



High Desert Montessori

**SUMMARY OF RESULTS:
PARENT AND STAFF FORUMS
NOVEMBER 2018**

Prepared by



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I. Executive Summary: Parent and Staff Forums

A. Introduction

The Blueprint Collaborative facilitated two forums with High Desert Montessori Charter School (HDMS):

- 1) Parents on November 8, 2018 (29 participants)
- 2) Staff on November 9, 2018 (27 participants)

The packets distributed in the forums (Appendices A and B) included instructions that requested participants break into small groups (for parent forum) and pairs (for staff forum). Responses to questions included in the packets were recorded in writing by one person in each group/pair. The questions were organized into the following five categories:

- 1) Overall/Big Picture;
- 2) Community Outreach and Engagement;
- 3) Parent Outreach and Engagement;
- 4) Education/Academics;
- 5) Facilities/Physical Campus.

Once completed, the sheets with responses were posted on the corresponding poster on the wall. The completed sheets were analyzed using qualitative analysis methods, which rely on the identification of common themes.

This report includes a summary of the data collected during the two forums. The counts provided in the analysis below are counts of **mentions per group**, demonstrating a count of **one** could mean 2-5 people in the group agreed this was a key issue. The primary themes are noted for each category of forum questions.

The main themes that emerged from the forums fall into the following categories:

- 1) Support for Montessori Principles and Adhering to Those Principles
- 2) Facilities/Campus Expansion
- 3) Communication and Engagement
- 4) Sustainability and Long-term Success

The summary of qualitative data collected from parents and staff, for each of these themes, is provided in the following section.

B. Main Themes

1. Support for Montessori Principles and Adhering to Those Principles

The parents and staff forums clearly demonstrate the strong support for the Montessori principles and adhering to those principles. These were reflected through the following common themes:

- Recruiting, retaining, and supporting ALL staff (admin, teachers, assistants) in Montessori accredited education was a theme identified by both staff and parents as being instrumental for success. Ongoing training and professional development were also the top priority for budget allocations from parents and staff.
- Connection to the environment and nature was among one of the most frequently identified overall themes. Both staff and parents expressed desire for the current and future campus to intertwine with the environment through improved outdoor playgrounds, improvement and expansion of the gardens, maintaining mature landscape, connecting each classroom with the outside, being a leader

in green and eco-friendly practices, and someday having a separate campus for Middle School that would include a farm.

- The most frequently identified staff need was more time for preparing the classroom to better incorporate Montessori materials.
- Reducing class size to align better with Montessori guidelines and not pushing 30 students was identified as one of the top concerns among staff.
- Having purposefully built classrooms with enough space for group collaboration was captured and echoed in the expressed need for funding for quality Montessori materials.
- Staff and parents both indicated a desire for a formal onboarding orientation and ongoing process to better communicate the Montessori principles and how to translate and integrate these principles into the home.
- There was also expressed concern for retaining Montessori families through all grades.

2. Facilities/Campus Expansion

The top identified needs for indoor space in the classrooms are provided in detail, however the atrium, shared community space, green ecofriendly design, and incorporating artwork were frequently mentioned as key to preserve or incorporate into the building design. The top physical space needs, listed in two categories (classroom and campus needs), are below. Note that parent results are reported by group frequency (3-6 parents per group) and staff results are reported by both group frequency and pair frequency (since staff broke into both groups and pairs during the staff forum).

Table 1: Classroom Needs

Rank	Identified Need	Parent Group Frequency	Staff Group/Pair Frequency	Total
1	More storage & closet space	1	13	14
2	Larger classrooms/more space/rooms that are not in an "L" shape	-	11	11
3	Direct access outside for each classroom	2	7	9
3	Sinks that accommodate children	-	9	9
4	Large windows that open/allow for more natural light	1	7	8
4	Laminate flooring/not stained carpet	-	8	8
5	More bathrooms & better access to bathrooms, especially for primary	-	5	5
6	Shelving	-	4	4
7	Temperature control/updated HVAC	-	3	3

*Classroom-specific needs not asked of parent forum

Table 2: Campus Needs

Rank	Identified Need	Parent Group Frequency	Staff Group/Pair Frequency	Total
1	Playground at Silverada with grassy area needed, no asphalt, no rubber chips, more room for recreational play	7	16	23
2	Preservation & improvement to natural environment: Increase & improve gardens, preserve native habitats, mature trees, greenhouse	9	9	18
3	Unified campus, same side of street	6	8	14
4	Preserve murals, increase number of murals, artwork	2	7	9
5	Middle School farm/separate campus	2	4	8
6	Solar powered shade structures	2	2	4
7	Single story building preferred	-	2	2
7	Drinking fountain outside	-	2	2
7	Pick-up/drop-off improvement needed	1	1	2
8	Outside workspace for students	-	1	1

3. Communication and Engagement

Parents feel connected and engaged with HDMS, however they feel improvements could be made if there were more opportunities for social gatherings, discussion with the teachers outside of parent teacher nights, a central hub for parents to connect and communicate with one another.

Parents reported being willing to volunteer with a number of events, while staff also expressed the desire for parents to get involved with social events and fundraising, teachers would appreciate parent who can share skills such as tutoring, classroom set up and preparation.

HDMS staff does a good job at communicating with families overall, all identified methods of communication were found to be helpful. Feedback for potential changes includes:

- Clear, concise text messages
- Have teachers inform families about classroom lessons learned, have administrative staff inform on school-wide issues
- Build a parent portal so families can connect and submit comments, questions, concerns about the school in general to a central location
- Make parents aware of large issues such as needs or changes to the budget and facilities

4. Sustainability and Long-term Success

Overall concerns for future longevity of HDMS fell into two major categories: 1) adherence to Montessori principles and 2) funding. These two categories are related. The first is preserving Montessori theory while adhering to Washoe County School District rules and regulations. The second has to do with financial stability and growth and expansion without a strong foundation.

Star ratings were specifically mentioned as a potential threat for to receiving district funding and standardized tests; resulting test scores are a source of stress and drive Star ratings. Some groups identified the need to better advocate to the school district on behalf of Montessori, through educating the public and engaging with elected officials and key stakeholders to demonstrate the importance of Montessori.

II. Results by Category

A. Overall/Big Picture

Tables 3-7 below summarize the parent and staff forum results. Note that parent results are reported by group frequency (3-6 parents per group) and staff results are reported by both group frequency and pair frequency (since staff broke into both groups and pairs during the staff forum).

Table 3: Strengths and Assets

Rank	Identified Need	Parent Group Frequency	Staff Group/Pair Frequency	Total
1	Adherence to Montessori methods/principles <i>Peace education, child-centered & lead, project-based learning, fostering love for learning, independent, free-thinking students, social emotional learning/whole child approach, mixed-aged interactions, protecting the 3-hour work periods, community-based learning, administrative staff believes in Montessori</i>	51	50	101
2	Public charter school	11	12	23
3	More diverse student body/inclusive of all cultures/socioeconomic status	6	9	15
4	Retaining trained teachers, especially in primary	5	5	10
5	Collaborative, passionate, community that is family based & inclusive	5	4	9
6	Green building/ecofriendly	4	3	7
7	Focus on supporting training & professional development	-	6	6
7	Staff has good communication with families	5	1	6
8	Organic food/lunch program	5	-	5

Table 4: Opportunities for Improvement

Rank	Identified Need	Parent Group Frequency	Staff Group/Pair Frequency	Total
1	Advocate for Montessori to general public & WCSD; Need to develop a message/platform for engagement with WCSD to make case/educate why Montessori is an effective method	12	5	17
2	Decrease class size	2	12	14
3	Recruitment and retention of trained teachers/staff turnover	3	9	12
4	Outdoor learning space/Middle School farm	2	9	11
4	Improve outdoor play/formal sports/increased physical activity	6	5	11
5	Onboard, orientation, ongoing engagement with families regarding Montessori methods & how to translate those principles into homes	4	2	6
5	Need a unified campus	2	4	6
6	Retain Montessori families	2	3	5
7	Better communication to parents from admin staff about larger school issues (budget)	4	-	4
8	Train all staff	-	3	3
8	Purposefully built classrooms	1	2	3
8	More programs, including a summer program, before/after care, technology/coding class	1	2	3

Table 5: Threats to Long-term Success

Rank	Identified Need	Parent Group Frequency	Staff Group/Pair Frequency	Total
1	Lack of funding/in debt/budget	5	7	12
2	Elimination of certain grades (especially toddler program/pre-K potentially as satellite partnering with Head Start programs and 9 th grade)	3	5	8
3	Star ratings/test scores drive funding	1	4	5
3	Rapid expansion without strong foundation	1	4	5
4	Untrained staff/administrative staff	-	3	3
5	WCSD rules/regulations	2	-	2

Table 6: Future of Staff

Rank	Identified Need	Parent Group Frequency	Staff Group/Pair Frequency	Total
1	Fully accredited/all staff trained in Montessori	11	13	24
2	HDMS becomes a Montessori training center	2	7	9
3	More interventionists/counselors, building increase number of teachers for grades (7 primary 5 lower EL, 4 upper EL, 5 MS)	-	7	7
4	More early education through UNR/TMCC partnerships	-	5	5
5	Decrease student to teacher ratios	2	-	2

Table 7: Budget Considerations

Rank	Identified Need	Parent Group Frequency	Staff Group/Pair Frequency	Total
1	Fund Montessori professional development & training for all staff	5	9	14
2	More staff for PE, music, arts, behavioral, counselors, after care	3	7	10
3	Outdoor learning environment/Middle School Farm	2	6	8
3	Build a cohesive facility/facility upkeep maintenance	2	6	8
4	Increase salary/benefits for staff	3	4	7
5	Montessori materials	2	2	4
6	Reduce class size	-	3	3
6	Outings/field trip	3	-	3
7	Pay off debt	1	1	2
7	Transportation	1	1	2

B. Outreach and Engagement: Parents and Community Combined

The following sections does not include frequency counts. These questions were used to generate an exhaustive list of all options. Analysis did not identify that one method of communication was more frequently mentioned or considered more effective than another.

1. Parent Engagement and Outreach

Tables 8-10 below summarize the parent results for questions related to information sharing and volunteering.

Table 8: How Families Currently Receive Information/Feedback on Current Methods

How Families Currently Receive Information	Feedback on Current Methods
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children • Emails - Friday teacher emails should inform parents what class learned/did that week; specific to class; general school information better if on website; tell parents how education can be continued at home • Front desk • Open Houses- want more open houses/parent nights • Phone Calls- Make calls/texts as concise as possible • Rhonda's Tidbits • Sandwich boards out front • Spouses • Text • Weekly Newsletters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows for participation • Very helpful • Multiple methods may be overkill, but is appreciated • Many different methods can be confusing • Good on dates & times, but poor on locations

Table 9: How Families Would like to Receive Information in the Future

How Families Would like to Receive Information in the Future
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bi-lingual staff to decrease language barriers • Childcare for meetings • Co-op could be offered • Could create or improve the website or create a Parent Portal so parents can access/comment • Continue "2nd Cup of Coffee" • Improved volunteer sign-ups • Multicultural night • PTO & school need to collaborate better to not over burden parents with fundraising demands/volunteering

Table 10: Future Volunteering/Events

Future Volunteering/Events	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Back-to-School night • Beers & Bites fundraising • Big Rigs • Book Fair Class fundraisers • Classroom helpers-yoga, art, PE • Clubs-math, reading, after school clubs • Community gathering • Community clean up • Educational nights/workshops • Fall Festival • Gardening bees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Going Out Chaperones • Montessori Through my Eyes • Parents as mentors/speakers • PTO • Read Alouds • School improvement projects • Seasonal Events • Social Events • Parents to help with tutoring • Volunteering in classroom

2. Community Engagement and Outreach

Tables 11-13 summarize the parent and staff results for questions related to community partners.

Table 11: Current Partners

Current Partners	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dolan Auto Farm Fresh Catering Grassroots Books and Music Jessi LeMay JK Architecture Engineering 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parent Teacher Organization Peterbilt Sierra Arts Foundation The Blueprint Collaborative

Table 12: Organizations HDMS Should Partner With

Organizations HDMS Should Partner With			
Educational Institutions			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rita Cannon - neighboring elementary school Academy of Arts, Careers, & Technology (AACT) as a bridge to high school Higher education - Western Nevada Community College, TMCC, UNR Should partner with UNR/TMCC for early education programs & to help establish HDMS as a training center [10]-came out of "role as future leader in education" Washoe County School District Montessori specific - Mountain View Montessori, Montessori Nevada, National Center for Montessori Vocational training organizations Online colleges Signature academies Feeder high schools 			
Health & Social Services	Food and Farm Based	Businesses	Other
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Renown Health Washoe County Health District Head Start- pre/early education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grateful Gardens Groceries: Trader Joe's, Raley's WinCo, SakNSave River School Farm Urban Roots 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Big business – Amazon, Casinos, ITS Logistics, Google, Switch, Tesla Local business – Abbi Agency (and general marketing firms), Desert Research Institute (DRI), artists & authors, like-minded orgs, Sierra Journeys, Discovery Museum, Sustainable Nevada Neighboring – Rosewood, The Generator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Reno, local politicians, Assembly woman Sarah Peters' children attend (her background is environmental engineering) Eco construction companies Solar companies

Table 13: Previous Partners and Reasons Not Engaged Now

Previous Partners and Reasons Not Engaged
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be the Change Gina Strausser-her children no longer attend Lissner- because of disagreements Sustainable Nevada-contract changed; Yana's children Urban Roots-because we need year-round access to outdoor water; because they outgrew us Vaughn Construction- children no longer attend

C. Education and Academics

1. Top Priorities to Ensure Student Success

Tables 14-16 summarize parent and staff results for questions related to top priorities.

Table 14: Top Priorities: Parents & Staff

Rank	Identified Need	Parent Group Frequency	Staff Group/Pair Frequency	Total
1	Montessori trained teachers, assistants, & administrative staff	6	7	13
2	Continued Montessori methods outside classroom/at home, help parents to have a better understanding of Montessori	4	5	9
3	Quality Montessori-based learning materials & learning environment	4	4	8
4	Reducing staff turnover	3	2	5
4	Annual assessment & accountability for learning & maintaining high standards	2	3	5
5	Decreased student to teacher ratios	1	1	2

Table 15: Top Priorities: Staff ONLY

Rank	Identified Need	Group/Pair Frequency
1	Education of the whole child	2
2	Gathering alumni information/stats on graduates that are college/career bound	1
2	Scholarship opportunities for primary	1
2	Precision Teaching	1
2	Professional Development refreshers	1
2	Children who are socially & emotionally ready to learn	1

Table 16: Top Priorities Parents ONLY

Rank	Identified Need	Group Frequency
1	Balance between student choice & teacher direction	2
1	Preparation for high school	2
1	Gifted & Talented Program, Special Education Program	2
2	Reading support	1
2	Teacher demonstration	1

2. Questions Asked of STAFF ONLY

Tables 17-19 summarize staff responses to questions related to teaching, education and academics.

Table 17: How do you know you're doing well as a teacher?

Rank	Identified Need	Group/Pair Frequency
1	Behaviors of Students <i>Children are engaged with the materials, behavioral reflects enjoyment for learning, they are peaceful, happy, working independently, learning from one another</i>	12
2	Normalized classroom	3
2	Emotional, social learning occurring & improvement is evident	3
3	Parents are happy	2
3	Having a relationship with each child	2

Table 18: What makes you feel you are not succeeding as a teacher?

Rank	Identified Need	Group/Pair Frequency
1	When students are not engaged with the materials, getting blank stares	8
2	Increase in behavioral issues & student conflict	3
2	Tests & test scores	3
2	Students are not making progress	3
2	When not able to fully prepare the classroom/messy classroom	3

Table 19: What do you need as an instructor to be able to succeed that you are currently not receiving?

Rank	Identified Need	Group/Pair Frequency
1	Time to prepare the environment	6
2	Clear communications & expectations	5
3	More Professional Development material	3
4	Administration to be trained in Montessori	2
4	Reduce class size	2
5	Accessible storage space	1
5	No 7:45 am meetings	1
5	Help using Transparent Classroom	1
5	Improved technology	1
5	Help with student behavioral issues	1
5	Coaches trained at their level	1

D. Facilities and Physical Campus

1. Indoor Spaces

Tables 20 and 21 summarize parent and staff responses to questions related to indoor spaces.

Table 20: Classroom Needs

Rank	Identified Need	Parent Group Frequency	Staff Group/Pair Frequency	Total
1	More storage & closet space	1	13	14
2	Larger classrooms/more space/rooms that are not in an "L" shape	-	11	11
3	Direct access outside for each classroom	2	7	9
3	Sinks that accommodate children	-	9	9
4	Large windows that open/allow for more natural light	1	7	8
5	Laminate flooring/not stained carpet	-	8	8
5	More bathrooms & better access to bathrooms, especially for primary	-	5	5
6	Shelving	-	4	4
7	Temperature control/updated HVAC	-	3	3

Table 21: Other Considerations for Indoor Space

Rank	Identified Need	Parent Group Frequency	Staff Group/Pair Frequency	Total
1	Keep/incorporate the atrium	2	2	4
1	Keep/incorporate the artwork	1	3	4
2	Improved space for family events/community gatherings	2	1	3
2	General reception area	2	1	3
2	Middle School art & science facilities	1	2	3
3	Increase size of staff lounge & have separate bathroom	-	2	2
3	More classrooms	1	1	2
3	Professional/updated kitchen facility & cafeteria	-	2	2
3	Sound dimming or lowered ceilings to decrease noise	-	2	2
4	Rework or remove pillars	-	1	1

2. Outdoor Grounds Needs

Table 22 summarize parent and staff responses to questions related to outdoor grounds.

Table 22: Outdoor Grounds Needs

Rank	Identified Need	Parent Group Frequency	Staff Group/Pair Frequency	Total
1	Playground at Silverada with grassy area needed, no asphalt, no rubber chips, more room for recreational play	7	16	23
2	Preservation & improvement to natural environment: Increase & improve gardens, preserve native habitats, mature trees, greenhouse	9	9	18
3	Unified campus, same side of street	6	8	14
4	Preserve murals, increase number of murals, artwork	2	7	9
5	Middle School farm/separate campus	2	4	8
6	Solar powered shade structures	2	2	4
7	Single story building preferred	-	2	2
7	Drinking fountain outside	-	2	2
7	Pick-up/drop-off improvement needed	1	1	2
8	Outside workspace for students	-	1	1

Appendix A: Parent Forum Instructions and Questions

Parent Forum Instructions and Questions

INSTRUCTIONS

Number of people in group: _____

Within your group of 3 to 5 people, assign an individual to be the note taker/scribe. Write the group members' responses to each of the questions under the five, high-level topics:

- 1) Overall/Big Picture;
- 2) Community Outreach and Engagement;
- 3) Parent Outreach and Engagement;
- 4) Education/Academics;
- 5) Facilities/Physical Campus.

After your group has completed a set of questions for one of the topics, remove the sheet from the packet, tape it under the matching topic heading on the wall, and move onto the next topic.

A few guidelines to keep us on target and on time:

- If you have more than one answer among the group, write them all down as we want everyone's input.
- Spend no more than 2-4 minutes on each question.
- If a question is taking a lot of time to answer, skip it and come back to it later.

**NOTE: HDMS is shorthand for High Desert Montessori School

Overall/ Big Picture

1. Identify five (5) things that HDMS does well that you would NOT want to change?
2. If you could improve three (3) things about HDMS, what would they be?
3. What is the biggest threat to HDMS' long term survival?
4. What is the strongest asset to ensure HDMS' long term survival?
5. Where do you see the HDMS campus in the future? (size, layout, student capacity)
6. Where do you see the HDMS staff in the future? (number of staff, staff quality/accreditations?)
7. What role do you see HDMS having in the future as a leader in education for the community?
8. What sets HDMS apart from other Montessori institutions?
9. When asked about HDMS, what is your elevator pitch (what do you most often say in 30 seconds)?
10. If you were in charge of the budget, what would your top three (3) funding priorities be?

Parent Outreach and Engagement

1. How do parents currently receive information about how to get involved with HDMS?
 - a. How impactful/helpful is this information?
2. What methods should be used in the future to connect with parents?
3. As a parent, what types of events, activities, or tasks are you currently involved in? What would you like to be involved in in the future?
4. Do you feel connected to HDMS?
 - a. If YES, what about the school makes you feel connected? How could this be improved?
 - b. If NO, why not, what's missing?

Community Outreach and Engagement

1. Who are the key partners (individual people and/or organizations) in the community that HDMS should build or strengthen relationships with?
2. Who are HDMS' current community partners and how are these partners engaged with HDMS?

Education and Academics

1. Identify the top three (3) priorities that are most important to ensure students succeed academically at HDMS.

Facilities/Physical Campus

1. What aspect(s) of the current HDMS campus do you enjoy the most?
2. What aspect(s) of the current HDMS campus do you least enjoy? If you could change one thing about the physical campus, what would you change?

Appendix B: Staff Forum Instructions and Questions

Staff Forum Instructions and Questions

INSTRUCTIONS

Number of people in group: _____

Within your group of 3 to 5 people, assign an individual to be the note taker/scribe. Write the group members' responses to each of the questions under the five, high-level topics:

- 1) Overall/Big Picture;
- 2) Community Outreach and Engagement;
- 3) Parent Outreach and Engagement;
- 4) Education/Academics;
- 5) Facilities/Physical Campus.

After your group has completed a set of questions for one of the topics, remove the sheet from the packet, tape it under the matching topic heading on the wall, and move onto the next topic.

A few guidelines to keep us on target and on time:

- If you have more than one answer among the group, write them all down as we want everyone's input.
- Spend no more than 2-4 minutes on each question.
- If a question is taking a lot of time to answer, skip it and come back to it later.

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Overall/ Big Picture

1. Identify five (5) things that HDMS does well that you would NOT want to change?
2. If you could improve three (3) things about HDMS, what would they be?
3. What is the biggest threat to HDMS' long term survival?
4. What is the strongest asset to ensure HDMS' long term survival?
5. Where do you see the HDMS campus in the future? (size, layout, student capacity)
6. Where do you see the HDMS staff in the future? (number of staff, staff quality/accreditations?)
7. What role do you see HDMS having in the future as a leader in education for the community?
8. What sets HDMS apart from other Montessori institutions?
9. When asked about HDMS, what is your elevator pitch (what do you most often say in 30 seconds)?
10. If you were in charge of the budget, what would your top three (3) funding priorities be?

Parent Outreach and Engagement

1. How do parents currently receive information about how to get involved with HDMS?
 - a. How impactful/helpful is this information?
2. What methods should be used in the future to connect with parents?
3. What types of events, activities, or tasks would be best for parents to be involved in?

Community Outreach and Engagement

1. Who are the key partners (individual people and/or organizations) in the community that HDMS should build or strengthen relationships with?
2. Who are HDMS' community partners and how are these partners engaged with HDMS?
 - a. What would you like to know from these partners?
3. Have you had previously engaged community partners who have since faded from the organization? If so, do you know why?

Education and Academics

1. Identify the top three (3) priorities that are most important to ensure students succeed academically at HDMS.
2. How do you know you are doing well as a teacher?
3. What makes you feel like you are not succeeding as a teacher?
4. What do you as an instructor need from HDMS (that you are currently not receiving) to be able to succeed as teacher?

Appendix B: Staff Forum Instructions and Questions

Facilities/Physical Campus

1. What aspect(s) of the current HDMS campus do you enjoy the most?
2. What aspect(s) of the current HDMS campus do you least enjoy? If you could change one thing about the physical campus, what would you change?
3. What does your classroom need the most in terms of space or other qualities? (i.e. windows, sinks, storage, shelving)
4. What do you like most about your current classroom?
5. What do you like least about your current classroom?