

Annual Meeting



Bluffview
Montessori
School

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May 13, 2020



Bluffview Montessori

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Agenda

1. Call to Order
2. Review and approve agenda
3. Review and approve May 15, 2019 Annual Meeting Minutes
4. Annual Reports:
 - a. Head of School: Henry Schantzen
 - b. Treasurer: Katie Kinneberg
 - c. Governance: Katie Kinneberg
 - d. Human Resources: Molly Leifeld
 - e. Building and Grounds: Henry Schantzen
 - f. Pedagogy: Katie Kinneberg
5. Announcement of new Assistant Head of School for SY 2020-21
6. Announcement and introduction of elected Board of Directors members
7. Open Forum
8. Adjourn



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May 15, 2019 Annual Meeting Minutes

Board Members Present- Erich Lippman, Molly Leifeld, Henry Schantzen, Ann-Marie Dunbar, Katie Kinneberg, Kelly Dicke, Emily Schultz, and Lauren Lund

Board Members Absent:

Others in attendance: Criss Polachek, Cindy Smith, Kelly Skillicorn, and Lori Cloutier

1- Meeting was called to order at 6:03pm

2- Katie motioned, and Erich seconded to approve agenda for May 15, 2019. The vote was unanimous.

3- Katie motioned, and Lauren seconded to approve board minutes from May 16, 2018. The vote was unanimous.

4- Annual Reports

- Head of School:
 - Enrollment is full; Discussion about Hiawatha Valley Mental Health and having a program for Erdkinder; Beginning work on the friendship garden in June; Peer evaluation format was changed; Winona Public Schools is continuing as our authorizer; Increased teacher salary scale by 8.4%
- Treasurer:
 - Works with BerganKDV; Fund balance is healthy and we had a clean audit; Bluffview has been allocated \$10,000 through Title IV
- Governance:
 - Only two teacher openings for the BOD and Emily and Katie will fill those spots
- HR:
 - Continued working on updating policies this year; Adopted the Investment Policy Statement from Slaggie Capital; School TRA contribution was raised to 7.71% and will be raised to 7.92% beginning next fiscal year; Next year, HR will update job descriptions and staff evaluations and complete the I9
- Building and Grounds:
 - HVAC system continues to need work; Lead testing was completed; Piping was improved; Crosswalk was completed; Drop down projector was installed in the gym; Deadbolts were removed from classroom doors; Next year: New window into the office; ORC discussion and alternate possibilities



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- Pedagogy:
 - Staff developments this year included “Run, Hide, Fight,” Inclusion and Diversity, Cultural Competency, PLCs and SPED law; PLC team discussions/opinions. Two staff members attended the Montessori conference in Washington D.C. this year

5- Announcement and introduction of elected Board of Directors members

- Katie and Emily are the newly elected Board members
- Lauren is resigning from the BOD beginning in July

6- No one spoke during Open Forum

7-Meeting adjourned at 6:27pm.



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[Annual Reports](#)

[Head of School](#)

“The greatest gifts we can give our children are the roots of responsibility and the wings of independence” -Dr. Maria Montessori

The Bluffview staff, along with the other schools in the state, were given eight working days to create and implement Distance Learning while ensuring “curricular rigor and equity” for all Minnesota students. The state gave us two days prior to that to plan and implement a summer food service concept and an Essential Worker Child Care, which carried with it a frequently changing list of workers throughout the state that we were to use in determining who qualified. The Minnesota Department of Education also directed that our tuition-based pre-K could not be run on site, while stating that we were to honor all contracts and maintain full employment for all staff.

Before these directives, Bluffview was humming along, full of hustle and bustle. Students were highly engaged in the wonderful and vibrant Montessori fashion that we all have come to appreciate and value. The student data around math was showing significant signs of growth as we had spent the prior 2 years reviewing and refining our math practices. A few new pieces to the curriculum around mental health and well-being felt like great additions that we will work hard to keep in place. Big financial plans were gaining momentum and showing some signs that created, for me at least, a great sense of wonder and optimism for the coming months in the hunt for some needed supplemental revenue. We had plans drawn up for a garage as we are out of storage space, and were trying to squirrel away \$37,000 for new boilers. MCAs and the spring screeners were scheduled along with concerts, the read-a-thon, and the Young Writers Conference. As is the case around spring break every year, the school climate was filled with a mix of fatigue and anticipation, with spring weather potentially around the corner.



The call to implement Distance Learning and social distancing certainly popped us out of any groove that we were in. The Monday that staff returned to work after spring break, we made a plan and broke into groups to make it all happen. Two days later, food service and childcare were up and running with greatly enhanced safety guidelines. Eight days later the teachers had made their plans and were practicing with tools that some had not used before like Google Classroom. We had ordered and onboarded new Chromebooks, knowing that we didn't have enough devices to meet the needs of our families. Things came together quite nicely, all things considered.

Our goals for Distance Learning were fairly simple: keep the kids engaged with their education as much as possible, and to do so in a way that created as little stress to families as possible, knowing that they now had to bear a much greater burden as many were forced to work from home while trying to join us in meeting the educational needs of their children. We have tried to maintain completely open communication and relentless responsiveness for the families that we serve. Thanks to some thoughtful feedback by families, we have tried to make subtle improvements and changes to accommodate the needs of the students. Distance Learning at Bluffview has not been perfect. It has been met with great effort, empathy, and a sincere belief in the possibilities and growth of every student, every day.

All that said, I would be remiss if I didn't extend my gratitude to a great many people. First, as we began our planning numerous staff members stepped forward and took on leadership roles in their breakout teams. Without their leadership and work, the quick turnaround would not have been possible. Second, many thanks to the assistants and paraprofessionals that have stepped forward and taken on many jobs that are way out of their comfort zones: with Cindy in food service (they pushed out 252 meals today); in child care for essential workers, which has allowed those workers to continue to serve our community; with packet pickup/drop off; and with Andy in sanitation and cleaning. Third, the teaching staff has met this new challenge head-on. They have worked together



in their teams, put forth materials that they believe would best meet our collective goals, and have worked many odd hours as they continue to be responsive to the needs of our students. Fourth, the office staff has continued to ensure that everything moves forward. Special thanks to Ms. C. for being the amazing, skilled, and compassionate person that she is, which has allowed me the luxury of spending my mornings at home with my own kids and working in the evenings. Lastly, a big thanks to Bluffview families. While we miss the kiddos greatly, our students' parents have been very supportive and patient. Moreover, I feel compelled to point out the parent-influenced statistic to date that has absolutely blown my mind: our student attendance at the time of this report was 98%. Half the battle is just showing up.

So, where does that leave us as we look to the future? We are finalizing plans for bridging, the return of Chromebooks and final packets, and changes to progress reports that will reflect Distance Learning. That information will be forthcoming. As for next school year, I wish I could say definitively that we will return to school as normal in the fall but that is not likely. The fact is we have no idea what to expect. It is also unlikely that a final decision will be made by the MDE before the end of July. There are a few things I am confident about for next year: the adaptability and strong work of our staff, the thoughtful financial planning of the Board of Directors, the support of our parents and families, and the resilience of our children. Whatever form school takes in the fall, the Bluffview community will come together to serve and educate the children that we have the good fortune to serve.

Sincerely,

Henry Schantzen



Treasurer

Bluffview's financial management company remains BergankDV. In addition to compiling our monthly financial reports, creating budget projections, managing payroll and accounts payable, and working in an advisory position to help the Board make sound financial decisions for our school, they inform us of updates from the state and federal levels regarding revenues and legislative changes. They are also responsible for the clean audit issued to Bluffview by CliftonLarsonAllen (CLA) for FY 2018-2019.

One of the primary functions of the Board of Directors is to ensure the financial health of the school while working to maintain a balanced budget. In FY 2018-19, Bluffview had a 30.4% fund balance for all funds. During FY 2019-20, BMS has continued to maintain a healthy fund balance of 28.7% of our expenditures. We are obligated to have a fund balance of at least 20% and our policy states a minimum goal of a fund balance of 24%. We as a Board have a goal of 30%. The state's annual holdback of our funding is currently set at 10%. As of April 30th, we have received 100% of our FY 2018-19 holdback. Amid the coronavirus pandemic, Minnesota's budget and economic outlook is projecting a significant deficit. Because of this, we are anticipating an increase in the holdback for next year, but we do not know what that could be at this time. The holdback has been as high as 40% back in FY 2012, which the state used to help balance its budget. One significant reason for maintaining a strong fund balance is to insulate the school against external influences as much as possible in times of financial shortfalls. Not only are we predicting an increase in the holdback, but also a reduction in or no increase to the state funding formulas in the next biennium. We have received 2% increases each of the last several years.

There are always factors that present challenges and benefits to the budget. Enrollment is the main source of the school's income (approximately 92%) and is one thing the Board looks at during each monthly meeting. Due to distance learning mandates by the MN Department of Education, we lost approximately 30% of our revenues for the preschool program this year as we were not allowed to maintain the tuition-based pre-K during the ongoing distance learning period. We understand and



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support our families who have opted out of preschool during the distance learning period and our healthy fund balance allows us to maintain employment options for all Children's House staff.

Henry has received confirmation that Bluffview's application for a Paycheck Protection Program Loan has been approved (Bluffview is a 501c3). This is the first step in securing the financial stability of the school to overcome the significant financial issues we will be facing in the next few years. The second key step will be securing a line of credit that will allow us to maintain a positive cash flow during the projected holdbacks at the appropriate time. That is entirely dependent on the state funding and how much they withhold, which includes any potential changes to the coming fiscal year formula that, for the school, begins on July 1.

We currently have full enrollment in Kindergarten through grade eight for the 2020-21 school year. Maintaining and increasing our enrollment where we can will continue to be priority for BMS. Erdkinder and the tuition-based pre-K are the focal points there.

The Board, along with our partners BerganKDV, the Minnesota Association of Charter Schools, and our Authorizer (Winona Area Public Schools), continues to research and assess viable financial options for Bluffview, always returning to our Vision for guidance as we work to provide the best possible services for our students and their families.

Sincerely,

Katie Kinneberg



Governance

The Governance Committee is responsible for:

- promoting an active Board recruitment process for the school
- orienting and mentoring new Board members
- working with the Board Chair and Head of School to promote ongoing leadership and governance education and the continued growth of all Board members
- periodically assessing processes for individual Board members and the Board as a whole
- conducting the annual election of Directors and filling Board vacancies.

This year Ruth Rourke was appointed to be the third person on the Governance Committee. We reviewed the Board election timelines set in the bylaws and updated the working document we use so it aligns with those timelines.

The committee called for nominations for the Board election; there were four positions open. We received a nomination for the open community position currently filled by Dan Kirk, who was appointed in March. Dan was nominated for a full term. Ann-Marie Dunbar was the nominee for the open parent position. There were two open teacher seats and the nominees were Meghan Booth and Shelly Merchlewitz, both of whom are currently serving on the Board.

New Board members will attend 3 mandatory training sessions about charter school employment, laws, and finances through the Minnesota Association of Charter Schools.

Sincerely,

Katie Kinneberg



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Human Resources

This year the Human Resources Committee continued working on reviewing and updating policies as assigned by the Board of Directors. We reviewed the new Tuition Reimbursement Policy: Non-Montessori and the Board is reviewing. We completed changes to Policy 712 Fringe Benefits, stating the last day of employment is the last day on which the employee provides service to the company. Policy 406 Stipends was updated to follow minimum wage law.

We would also like to announce that the School TRA contribution will be raised to 8.13% starting in July 2020.

In the coming year, we will begin reviewing all policies annually. We will also continue to organize and update policies on the website, in handbooks, and in the Board of Directors folder. One of our primary goals is to get all job descriptions updated, and then build staff self-evaluations off of those descriptions.

Sincerely,

Molly Leifeld



Building and Grounds

The Building and Grounds Committee is tasked with planning, discussing, and presenting recommendations to the Board of Directors on all Building and Grounds-related projects associated with Bluffview Montessori and the BMS Building Corporation.

This school year has been another frustrating year regarding the maintenance of the systems within the building.

1. The HVAC system has once again needed a lot of attention compared to years past. Several aspects of the system were simply not working properly. As we continue to fix and replace parts, other parts are showing their age. We are still ironing out some little things in the software as well. Now that we are entering our second year of the preventative maintenance contract for the heating and cooling systems, our maintenance costs should see a small reduction next year.
2. The boilers in the main building and in the Erdkinder building need a lot of attention. Neither system was installed with the proper chemical pots to feed chemicals into the lines, which has led to excessive corrosion. We have bids for new boilers, including the chemical pots for the new building, and bids for adding chemical pots to the Erdkinder system as well. Again, it is an issue of capital. The bids are \$25K for standard boilers and \$37K for high-efficiency units.
3. The dry suppression system in the attic has been and continues to be the other main issue. The original pipes were not made of high-quality material and continue to develop pin-sized holes as they rust, causing them to hemorrhage air. This caused the compressor to run more than it should, leading to its demise and the purchase of a new one.

We used Building Corp money to replace all the remaining pieces of pipe in the original building. That, of course, led to more pressure in the Erdkinder part of the building, and several pipes in that building have now been replaced. We are waiting for a bid for a nitrogen-based compression system which would remove the oxygen from the pipe lines and greatly mitigate the rusting.



4. We are short on storage spaces as our building is quite full. Andy has done a great job of removing a great many unnecessary things that were in storage. He has added shelving and other storage concepts to several areas of the building. We have had plans for a garage drafted. We do not, however, have the capital to build said garage. That was on our punch list for the school budget before the Covid-19 issues caused the school to see a significant loss of revenue.

There are plenty of plans for the coming year as well. They include:

1. Bluffview was one of the recipients of the School Safety Grant last fall. The goal is to execute those plans this summer, so we will be collecting bids and completing projects as allowed by that grant.
 - a. We will replace an office window with a bank teller-style window to allow vetting of non-familiar individuals before they enter the student hallways. This will include an identification system much like that used by WAPS.
 - b. The office counters/work spaces will have to be adjusted accordingly.
 - c. Outdoor speakers will be added. Our building has a large perimeter, yet only 3 outside speakers. We will add up to 7 on the eaves around the building, as well as 4 speakers inside the building where they don't currently exist.
 - d. All external doors will be retrofitted with key card readers and electric door strikes, allowing us to do away with traditional keys for those doors. For our 22 external doors, this is a big project, but it will be done in a way that will allow us to do the same for all internal doors at some point in the future. One of the security concerns is that there are 19 years' worth of keys floating around, a situation that needs to be remedied. The key cards will allow us to activate and deactivate as necessary.
2. The school received a one-time, formula-based security upgrade amount of \$7300 from the state. We have chosen to use that to install the first phase of a large plan to upgrade the very outdated security camera system. Phase one, to be done in June, is to add a 32-channel, 24 TB



DVR unit with three new cameras in the entry area of the school (2 outside, 1 inside), along with a monitor to be mounted in the office. There are additional phases planned in which we will replace all existing cameras and add others in strategic locations. The hope is to complete these upgrades over the next several years.

3. We are continuing to team with the Cyert family and Chris Florin to complete our Kindness garden that will include, among other things, a set of “buddy benches” for kids to sit on. There is now a mulched rain garden bed and a pergola with a slate floor. The next steps are to add the plantings and the benches. This space will be used as a teaching space for our virtues and peace education, as well as a space for kids to go to when they want a friend to play with. The plan was for much of our fundraising to go to this purpose, notably funds raised by the BMS 5K/10K that was unfortunately cancelled this year. Work to complete the area should take place this summer.
4. We are also discussing potential changes to the kitchen and food service window, which will have to be done through grants.
5. The continued contracting of the ORC to do our after-school cleaning has been debated as well. Their cost is at a point where we could hire two people (1.5 FTE total) to do the same job. This discussion will continue, especially with the heightened cleaning requirements that we will have, assuming we are able to resume school in the fall.

As we move forward, we will continue to work towards making the building more secure, upgrading that which is needed, and trying to engage in a heightened level of preventative maintenance on our building systems.

Sincerely,

Henry Schantzen



Pedagogy

The pedagogy committee began the year planning staff development. We rescheduled the great lesson and literacy days that were cancelled due to inclement weather last school year. Dr. Jonathan Locust, Winona State's Associate Vice President for Inclusion & Diversity, led us in several informational Cultural Competency seminars, which fulfill one of the state's requirements for teacher relicensure.

Bluffview continued its second year of PLCs (Professional Learning Communities) implementation. PLCs are a process for teachers to work together to ensure students are learning at a mastery level. This is done through weekly group meetings, formative assessments, reviewing of assessment data, and implementing learning practices to best help our students learn. As part of this year's process, the teaching staff focused on creating common formative assessments in the area of math. These are used during weekly teacher meetings in the classroom to gauge students' mastery of specific standards and "I can" statements. We also created a PLC leadership committee with one teacher from each level (Children's House, E1, E2) and Henry that meets monthly to bring information back to PLC teams and ensure vertical alignment.

Last year we streamlined the peer observation portion of the teacher evaluation process. The overall feedback is that this is much easier to schedule and maintain and gives just as much information, while being less time-consuming. We assigned the two new peer observers a teacher who was experienced with the practice to streamline the learning curve.

After the implementation of distance learning, the committee followed the guidelines set by MDE and decided to forgo summative evaluations this year. Most of the teacher evaluations were completed by the summative evaluators, but the peer evaluations were only partially done for each teacher and there were other components such as student surveys and formal assessments that we were not able to complete. This year will not be included in the three-year cycle of evaluation. If for any



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reason a teacher has need of a finalized evaluation, that will be available to them upon request and will use the partial data available.

We reviewed the results of the distance learning parent survey that was sent out. We discussed what is going well and identified ways we can better serve our students and their families.

A large number of staff attended the LaCrosse Montessori conference in January, including the specific assistant training. We did not plan to send anyone to the National Montessori conference this year.

Sincerely,

Katie Kinneberg



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Assistant Head of School

After many years of distinguished service as Assistant Head of School and, before that, as a Special Education teacher, Lori Cloutier has announced her plans to retire at the end of the school year. Ms. C. has provided tireless leadership to the Bluffview community, and her kindness and creativity have helped to make Bluffview a wonderful place to learn and grow. We are so grateful to Ms. C. for her dedication and leadership, and we wish her all the best in her well-deserved retirement. She will be missed!

We are pleased to announce the appointment of Sherry Lohmeyer as Bluffview's new Assistant Head of School. Ms. Lohmeyer comes to Bluffview with extensive experience as an English teacher and public-school administrator, most recently serving as the Assistant Principal of Curriculum at Wakulla High School, near Tallahassee, Florida. The hiring committee was impressed by Ms. Lohmeyer's expertise, thoughtful discussion of teaching and leadership, and commitment to innovation and inclusivity. We look forward to welcoming her to the Bluffview community in July.



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2020 Annual Meeting Elected Board Members

Two teacher, one parent, and one community member seats were open for election. There were 4 nominations (1 for each seat):

- Shelly Merchlewitz and Meghan Booth will continue to serve as Teacher Board members.
- Ann-Marie Dunbar will continue to serve as a Parent Board member.
- Daniel Kirk will continue to serve as the Community Board member.

These elected positions are for 3-year terms.