

SUBJECT

Monticello Montessori School Annual Update

APPLICABLE STATUTE, RULE, OR POLICY

N/A

BACKGROUND

Monticello Montessori School (Monticello) is a public charter school approved by the Public Charter School Commission (PCSC). Serving approximately 215 students in Idaho Falls, Monticello recently completed its second year of operations.

DISCUSSION

Monticello will provide an update regarding the status of the school. Meeting materials were submitted after the deadline and have therefore been excluded from this document.

Monticello's [Star Rating](#) for the 2011-12 school year is 2 out of 5. Math represents the school's weakest area in terms of both achievement and growth. The median Monticello student's growth was in the 10th percentile, and the majority of students are not growing at a rate that will enable them to reach proficiency within three years.

Monticello did meet the Adequate Growth Percentile (AGP) in reading and language. However, the 2/5 points earned for language indicate that most Monticello students grew less than their academic peers.

It should be noted that, due to inadequate numbers of students, Monticello's overall points (43/100) are not influenced by Growth to Achievement Subgroups.

Monticello did not meet [AYP](#) in 2012, and is on alert status in math.

Insufficient documentation has been provided to permit a determination regarding whether or not Monticello has met the MSES in the approved charter. As noted in the PCSC site visit report and a response from Monticello's administrator, the MSES require amendment to increase effectiveness and better reflect the mission of the school.

Monticello's former administrator, a school founder, has been replaced by Mr. Randy Crisler. Three new members have joined the board since January 2012, filling a vacant seat and replacing two, outgoing members.

The school reports finishing FY12 with a carryover of approximately \$64,000, despite an \$85,000 operating loss. The projected FY13 ending

balance is \$42,136; the school retains an additional \$50,000 in a reserve account. Additionally, Monticello has succeeded in obtained USDA financing for its facility.

Required dashboard attachments including standardized test results, a goals attainment report, programmatic audit responses, stakeholder survey results, and student exit interview data were not provided.

IMPACT

Pursuant to I.C. § 33-5209(2), if the PCSC “has reason to believe that the public charter school has done any of the following, it shall provide the public charter school written notice of the defect and provide a reasonable opportunity to cure the defect:...(e) Failed to submit required reports to the authorized chartering entity governing the charter...”

STAFF COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Staff recommends that the PCSC direct staff to issue to Monticello Montessori School a notice of defect on the grounds of failure to submit required reports to the authorizing chartering entity, specifically: budgets, standardized test results, a goals attainment report, programmatic audit responses, stakeholder survey results, and student exit interview data.

Monticello has indicated that both students and teachers require time to adjust to the Montessori Method. However, a central purpose of the public charter school is to improve educational outcomes, and Monticello is now in its third year of operations. In the event that the school continues to evidence academic underperformance, the PCSC should seriously consider whether Monticello represents a viable choice for students and taxpayers.

COMMISSION ACTION

A motion to direct PCSC staff to issue to Monticello Montessori School a notice of defect on the grounds of failure to submit required reports to the authorizing chartering entity, specifically: budgets, standardized test results, a goals attainment report, programmatic audit responses, stakeholder survey results, and student exit interview data.

Moved by _____ Seconded by _____ Carried Yes _____ No _____

Monticello Montessori Charter School Site Visit

January 6, 2012

Interview with Board Members:

Two board members participated in the interview. Board members articulated that the mission of the school is to provide a Montessori-based education focused on continuous improvement and a strong commitment to success with an emphasis on students becoming independent citizens. They believe the school is on target in fulfilling the mission.

According to the board members, the board functions exceedingly well. They understand the role of a board, and each member is committed to the success of the school. Engaging discussions take place during which all members are free to express opinions and consensus is reached. Meeting attendance is good.

Administration and the board have an open and compatible relationship with regular communication. Board members consider the administration to be an effective team that works well with a young staff that continues to learn and adjust. The board completes administrator evaluations on a semiannual basis.

Regarding the financial stability of the school, board members believe the school has done very well in light of the times. They are trying to obtain permanent financing for their new facility but have a good relationship with the construction company, which will continue to work with the school in leasing the facility. The board considers fund usage to be wise and looks at the financial situation from an investment perspective. As expressed in the interview, enrollment is the key to operating without a loss. Keeping a reserve is of utmost importance to the board. Contingency plans are discussed on a monthly basis.

Facility issues include obtaining permanent financing and gaining space to allow for a cafeteria and gym. The school would like to add additional domes to expand the school.

Possible board candidates are being groomed through training invitations, board meeting invitations, and committee service. Current board strengths include diversity and open discussion. Weaknesses include the need for additional training, and the board is committed to continuous learning and growth. Training is an ongoing agenda item that is scheduled for the next several months.

Parent involvement is described as being fabulous. The school has instituted a point system that acts as incentive for volunteerism and participation. Many misconceptions remain in the community, which tends to expect Montessori schools to be private rather than public. Movie theatre commercials, bookmarks distributed to libraries, harvest festivals, and community fundraising events form

the basis of marketing plans. The school is trying to capitalize on word of mouth marketing as it seems to be the most effective.

Concerns expressed by the board include inadequate funding for Special Education programs, which they view as creating a financial burden for schools. They would like to see the option of video conferencing for PCSC meeting attendance to relieve the time and money constraints related to traveling to Boise.

Interview with Administrator:

The mission of the school as expressed by the administrator, Mr. David Meyer, is using the Montessori Method to create critical thinkers and independent learners with a focus on individualized and differentiated learning. Students are encouraged to take responsibility for their learning. Ideally, fulfillment of the mission is determined according to how well students use knowledge to solve problems. However, the only measurement tools currently available are designed to measure the accumulation of knowledge. Administration expressed the need to amend the MSES to better reflect the mission of the school.

The relationship between administration and the board is described as professional, effective, and efficient. The board supports the mission and makes decisions based on policy and the law without personal entanglement. Only recently were parents of students in the school added as board members. Current board members were selected based on the skills they possess.

Facility issues involve the need to obtain permanent financing. Dome Technology invested 2.3 million in the facility and is patiently waiting for reimbursement. Debt service to Dome Technology is scaled to enrollment. The school is working to obtain USDA financing. The school would like to see legislation that would help charter schools access facility funds.

The administrative workload is described as being manageable. Mr. Meyer values continuation of the school regardless of his presence there. Therefore, he tries to offload tasks as appropriate. Staff is cross trained and their increased understanding of various roles and responsibilities makes workloads more reasonable. Additionally, an administrative assistant was brought in this year. Staff members work well together and willingly aid in task completion.

The administrator acts as a resource to the staff and has created a collaborative and trusting environment. Staff credits the administrator's attitude as being the catalyst for staff being willing to do more. The administrator views himself as being effective at organizing people; defining tasks; ensuring people feel supported; communicating with staff, parents, and students; and creating a close knit team. He holds himself to high standards and ultimately feels responsible for everything that happens even though he has a shared vision of responsibility.

An academic strength of the school is the level of effort put into professional development regarding use of Montessori Method. Students must also learn how to learn through Montessori. Work plans provide direction for students, while teachers serve as mentors that solicit student feedback and respond to individual needs. Students are excited about learning and engaged in the work. Weaknesses include the need for additional training in the Montessori Method, alignment of Montessori principles to state and common core standards, and a significant student population that struggles with reading. Additional reading curriculum resources are needed. Administration believes a three year cycle is needed to obtain accurate results.

The administrator reports that all teachers are properly certified and highly qualified. Annual teacher evaluations are completed. These are based on the Danielson model and appreciative inquiry. Special education students are properly identified and serviced. The school is ready to align curriculum to common core standards, they are currently deciding who will complete this task. The staff is aware of common core standards but training is needed.

Data acquisition is based mostly on teacher observation. The Montessori Method provides that teachers observe students for mastery and move them on accordingly. Controls are built into the curriculum so it is obvious to both the student and teacher when mistakes are made. The student becomes his own authority over what is being done right or wrong. Additionally, feedback loops are built into the curriculum. For these reasons, the administrator said little formal data acquisition is needed. IRI, AIMSWEB, reading probes, and ISAT scores are used to identify areas of weakness and drive curricular decisions.

Over 90% of parents attend conferences, and the school has an active parent organization. Administration believes newly passed state legislation does not support the Montessori Method and that legislation is driving innovation. The legislation has resulted in reduction of staff and is not viewed as being a motivator for teachers. Also as a result of Students Come First, the administration is considering adding an online component to the school.

Interview with Business Manager:

The business manager describes her training as being adequate and the workload manageable. After a year on the job, she has a good understanding of the 2M software. Every month she goes over the budget and completes interim budgets reflecting needed adjustments. She describes the process as ongoing evaluation.

The current budget is likely inaccurate, as it was based on enrollment of 256 and enrollment is actually 241. Additionally transportation reimbursement may be lower than estimated. The state will true up these figures in February. Medicaid reimbursement has gone up due to increased special education expenses.

MMCS currently charges preschool tuition. Tuition is also collected for full day kindergarten. Next year, the preschool tuition will be phased out but will continue to be charged for the full day kindergarten option. No fees are charged for supplies or for the half-day kindergarten option.

It appears that the school will have an operating loss of about \$62,000 this year. However, this does not take into account grant money carried over from last year, budget even though grant expenditures are included. The school has had to dip into reserves but anticipates ending the current year with a positive fund balance of about \$47,000. FY 13 projections were not provided.

Program Strengths:

- Individualized instruction
- Dedicated staff, board, and administration
- Good working relationships among staff, administration, and board
- Engaged students
- Administrator is viewed as a resource
- High parent involvement
- Met AYP
- SRA curriculum
- AIMSWEB data acquisition

Program Concerns:

- Additional teacher training needed
- MSES not met or in need of more data
- 3 year cycle needed for true measure of Montessori effectiveness – how will progress be measured in the meantime?
- Obtaining permanent financing for facility
- Better calibration to determine appropriateness of curriculum needed
- More hard data may be required to determine success of program – better tracking of student progress
- Financial audit - PCSC does not have copy

Possible Charter Violations:

- The Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) program will be supervised by a certificated staff member who holds the Gifted and Talented Endorsement, or by a certificated staff member of another school through a cooperative arrangement.
- Monticello teachers are trained in the use of the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) Model
- MSES 2 not met

- Monticello offers a full day preschool and kindergarten to better meet the needs of parents.

Possible Charter Amendments:

- MSES
- Other areas of non-compliance as noted above
- Adding an online component

Recommendations:

- Amend MSES and other charter requirements that are not being met as soon as possible
- Meet compliance with all charter requirements
- Obtain additional teacher training
- Find ways to collect more hard data to better measure student progress and the success of the program
- Continue work on obtaining permanent financing
- Train teachers in MTI
- Continue implementation of common core standards
- Additional board training
- Community education about the Montessori method

Materials Requested:

- Fiscal audit

September 20, 20112

Monticello Montessori

4707 S. Sweetwater Way
Ammon, Idaho 83406
208.520.2492 office
208.717.3161 fax



February 14, 2012

Dear Keelie:

Thank you for visiting Monticello Montessori. We enjoyed having you here. I appreciate the document you created that lists in an abbreviated format the requirements of our charter. This will be a very helpful document for us!

Regarding your concerns about compliance, the following information is submitted for your consideration.

1. We would like to amend our charter to reflect MESEs that align with our school's mission: To create critical thinkers and intrinsically motivated learners. We would like to remove the ISAT and IRI MESEs and add the following assessments instead:

The Cornell Critical Thinking Test, Grades 5 and 6

The School Motivation and Learning Strategies Inventory (SMALSI), Grades 3 through 6

Both of these assessments have been nationally normed. *(PCSC Staff Note: This possibility was discussed but never submitted as a proposed amendment.)*

2. We have contracted with a teacher who holds a Gifted and Talented endorsement. She is working with us to identify our GAT students and provide a program to meet their needs.
3. We do not currently have any students who are English Language Learners; however, we will purchase the SIOP training books from the SIOP Institute and begin training this school year to be in compliance with the charter.
4. We would like to amend our charter to state Monticello Montessori *may* offer a full day preschool and kindergarten program so that we have the flexibility to offer or not to offer such programs. *(PCSC Staff note: This amendment was approved by staff in Spring 2012.)*

Please advise how you would like us to submit the charter amendments mentioned in items 1 and 4 above. Also, please advise if there is anything else we need to do to be in compliance regarding items 2 and 3 above. Once again, thank you for your oversight and attention to detail regarding our charter.

Best regards,

--

David D. Meyer, Administrator
Monticello Montessori Charter School
4707 S Sweetwater Way

September 20, 2012

Ammon, ID 83406
(208) 419-0742, office
(208) 717-3161, fax

September 20, 20112

2011 - 2012 Star Rating Results

Monticello Montessori Charter School (474) / Monticello Montessori Charter School (1246)

OVERALL STAR RATING

2 star

43 out of 100 points

ACHIEVEMENT

Content Area	Percent Proficient / Advanced	Points Earned	Points Eligible
ISAT Reading	83.1%	3	5
ISAT Math	52.1%	2	5
ISAT Language	64.8%	3	5

*** Calculated using average of last three years data*

Percentage of points:

8 / 15 = 53.3%

Total points for this area:

13 / 25

GROWTH TO ACHIEVEMENT

Content Area	Median Student Growth Percentile (SGP)	Median Student Adequate Growth Percentile (AGP)	Made Adequate Growth?	Points Earned	Points Eligible
Reading	48.5	18.0	Yes	3	5

September 20, 20112

Math	10.0	38.5	No	1	5
Language	40.5	35.0	Yes	2	5
Percentage of points: 6 / 15 = 40.0%					
Total points for this area: 30 / 75					
PARTICIPATION					
Was participation met? Yes					