



September 9, 2020

Ann Marie Dunbar, Board Chair
Henry Schantzen, Head of School
Bluffview Montessori School
1321 Gilmore Avenue,
Winona, MN 55987

Dear Ms. Dunbar and Mr. Schantzen:

The Bluffview Montessori School (BMS) Letter of Intent to Apply to Volunteers of America - Minnesota (VOA-MN) for charter school authorization was received by VOA-MN on August 27, 2020. Documentation included the Mutual Termination Letter and formal evaluation by Winona Area Public Schools.

The peer review of the BMS Letter of Intent is completed. Congratulations! The VOA-MN Charter School Authorizing Program is pleased to inform you that the review of the school's Letter of Intent was positive and **Bluffview Montessori School is invited to proceed to submit a full Change of Authorizer Application to Authorizer VOA-MN.**

This letter also contains the peer reviewer comments and scores organized by section of the BMS Letter of Intent. The same three peer reviewers will be assigned to the Bluffview Change of Authorizer Application, so it is *suggested* that the Bluffview Change of Authorizer Application include a *brief* response for any area a reviewer scored as "Approaching Satisfactory" in the BMS Letter of Intent.

School Mission and Vision Fit with VOA-MN: *The Letter of Intent contains an explanation of how the school's mission and vision align with VOA-MN Authorizing Program mission and vision.*

- Reviewer notes clear alignment of missions, with VOA's focus on service to others, and Bluffview's focus on civic fulfillment. (score: Satisfactory 10/10)
- The explanation of how BMS's mission and vision align with VOA's is satisfactory. The Montessori philosophy of promoting intrinsic learning matches VOA's emphasis on the importance that all students improve. Also, it is clear that BMS puts an emphasis on service-learning. (score: Satisfactory 9/10)
- It appears clear how the school's mission and vision align with that of authorizer VOA-MN. (score: Satisfactory 10/10)

Authorizer / School Alignment: *The Letter of Intent contains an explanation of why the school believes VOA-MN would be an appropriate authorizer for the school.*

- Alignment between school and authorizer is clear. (score: Satisfactory 10/10)
- Good explanation of why VOA would be a good resource for BMS, but there is no mention of the function of VOA-MN as an overseer of compliance, which is a significant function of an authorizer. (score: Approaching Satisfactory 8/10)
- A thorough explanation helps to explain a clear alignment between organizations. (score: Satisfactory 10/10)

School Financial Health: *The Letter of Intent contains information on the fiscal health of the school. The school has a fund balance of at least 15 percent in the last audited fiscal year as illustrated in its most recent financial audit. The school's most recent audit is free of findings.*

- The information provided by the school doesn't currently show a balanced budget, shows a strong, pre-COVID financial history. When PPP loan is forgiven, budget and forecast budgets will balance. No statement of findings or lack thereof was found by the reviewer. (score: Approaching Satisfactory 8/10)
- Records show a healthy fund balance overall. There is plausible reason for recent loss of revenue due to distance learning and also recent gain due to the PPP loan. This school looks financially stable. (score: Satisfactory 10/10)
- Records indicate that the expectations are met and exceed the recommendations. (score: Satisfactory 10/10)

Academic Performance: *The Letter of Intent contains information on how the school is meeting their primary statutory purpose to "increase all pupil learning and all student achievement." The school demonstrates longitudinal growth on the state exams. The school is out-performing their local school district school with similar student demographics on the state exams.*

- Most recent MCA test scores in Reading, Math, and Science exceed local district scores. No longitudinal data was provided, so the reviewer did not assess growth on state exams. (score: Approaching Satisfactory 8/10)
- MDE data shows that BMS out scores the state average Reading and Science and outscores the local district in all three subject areas. (score: Satisfactory 10/10)
- BMS out-performed the state and local school district in Reading, and was slightly below the state, while above the local school district in Math. Like many schools, BMS is still working to ensure that the vast majority of kids are proficient. It does appear that they are a higher performing option to the local school district. (score: Approaching Satisfactory 8/10)

Service Learning: *The Letter of Intent contains an explanation of the school's service-learning component in their education program or plans for developing one.*

- Service learning is clearly described as an integral part of the Montessori philosophy. (score: Satisfactory 10/10)
- Although there is definitely service-learning happening at BMS, it is not clear how every student participates in service learning. There is good indication that this is a priority and an opportunity for students, but unclear to the reviewer if it is a requirement. (score: Approaching Satisfactory 8/10)
- Service learning appears to be integral to the current methods of learning at BMS. However, it appears that the majority of the service-learning opportunities happen only within the school system and only impact the staff, students and families of BMS. A community approach may be an area for growth in the years to come. (score: Approaching Satisfactory 8/10)

Reporting Compliance – Not scored: *The Letter of Intent includes an assurance that the school has been compliant with the majority of MDE reporting deadlines within the past two years.*

- Director indicates all MDE compliance is up to date as of May 2020. (rating: Satisfactory)
- The letter of intent confirms that the school has been compliant with MDE reporting. (rating: Satisfactory)
- No comment provided. (rating: Satisfactory)

Website Compliance – Not scored: *The Letter of Intent contains an assurance that the school's website is compliant with all statutory requirements.*

- Director indicates website compliance is up to date as of May 2020. (rating: Satisfactory)
- The school's website appears to be in compliance with all statutory requirements. (rating: Satisfactory)
- No comment provided. (rating: Satisfactory)

A school must earn a minimum score of 45/50 (90%) from the peer reviewers for approval to proceed to apply for authorization.

Reviewer I Determination:	Approve	Score: 46/50
Reviewer II Determination:	Approve	Score: 45/50
Reviewer III Determination:	Approve	Score: 46/50

Thank you for seeking VOA-MN as the future authorizer of Bluffview Montessori School. **The Bluffview Change of Authorizer Application must be received by October 15, 2020.** Please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Stephanie Olsen, Manager
Charter School Authorizing Program