

HIGH DESERT MONTESSORI CHARTER SCHOOL

Board of Directors Meeting

Monday June 26, 2019 @ 5:00 P.M.

Diamond Peak Room

2025 Silverada Blvd, Reno, NV

MINUTES of MEETING

Board Binder Available Upon Request

Members Present Terry Fowler
 Linda Aaquist – By Phone
 Doug Whitener – By Phone
 Amanda Baldwin
 Reid Riker
 Max Haynes
 Claudia Castañeda

Not Present Bryce Ganes

Also Present Principal Rhonda Turnipseed
 Assistant Principal Tamra Hopkins
 Bookkeeper Adista Emler

1. Call to order and roll call

Chairperson Terry Fowler called the meeting to order with a quorum of seven board members.

2. Public comment

Keith Roberts- Parent: Mr. Roberts work with Rhonda Turnipseed for two years as his evaluator. Mr. Roberts stated in his experience, that he found Rhonda to be very innovative, insightful, strong-minded and very supportive.

Gina Strasser- Former parent: Ms. Strasser was the Operations Manager for a nonprofit organization through capital campaign for land purchases and construction of facilities and Ms. Strasser is here to ask the Board to consider before the school and Board begins to sell property that the Board works with a firm that is experienced with strategic planning and to have that firm come it to create a long term strategic plan that has been approved by the board which then you proceed with selling properties and remodeling. Ms. Strasser also asked the Board to consider hiring an Executive Director to deal with things that a principal does not necessarily have experience with. Ms. Strasser went on to say that a

nonprofit is a beast of its own and has very unique opportunities and felt that is why they were able to do so much with the outdoor area of Orovada.

Jamie Berfield- Teacher: Approximately four weeks ago, I heard that many employee contracts were not renewed. My initial reaction was how could these kind and special people not be asked back. My second reaction was to attend meetings, where I did a lot of listening, thinking, and analyzing. My third reaction was to say, "I am sorry". I sympathize, 12 years ago, my contract was not renewed for a similar reason, which brought me here.

I sympathize because I have been a part of over 120 meetings in the last ten years that has to lead us to this place. In these meetings, which all community members have been invited to, the overarching goal has been to make financially savvy decisions, not bastardize the Montessori philosophy while meeting state standards, and defining our future. These decisions don't go unchallenged and are not made lightly. We have tried to make these changes by ourselves and have realized that we are not accountants, builders, project managers, strategic planners but passionate educators. Passionate educators make an impact on a community. That is why you have seen an outpouring from teachers, parents, and students. I know that change is hard and scary.

12 years ago, I took the place of people that were not willing to change their ways and make changes to middle school. In that first year at the middle school level, we had a counselor and it was amazing the support that was felt throughout the school when she was here. When we lost her, I knew we needed to get a counselor back into the school. Thank goodness the district is beginning to require this because we haven't made it work until now.

In 2013 Montessori consultants told us, "to work toward an increasingly consistent population of students who enter Montessori at an early age, to establish a community culture of independence and productivity." Until now, we haven't had a plan or someone that is willing to take the necessary steps to move us forward. The Middle School teacher allocation is too top heavy to meet the needs of our Montessori school.

The other day, one of my coworkers said, "the only thing that is constant in life is change." We have altered the look of school by adding a property, playgrounds, solar panels. The population we have served and how we provided services has changed multiple times. Since 2014, we have tried to formulate a guiding document to help us make these difficult decisions. A document that provides our administration to have support and buy-in from the community. Without a strategic plan, I feel that change is even more difficult.

So, what action am I requesting for you?

1. Renew Rhonda's contract. Allow her to take this organization poised for greatness to that next level and understand that resistance is equal to the magnitude of change.
2. Budget money to finish our school's strategic plan. This document will lead to future decisions by all invested parties.
3. After tonight's presentation on the Middle school program, embrace the plan that allows us to provide services to all current students and fill in vacant spots with our waiting list students

4. Knowing that by reducing our middle school staff it provides us with a counselor to help meet goal #4 of our drafted strategic plan, "Evaluate student success with the goal of human flourishing."
5. Trust that these decisions have not been made by one person but a large community that wants the best for the school.

Reid Riker- Board member: Reid Riker was asked to join the board back in January of 2019. Reid took a tour of both campuses. Reid had the pleasure of meeting several teachers. Without any knowledge of the Montessori method, Mr. Riker could tell that these teachers displayed a level of commitment and engagement to the students that Mr. Riker could only dream of. Mr. Riker went on to say that when he heard some of these teacher's contracts were not be renewed, he was sad because he may never see them share their knowledge and experience with the children again. Mr. Riker stated that as a child he went through a similar experience with his mom while living in Canada. Mr. Riker's mom taught for many years and her contract was not renewed and it was very difficult and that is what brought his family to the United States. Mr. Riker stated that he is not sharing his story to change any one's mind, he just wanted to let everyone know that he understands how they feel.

Erica M- Parent: Erica stated that at the last board meeting it was discussed to have a third-party consultant come in and Erica felt that was a great idea. Erica went on to say that it's on tonight's agenda as a discussion and Erica asked the Board if it was possible when they adopt the agenda if this item could be moved up as an action item to move this process along?

Katrina Reinhardt- Teacher: Katrina asked the board since teachers have not yet had the opportunity to have a third party consultant come in and investigate, that the Board do not renew Principal Rhonda Turnipseed's contract until that has happened. Katrina felt there is not enough information yet for the Board to make that kind of decision yet. Katrina also stated that she was let go under the guise of restructuring and Katrina does not feel that is the case for the Primary level and that is not the situation that is necessarily happening. Katrina wanted on record that if another teacher is being hired for her exact position that Katrina does not feel that is restructuring in the sense of the word that is being used in other cases. Katrina wishes she had the opportunity to have a three-step process to be aware of any issues that may have been the case happening with herself. Katrina wishes that there would be a three-step process that is outlined in the employee handbook. That has a step one of a warning notification, step two, process and step three, opportunity to improve before letting someone go.

Jen Voss- Parent: Changes to the middle school seemed to have been made quickly. When the recommendations came back from The National Center for Montessori, since the report, rough draft and final were not available until after school year ended. Ms. Voss stated that she understands the pyramid concept and understands the pyramid may not be perfect right now but is cutting the middle school teachers the best way to achieve our school's perfect pyramid? Ms. Voss asked why the school are they not focusing on building the base of the pyramid so it can take on a better shape later? Ms. Voss went on to say that it does not make sense to cut a primary teacher and the three middle school teachers and Ms. Voss urged the board to rehire the middle school teachers back and for the middle school program to be put back into place. MS. Voss feels more time is needed to be spent on finding ways to achieve the pyramid if that is what is so important. Ms. Voss still does not know what the environment will look like for when her daughters return back

to school since the letter the teachers wrote has not been addressed yet. Ms. Voss hopes the letter will be looked at and reviewed during the review of the renewal of Principal Rhonda Turnipseed's contract. Ms. Voss also hopes Ms. Rhonda will be interviewed as the teachers were for their renewal.

3. Chairman's report

Chairperson Fowler let the public know of the things that the board deals with. The Board deals with policies and legal requirements. It's the Chair and the Board that decides the Charter. The Chair and the Board signs and modifies the By-Laws. The Board also deals with budget and financial health. The Principal sets the budget and the Board approves it. It's a team effort to manage the budget throughout the school year to make sure the Board meets its priorities. Mission fulfillment, this is the big catchall of what the Board does. Chairperson Fowler went on to say that it's a balancing act of managing conflicting priorities. We are a fully Montessori institution. The school receives money from the State that comes with some strings that may be in conflict with the Montessori philosophy. Chairperson Fowler stated that the other thing the Board needs to deal with is that the Board needs to act on behalf of the entire HDMS community.

4. End of Year Principal Evaluation and Contract Renewal of Rhonda Clark. The Board may go into a closed session that excludes the public to consider her performance as Principal. This session may also be closed to confer and deliberate with legal counsel. A reopened session will be held for topics such as job description, job duties, contract and for any action(s) taken.

Max Haynes made the comment that it may be hard to move the agenda around. Mr. Haynes knows that the public is here tonight and the Board stated that they are not addressing any personnel issues. The Board asked the public to come back in a minimum of thirty minutes.

Amanda Baldwin moved to adopt the agenda with the change of after the Board goes into closed session if a good portion of the public that came tonight does not return for the rest of the meeting the Board will then move unto financial discussions and will move agenda item 6 down below agenda item #10. Max Haynes seconded the motion. Motion carries.

The Board went into closed session. Chairperson called the meeting back into session around 7:20 p.m. Chairperson Fowler took roll again. Linda Aaquist present, Doug Whitener present, Terry Fowler present, Amanda Baldwin present, Reid Riker present, Max Haynes present and Claudia Castañeda present.

Linda Aaquist moved for the Board to not renew Principal Rhonda Turnipseed's contract. Doug Whitener seconded the motion. Chairperson Fowler called a roll call vote. Doug Whitener yes, Linda Aaquist yes, Claudia Castañeda yes, Amanda Baldwin, yes, Reid Riker yes, Max Haynes, yes. Motion carries

Chairperson Fowler tabled agenda items 6, 7, 8, 9, 11,13 and 15.

5. 2018-19 Augmented budget

Adista Emler stated that the augmented budget is basically what our financial statements are at year end.

Amanda Baldwin moved to accept the 2018-19 augmented budget as presented. Reid Riker seconded the motion. Motion carries.

6. Red Hook Proposal involving the sale, renovation, leaseback, and repurchase of 3 story building / Silverada Building.

Max Haynes stated that there is an offer on the table from Red Hook. The school does not have any other solid offers for the Orovada campus nor the vacant lot. The school has been working on this for months on this decision. The decision is to sell the Orovada campus and to have Red Hook purchase the 3-story building and to completely remodel the building and once done, the building would be leased back to the school which they have approved us to do. The challenge is that there will not be enough money to do a massive remodel which would include 2025 Silverada. The Facility Committee asked that there be a surplus from the sale of Orovada to allow the school to have some funds, approximately \$600,000, to do some improvements to 2025 Silverada depending on the configuration.

The school will have a brand new building when the 3-story is completed in about two years. The school will still occupy the Orovada campus until the 3-story remodel is complete. By selling Orovada, the school will have extinguished the debt on the Orovada building and will give the school a surplus of \$600,000. The school has received excellent recommendations from other schools that have worked with Red Hook. The sale of Orovada is 2.5 million. 1.2 million will go towards renovation the 3-story building and \$600,000 will go into reserves towards improvements for 2025 Silverada. The school is asking for the vacant lot to be sold as soon as possible to pay off the debt that is owed on it. This remodel will help expand our school to include an Infant Toddler program in the future. The school will be all on the same side of the street with a single point entry. Max Haynes stated we can't continue to hold onto all this real Estate.

Max Haynes moved to proceed with the sale of the Orovada building at 2.5 million dollars to Red Hook contingent upon Red Hook purchasing the 3-story building at a price to be determined for tax reasons and leasing the 3-story back to the school and completing the remodel of the 3-story and the school would lease back Orovada until the 3-story remodel was completed and ready to move into. Reid Riker seconded the motion. Motion carries.

7. Nominations and election of 2019-20 Board Officers

Reid Riker agreed to be the treasurer. Max Haynes will except the chair position but he will not conduct investigations of complaints and will need to delegate certain functions to other board members or an outside source.

Amanda Baldwin Vice Chair and Claudia Castañeda secretary.

Reid Riker moved to elect Max Haynes as Chair, Amanda Baldwin as Vice Chair, Reid Riker as Treasurer and Claudia Castañeda as secretary. Amanda Baldwin seconded the motion. Motion carries.

8. Public comment

Kim Franchi- Parent: Thanked everyone here tonight especially the Board members who made a very tough decision tonight. That decision was made in the best interest of the entire school community.

Stacey Cooper- Charter School Liaison: Ms. Cooper stated for the record how much she appreciates the time, effort, conscientious thought that have gone into the several of the actions that have been taken over the last several weeks. Ms. Cooper would like to offer her resources to the Board as a Charter Liaison because her role serving at the State as well as serving with Washoe County School District is in the capacity of understand NRS, understanding Board policies and protocols, development of work policies, staff development even on the level of reinstating or revisiting school missions and visions and knowing that the school is on the cuff of a charter renewal this next school year, the Board has a lot on their shoulders for the next few weeks. Ms. Cooper let the board know that she is working through the summer and the Board can reach out to her to hold informal meetings.

Michelle- Principal at Bailey Charter: Michelle has family that attends HDMS and has been interested in what is going on at HDMS. Michelle feels it's important for charter schools to support each other. Michelle stated to the Board that their decision to not renew Principal Rhonda Turnipseed's contract tonight may not be in the best interest of the school and has caused a ripple effect. Michelle went on to say that she has been the Principal at Bailey Charter School for the past twelve years and they have had their share of ups and downs. Michelle does not know Rhonda personally and is here at tonight's meeting as a Charter school representative. Michelle went on to say that there is a very toxic culture in your school and that has gotten back to the staff at Bailey from some of our staff at HDMS. The Pyramid model applies to school leadership and any leadership organization. It really disappointed Michelle to read that the staff does not feel that the Principal is the person in charge so who is? The decision the Board made tonight to not renew Principal Rhonda Turnipseed's contract has indicated that your staff is in charge. The school will always struggle now that the perception will always be that person was fired. The school will struggle to find a new principal to trust the mission and they will not understand who is in charge because that person will have no authority.

Sue Ting- Parent: There is a lot more work to be done with the charter and leadership issue. I think being fair about why certain things happened, how to help whoever is coming in. What were the steps taken and what lead to a non-renewal of the contract for a school leader? That may help the new person be supported because you do need a supported administrator to run the school. MS Ting went on to say that teachers do have questions on leadership and who do they go to and making sure that staff does know and making that process clear even if it's clearly stated as there is a disconnect in terms of communication. Ms. Ting went on to say that through this entire process there have been one-directional things. The administrators were allowed to have a presentation where they got to explain things and there were questions and answers. Teachers are in a harder spot when they have things they want to share in a confidential manner. Providing space to allow for that dialog to happen. Ms. Ting hopes there will be more dialog moving forward especially when choosing a new administrator for the school who will help this community heal and to continue to grow the school.

9. Adjournment and Future Agenda Items.

Middle School Restructuring
May Financials and cash disbursements

Third Party Consultant
Governance Report
Approval of June 10th board minutes
Board meeting on July 17th.

**Reid Riker moved to adjourn the meeting. Amanda Baldwin seconded the motion.
Motion carries.**