

Laramie Montessori Board of Trustees

Regular Board Meeting Minutes

November 16, 2023
6:30 PM

Location: Laramie Montessori Charter School

Zoom: <https://acsd1-org.zoom.us/j/93415596199?pwd=WThlaEJURExzNUV6R1JyNWVoVEFnQT09>

1. Opening (6:30 PM)

The Mission of Laramie Montessori School is to support the development of the whole child through an authentic Montessori environment that honors the child's intrinsic motivation to learn and supports each individual's unique intellectual, physical, social, and emotional development.

1.1 15-Second Montessori Moments

- Norman gave a brief description of Montessori moments.
- Kaylie: Excited about the weather balloon launch.
- Vitali: Appreciates peacefulness, sharing, and kindness in the classroom.
- Jeff: A preschooler got sick at the cafeteria and other kids -- even at the pre-school level -- rubbed his back and helped it.
- Kathy: The 3-hour work period has persisted throughout her daughter's educational career, and she has never had to ask her daughter to do homework.
- Emily: Her son loves that everyone comes to school with a smile on their face.

1.2 Roll Call

- Present: Carter, Emily, Rich, Amy, Megan
- Remote: Shawn

1.3 Approval Of Agenda

- Carter motions to approve, Shawn seconds. No discussion. Unanimously approved.

2. Minutes

2.1 Approval of Minutes

- Megan motions to approve, Carter seconds. No discussion unanimously approved.

3. Audience Communication

3.1 Kaylie Vendela – EAST

- Kaylie presented to the board about Practical Life and now it is a reality!
 - 4 students (3 in 6th grade and 1 in 3rd grade) gave presentations.
 - “What is practical life all about?”
 - And “What has their experience been so far?”
 - Vitali and Ben:
 - Practical Life is a class where kids...
 - Mind map
 - Visit local businesses
 - Go to the courthouse
 - Have interesting guests
 - Complete projects about topics they are passionate about
 - Vincenzo and Marcello:
 - Innings: in-classroom visits
 - Outings: going out in the community
 - Other activities:
 - Gardening
 - Snacks
 - Tastings
- Kaylie:
 - A lot of her inspiration at the beginning of the school year was mind maps which can be useful when there are no other plans.
 - 3rd-grade kids wanted to learn origami or knot tying.
 - Desires a creative environment.
 - Met with Daniel’s Fund. They talked about improving the grant application which is due Nov 29th. The grant is potentially \$50,000.
- Vitali:
 - Miss Kaylie listens to the students and allows them to guide the topics for lessons.
 - Originally, Vitali found herself only doing what was asked, but recently has started looking for work beyond the minimum.
- Parent: Kids are more open to inspiration from teachers than parents.
- Heidi: Practical Life is cross-curriculum which gives some students a more intrinsic motivation to excel.

3.2 Teacher Representative (6:55)

- Heidi:
 - Staff are excited that things seem to be flowing better. The director is very helpful to the kids and the staff.
 - A couple of teachers came up with a new event: Circle.
 - Winter assessments are going to be performed before the holidays so that when students come back after Christmas they aren’t stressed.
 - This will spread out with WY-TOPP, which will also reduce stress.

3.3 Open Communication

- Fawn (Friends of Montessori):
 - Planning to do a fundraiser, Larabee, next year. Possibly at the beginning of the school year, but nothing is set in stone.
 - They are meeting again in a couple of weeks to start putting things in place.

4. Monthly Financial Report

4.1 Financial Statements

- Finance committee met:
 - Norman:
 - Auditors determined that the QuickBooks data file corruption was a scam.
 - The \$4500 was paid with a cashier's check.
 - As a result, IT security policies have been improved.
- Emily: When might we see the complete audit?
- Megan: The finance committee will likely present the audit in the January board meeting.
- Carter: What is the policy for checks? Answer: There is typically a two-signature process.

4.1.1 Approve September and October Financials

- Discussion:
 - Norman:
 - Expenses should be at about 33%
 - They are currently at 35%
 - Preschool tuition is below 33% but accumulates through the summer.
 - Emily: What were the contributions?
 - Norman: Primarily a check from Friends of Laramie Montessori
 - Norman:
 - Equip/Furnishing – Admin/Gen: Not original in the budget.
 - Total Payroll: This year's budget is going to be tight toward the end of the year.
 - Lawyer: \$5K
 - Clerical Error: Purchase Services – MECR Training had \$20,000 budgeted and Professional Development had \$4,000 budgeted. Going to work with the accountant to split those categories out to get more fine-grained information.
 - Repairs and Maintenance and Maintenance and Custodial:
 - This is use-or-lose money.
 - 10,000-15,000 to fix electrical and plumbing problems.
 - Megan: Technology and maintenance will probably go over.
 - Norman: This is due to the new copier which is \$100 / month more than the old copier.
 - Jeff: Copier has been down every few days and it was more economical to go with the lease.
- Approval: Carter motions to approve, Megan seconds. No discussion. Unanimous approval

5. Reports

5.1 Director's Report

- Enrollment: No changes.
- Increase Family Engagement
 - Papa Murphy's fund raiser: Made a small amount of money.
 - Winter Performance:
 - This will be the major fundraiser of the year.
 - Silent auction along with winter performance
 - December 14th
 - Some parents have donated:
 - Paintings
 - Baskets
- Parental Involvement
 - Montessori Winter Solstice Spiral
 - Before Covid parents were in the school a lot
 - Spiral: It's a ceremony the day before the Winter Solstice.
 - There will be a potluck meal. School will provide some meat.
 - Cooking classes will be making homemade pizzas.
 - The meal will be in the gym.
 - There will be a ceremony on the other side of the school that families will do individually.
 - They will walk through the spiral encountering things to talk and think about.
 - Would love to make it an annual event.
- Experiential Education
 - Practical life classes have been working with local businesses, local elected officials, and local government.
 - Instructional Facilitator: Miss Kaylie is visiting classrooms and giving them feedback on growth in their classrooms.
 - Miss Kaylie is also working with a Montessori school in Fort Collins. Small groups of teachers will visit the school in Fort Collins.
- Community Relations
 - The website is up and running.
 - Coil Program: Working with students and teachers in Taiwan.
 - One upper elementary and one lower elementary classroom participating
 - Weather balloon launch
 - Wednesday after Thanksgiving
 - The physics department from UW is going to come launch a weather balloon.
 - Each grade is going to attach a box with an experiment.
 - Jeff gave a presentation on the different layers of the atmosphere.
 - Kids will predict where the weather balloon is going to go.
 - Andrea is going to be on the retrieval team and document it on video the retrieval.
- Facilities and Growth
 - Not much is going on here.

- Internal Ops
 - Communications
 - Jeff has been trying to communicate with staff and parents.
 - Trying to find middle ground for sending out information.
- Principal meetings:
 - Up in Casper
 - Great networking event, meetings, and speakers.
 - Interesting things to put into communication with parents and staff.
- Additional Questions Regarding the Weather Balloon
 - Shawn:
 - Curious about finding where the weather balloon lands?
 - Jeff:
 - Will be a GPS tracker on the device and a backup.
 - There will be a website where students will be able to track the balloon.
 - Megan
 - How long does it take to come down?
 - Jeff:
 - The amount of mass and weight in the boxes are factors.
 - Should be about 6 to 7 hours.
 - It also depends on how much helium is in it.
- Emily:
 - How did aligning the director's report with the strategic plan work?
 - Everyone likes using the strategic plan format.

5.2 Committee Reports

- Finance met (and reported financials)
- The Facilities Committee needs to meet, and it is time to talk about renewing the lease or finding other arrangements.

6. Old Business

6.1 Board Committee / Strategic Plan Alignment

- Carter: Recapped strategic plan alignment from the previous minutes.
- Emily:
 - Who is overseeing the goals within the school?
 - How can the board support and align with the school committees or programs?
- Jeff:
 - Is in each one of the of the groups and there are some teachers or staff members that are involved with the strategic plan goals.
 - Goals have been on the agenda for each leadership meeting this year.
- Carter:
 - All the committees need to meet.
 - Who is on these committees?

- Emily: How can we not just change the names but make sure the committees are active.

6.2 PTO

- Emily:
 - PTO is currently defunct.
 - Jeff and Christina have had a few parents reach out.
 - Historically, PTO has coordinated holiday gift bags for the staff.
 - How might we imagine engaging parents and PTO?
- Amy: What happened with the PTO that Leslie set up?
- Jeff: People stopped coming to meetings. It is not clear why parents stopped coming.
- Emily: There are a set of parents involved in governance so there might not be enough parents to go around.
- Heidi:
 - If you want to have a traditional PTO, make it consistent and convenient.
 - Perhaps open it up to grandparents and older siblings.
- Carter: Perhaps have the Resource Committee work on fundraising and involve parents.
- Shawn: Might be willing to help as president of the PTO has COVID was hitting. Does not recall what the rationale was for not getting involved with the board. Instead of making it a formal committee of the board, perhaps doing the clearing work, and trying to get it going.
- Amy: Would be happy to help get that setup.
- Shawn: Make a learning community for interested parents.

6.3 After School Update

- Norman: Met with Steve Hamaker (Big Brothers, Big Sisters) and Karen Bierhaus (Wyoming Department of Education).
 - Steve submits grants and Karen accepts grants.
 - Steve thinks we only need to provide a few pieces of data.
 - He is applying for another school in the district and is attaching the Montessori to that application.
 - The Montessori may have to cap the number the students.
- Emily: We have been trying to secure funding for free afterschool care for at least 2 years.
- Grant is due December 11th.
- Information for the grantees should be available in January/February

7. New Business

7.1 Jeff's Professional Development Proposal for 23-24

- We've discussed getting the director of the school Montessori trained.
- Jeff could be retiring within the next 10 years and would like to bring in ideas that he could use more immediately.
- It is also expensive to get the director changed.
- Instead of getting Montessori trained, perhaps he could attend Montessori conferences or more Montessori trainings.

- “The Montessori Event”
 - Put on by American Montessori Society (AMS)
 - The world’s largest Montessori event
 - In March this year (2024) in Florida
 - Based on what they have released so far:
 - In-focus Sessions with other heads of school that give deeper focus on the Montessori Pedagogy
 - Leadership growth within Montessori
 - Charter School Networking Session
 - 17 leader breakout sessions
- Emily: Historically, we have emphasized MECR training.
- Shawn: Do we have training requirements in our charter? We may have that for our lead teachers, but do we require that for our director?
- Carter: There is a notion of being accredited with AMS that might require it.
- Heidi: Accreditation was being worked on prior to Jeff being hired and fell through the cracks during COVID.
- Amy: How many hours of training does it require?
- Jeff: It isn’t done by hours. It is a 1.5-year program.
- Amy: What are some other avenues of training to go through?
- Jeff: Would need to investigate alternatives.
 - Certification Cost: \$10,000 (tuition only)
 - Conference: \$2K (includes registration and travel)
 - Early Registration goes through December.
- Shawn:
 - Need to find out if we need to be accredited.
 - If we rule out if there is an obligation, then maybe open to some other methods.
 - Concerned about how Upper EI was getting away from “true” Montessori teaching and perhaps a trained director would help?
- Megan: Kaylie as an instructional facilitator may help with Montessori philosophy.
- Jeff:
 - Going to investigate AMS offerings and potentially a mentorship program as well.
 - Has been using AMS quite a bit in the last year and a half. Yesterday’s topic was walkthroughs with a Montessori twist.
- Emily: How is what you’re learning communicated across the school and helps build the culture.
 - Actions Items:
 - Look up charter requirements.
 - See what kind of training we are committed to providing.

7.2 Renewing Lease in Current Facility

- Emily:
 - Legal counsel has encouraged us to start having conversations about what we are going to do for the upcoming school year.
 - There are not a lot of options for facilities right now, but the facilities committee needs to reconvene.

- There are conversations about what's happening in the school district and the Montessori should be a part of those to support both our school and the district.
- We need to be more proactive about our current lease and ensure we can cancel the lease in one year if something were to occur and a district building were to become available.
- Carter:
 - Wants to become more familiar with what the process is for education capital construction.
 - In the email that went back and forth between our legal counsel and a colleague there were indices for conditions for needs.
 - Where are we in terms of conditions?
- Megan:
 - We may have a copy of those evaluations.
 - There was too much money on deferred maintenance to buy the building.
- Carter: State has more money than they think right now, so it's a good time to investigate this.
- Emily: We will convene.
- Carter: Would not get excited about Beitel.
- Emily: We are going to start researching more proactively about space.
- Jeff: Needs to put paperwork from state lands and investment board into Google drive. The review is every other year.

7.3 December Board Meeting Date Change

- We have a winter carnival on the same night as our December board meeting.
- Changing Date to December 13th.
- Megan motions to approve, Carter seconds. No discussion. Unanimous approval.

7.4 End-of-Year Appeals

- Emily: Historically, we have sent out business requests for "time, talent, and treasure".
- Jeff:
 - These are letters that go out to businesses and individuals for donations.
 - We have quite a few individuals that send donations to our school.
 - We try to be mindful businesses that get requests.
- Norman: Micah and Emily wrote a letter a couple of years ago. It would be nice to use that letter over the typical letter that is sent out.
- Emily: Can we get photo permission for the kids?
- Shawn:
 - What is the division of labor?
 - Is Friends of Montessori involved with this at all?
 - Do we want to try a mini giving day with a larger challenge gift and match with smaller challenge gifts.
 - It would be fun to do a joint venture with FLM and perhaps we can work on it for next year.
- Emily will find the appeal letter from a couple of years ago.

8. Audience Communication

- No audience

9. Adjourn (8:41)

- Carter Motions, Megan Seconds. Unanimous.