



# Bluffview Montessori

8/27/20

Stephanie Olsen, Manager  
VOA-MN Charter School Authorizing Program  
924 19th Avenue S.  
Minneapolis, MN 55404

*TRANSMITTED ELECTRONICALLY*

Dear VOA-MN Charter School Authorizing Program:

This correspondence serves as the required “Letter of Intent” notifying the VOA-MN Charter School Authorizing Program that the Bluffview Montessori School (BMS) Board has approved the school to seek VOA-MN as their new charter school authorizer. The school is presently authorized by Winona Area Public Schools (WAPS); however, WAPS will no longer be an authorizer after June 30, 2021.

We believe that Bluffview Montessori Charter School meets all of the VOA-MN Authorizing Program’s required criteria for a change of authorizer, as outlined below.

***Criteria One: Explanation of how the school’s mission and vision aligns with VOA-MN Authorizing Program mission and vision.***

**VOA-MN Vision:** Volunteers of America-Minnesota (VOA-MN) Charter School Authorizing Program will authorize high quality charter schools that improve all pupil learning, all student achievement, and promote service to others.

**BMS Vision:** Empowered learners unfolding their full potential as whole and unique persons in a global community.

**VOA-MN Mission:** Volunteers of America-Minnesota (VOA-MN) Charter School Authorizing Program will improve all pupil learning and all student achievement with service to others as its core.

**BMS Mission:** Bluffview Montessori School empowers self-directed learning through a materials-based Montessori curriculum that encourages independence and natural curiosity. Bluffview cultivates learners’ deep respect for self, community, and a peaceful environment, while nourishing the intrinsic desire for academic, civic, and personal fulfillment.

**Explanation of Mission/Vision Alignment:**

The primary threads that align BMS and VOA-MN are increasing pupil learning and service to others.

Bluffview maintains a sincere focus on celebrating the individual child, meaning that we embrace who they are and how they learn. One of the foundational tenets of a Montessori school is to meet children where they are, and to facilitate their growth and development as whole and unique persons. This is

accomplished through the use of beautiful didactic materials that encourage students to engage in hands-on learning. This materials-based pedagogy enables students to learn concrete and abstract concepts simultaneously. This approach includes a strong focus on learning not only academics, but practical life skills as well.

These practical life skills also facilitate service learning, as the older students often help with classroom and school tasks. They may volunteer in the kitchen to wash dishes, take responsibility for cleaning tables after lunches or snacks, or work with our building manager to aid in the completion of a project. The older students also meet with their reading buddies in the Children's House classrooms once per week.

Visitors often wonder about the reasons for combining multiple grade levels in one classroom—what we call mixed-age learning. The primary reason for this structure is that older students are encouraged to assist younger students, which gives the younger students extra help as needed while enabling the older students to develop leadership and teaching skills. This demonstrates that service to others is embedded in the Montessori philosophy and thus is central to Bluffview's approach to teaching.

Bluffview hosts regular service-learning events, such as its annual Happy Harvest. During this November event, parents come to school and circulate with their children to different learning environments to make gifts for community members: hot chocolate mix for fire fighters, trail mix for police officers, hygiene kits for the homeless, and fleece blankets for Hope Harbor teens.

School leadership also practices service to others by maintaining a focus on servant leadership. Administration maintains an "open door policy" and makes every effort to meet the needs of the staff. For example, upon discovering that many of our staff lacked wills, administration brought in an attorney to do an "estate planning party." We invited all staff to come and hear a presentation, and, through this process, we were able to negotiate a 50% reduction in requisite legal fees.

***Criteria Two: Explanation of why the school believes VOA-MN would be an appropriate authorizer for the school.***

One of the most attractive features of VOA-MN's Authorizing Program is its commitment to building an active, supportive community among its schools. The vibrant networking and team building that VOA-MN encourages among its school leaders would be a wonderful resource for Bluffview as it moves into its next phase. Bluffview would benefit greatly from this network of experienced directors; access to the network's information sharing and expertise would help Bluffview to be more efficient and proactive. We are excited to become part of such a network of schools, and we believe we can bring a new range of experiences and expertise to VOA-MN's group—as a Montessori charter school in greater Minnesota, we will bring a unique perspective to the VOA-MN school network.

***Criteria Three: Proof that 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.***

Brenda Kes  
Senior Financial Manager  
FARMINGTON, MN 55024

DIRECT: 952.563.6861 | MAIN: 651.463.2233 x6861  
MOBILE: 651.280.5582  
[brenda.kes@bergankdv.com](mailto:brenda.kes@bergankdv.com)

SY 18-19 Audited Financials link:

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B0\\_7Kj7GmUSkMGV2N2Q1aUZPR044OVpwcFo5eW5oT3RfTC1N/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B0_7Kj7GmUSkMGV2N2Q1aUZPR044OVpwcFo5eW5oT3RfTC1N/view?usp=sharing)

Last five years of fund balance reporting:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1roliufRKS5hXRpu21pKq-46FHeKRbGbh/view?usp=sharing>

Adopted 5 year long range budget projection: I would like to point out two things about this doc. First, SY 19-20 is the first year that we have run a deficit since I have been here (outside of the 2008-09 recession). The last five years of fund balances report (above) shows that we met our goal of a 30% fund balance. This was done to insulate the school from another recession as we have not forgotten the pain of the large holdbacks we all had to manage. The math behind the SY 19-20 deficit was that approximately \$45,000 was lost in tuition during the spring distance learning time. MDE did not allow us to run our tuition based pre-k for the spring.

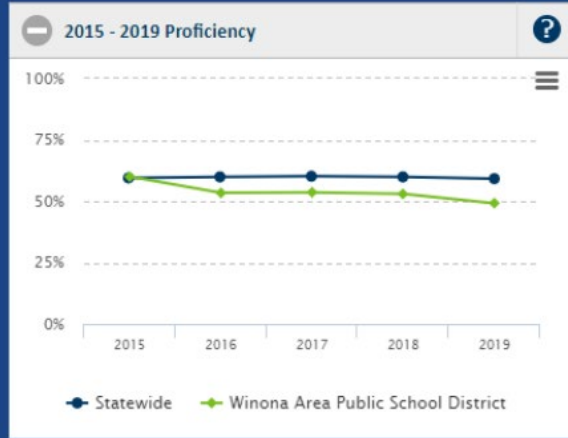
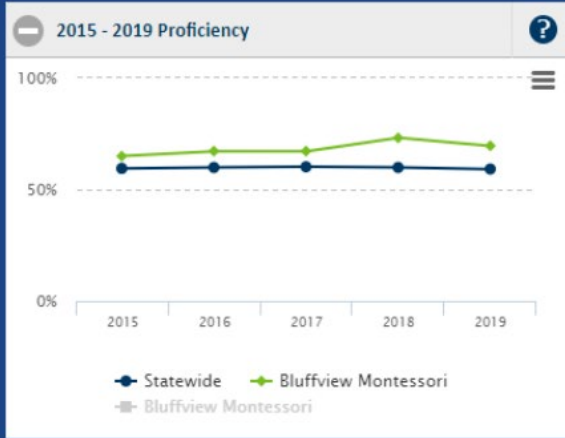
Secondly, the bottom line shows significant deficit spending over the next few years. The reason is that we received a \$323,000 PPP Loan that will be forgiven as soon as the portal opens. It was just not on the books at the time this was approved, but we were aware of it and have no reason to believe that it will not be forgiven.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/194nSNXugV1ck3tosjFfTbBf4QdrOw-kB/view?usp=sharing>

***Criteria Four: 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. The school is meeting their present charter contract academic performance goals.***

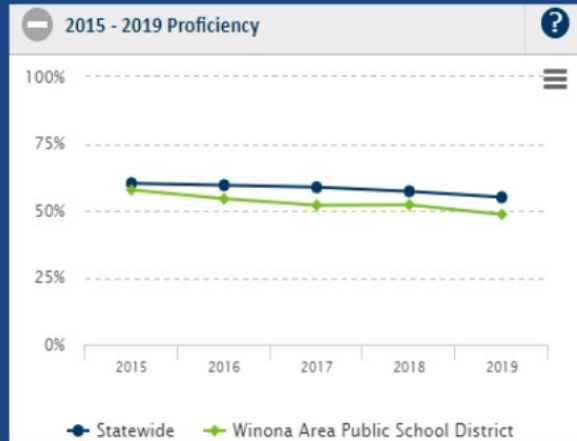
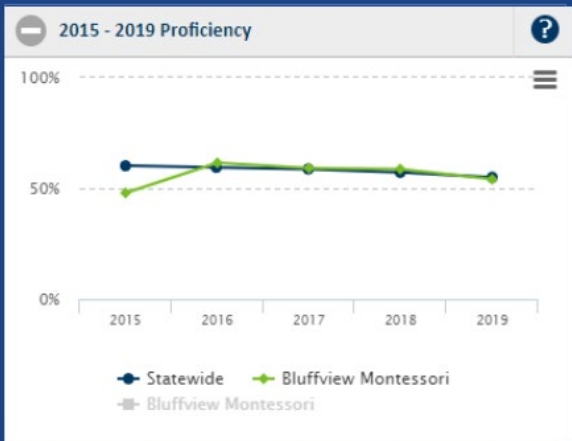
# MCA 2018-19 Reading

BMS: 69.6% Statewide: 59.2% WAPS: 49.2%



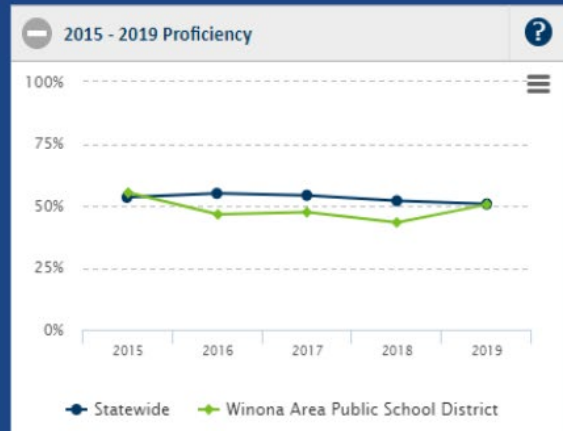
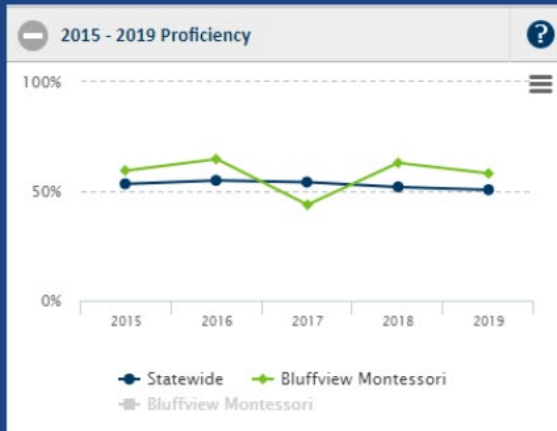
# MCA 2018-19 Math

BMS: 54.1% Statewide: 55% WAPS: 48.6%



# MCA 2018-19 Science

BMS: 58.1% Statewide: 50.7% WAPS: 50.5%



**Criteria Five: Assurance that the school has been compliant with the majority of MDE reporting deadlines within the past two years.**

To the best of my knowledge, we have complied with all required reporting deadlines.

**Criteria Six: Explanation of the school's service-learning component in their education program or plans for developing one.**

As discussed above, service is embedded into the Montessori philosophy at all levels of the organization. In the mixed-age classrooms, older students act as role models, leaders, and teachers to the younger children. Older students serve as reading buddies to the youngest students on a weekly basis. Older students also engage in community service learning; they may wash dishes in the kitchen, assist the building manager in a project, or perform other classroom duties. The Happy Harvest event is an annual service learning and community building opportunity where projects are made for and donated to specific organizations such as the police, fire department, and local warming house. School leadership also follows a servant leadership model.

**Criteria Seven: Assurance statement that the school's website is compliant with all statutory requirements.**

The website is compliant, to the best of my knowledge. We completed the MDE compliance checklist in May 2020:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1yx50WCO5f0tNuRN4tB9ga88LMd9dA3-n/view?usp=sharing>

Bluffview has also included the following required documents with the Letter of Intent to Apply for Change Authorization:

- Letter of Mutual Agreement to terminate or not renew the charter contract. This must be a joint letter from both entities that is signed and dated by the authorizer and board chair.
- Winona Area Public Schools' formal written evaluation of the Bluffview's performance. *The evaluation must report on the academic, financial, operational, and student performance of the school during the present contract term. The evaluation must also identify any concerns or deficiencies discovered during the evaluation of the school.*

Thank you for your consideration of our "Letter of Intent" to apply to VOA-MN for a change in authorizer.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Henry Schantzen", followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Henry Schantzen, Director  
Bluffview Montessori School