

1.1 Executive Summary

14 Del. C. §§ 512(1)-(3). And (5)-(6)

The purpose of the Executive Summary is to provide a high-level overview of the application. The Executive Summary does not receive a rating and is to contain the following. The page limit for the Executive Summary is 5 pages.

1. Mission and Vision Statements

- a. **Provide a mission statement and a vision statement that will give the reviewers and interested members of the public an overview of the proposed charter school. The mission and vision statements should be specific, clear, and brief and provide the foundation for the entire school proposal and operational plan. Accordingly, the mission and vision statements must be aligned with the legislative intent set forth in 14 Del. C. § 501, the approval criteria in 14 Del. C. § 512 and the restrictions on charter schools in 14 Del. C. § 506.**

The mission of the Sussex Montessori School (SMS) is to nurture the development of empathetic, collaborative, persistent and innovative global and community citizens in accordance with the time-tested philosophy of Maria Montessori.

The Vision of the Sussex Montessori School (SMS) is to use the Montessori Method to educate children through authentic personalized learning experiences, respectful relationships, opportunities to innovate, and a focus on global citizenship. We believe that the creation of a Montessori public school in Sussex County, DE will improve student learning, allow for greater choice for parents, and serve as a model for alternative approaches to education by providing a proven and innovative teaching and learning environment.

2. Educational Need and Target Population

- a. **Identify the target population, grade levels, and school district(s) that the school will serve. Briefly describe the intended effect on the existing community and provide a rationale for the chosen location.**

Sussex Montessori School will enroll students aged 5-12 years old (Kindergarten through Grade 6) who wish to participate in the Montessori approach. It is expected that the school will primarily draw students from the western side of Sussex County in the corridor bounded by Bridgeville to Laurel and west of Georgetown to Seaford. This corridor lacks educational options other than district schools, has no elementary charter schools, and has no Montessori educational opportunities. SMS will provide an option for families who seek a brain-based, child-centered, differentiated learning environment.

- b. **Explain how the proposed charter school, including the grade levels chosen, will clearly meet the identified needs of the community and the targeted student population.**

In Sussex County, there is a projected rapid population growth in children 0-9 years of age over the next 20 years combined with increasing rates of poverty. With over 35,000 school children

between the ages of 0-14 years, there is an opportunity to sufficiently develop a Montessori school within the County. In addition, there are fewer educational opportunities in Sussex County than in the remainder of the state. This is particularly true for early childhood and elementary programming. Outside of the traditional public schools, there are no other easily accessible opportunities for children in this age group. Current state assessment data indicates that in Western Sussex districts 50% or less of the children in grades 3 through 6 meet state standards on state assessments. According to the Rodel Foundation assessment of public education in 2015, the area of greatest concern is the 36-point achievement gap among students with special needs, students with low income, and English Language Learners. Scores from African American and Hispanic students also demonstrate significant gaps from their white counterparts. It is clear that the traditional public schools are not working well for many children in Sussex County. The Montessori approach, which was scientifically developed to meet the natural development of all children as learners, offers a proven alternative to the traditional public model for children in Sussex County.

c. Identify how many families have indicated their intent to enroll in your school.

Sussex Montessori School has run a community campaign for approximately 3 months. We have over 314 surveys from community members interested in the school reflecting about 305 children for whom parents would be interested in the school as a choice for enrollment. We continue to receive interest surveys daily.

3. Community Engagement

a. Describe how the applicant has assessed demand and solicited support for the school.

Sussex Montessori School has had extensive communication with parents, business leaders and civic officials during over the past four years. Much of this has been one on one meetings with community leaders, groups, and business leaders. In July, 2017 Sussex County resident Jim Purcell was engaged to support our community engagement efforts. In addition, Montessori Works launched a social medial campaign in the late summer of 2018 which has greatly enhanced the community awareness and support for the school. Montessori Works has had several articles both print and online in the Sussex County newspapers and the News Journal.

Presentations and Meetings:

- Meetings with business leaders to discuss the school, educate the leaders on its benefits and ask for financial and facilities support for the school;
- Presentations at local community groups such as the County Chamber of Commerce, Rotary Clubs, Lions Clubs, First State Community Action Council, Sussex Early Childhood Council, Leadership Delaware, etc.
- Marketed the school to all day cares and kindergartens in the Georgetown-Laurel- Seaford- Bridgeville corridor;
- Meetings with Sussex County civic leaders, including state legislators and county administrators;
- Meetings with school district leaders.

An extensive list of the Sussex County community residents and leaders that we have engaged with is provided in Section 1.7. It has been clear to the Sussex Montessori School Board that there is a desire for educational choices in Sussex County and in particular an interest in Montessori education.

- b. Describe any relationships the applicant currently has or plans to build to engage students, parents, and the community in support of the school.

We have been supported financially by the Longwood Foundation, the Welfare Foundation and Discover Bank. Community partners include but are not limited to First State Community Action, the Summer Collaborative, La Esperanza, and the Delaware Community Foundation. We are currently engaging Horizon Philanthropic to lead a fund raising and communication campaign in Sussex County. Horizon Philanthropic has a long history of successful fund raising for non-profits in Sussex County. Leadership Delaware has recently reached out to its Sussex County leaders who we will meet with in the coming months. We hope that this will be a source of potential Sussex County founding and future operating board members for the school. We continue to hold community outreach events, present at local Rotary clubs, engage in community dinners at First State Community Action, and host business leaders for an information session. In addition to expressing an interest in enrolling children in the school, our interest surveys have identified over 26 people who are interested in volunteering for the school and another 17 who are interested in teaching at the school. We will build on this strong foundation of community interest in the months ahead with a continued social media presence, personal conversations, committee work, and appearances at community events.

4. Educational Plan

- a. **Briefly describe the most important characteristics of the educational program, including any specific educational philosophy, instructional methods, educational model, or other important features of the proposed school.**

The Montessori Method is successfully used around the world and designed to educate the whole child, utilizing personalized learning, peer relationships and real-life skills to develop innovative thinkers and global citizens. The Montessori Method provides a unique choice for students: a holistic, personalized approach to learning for a diverse student population. As a result of their participation in a Montessori education, students are confident, intrinsically motivated, persistent, adaptable, collaborative, responsible, creative, and academically well-prepared. They emerge more-than-ready for whatever is next in their lives: college, the workforce, or community service.

Sussex Montessori School will use the Responsive Classroom Approach to develop a consistent and coherent positive school environment across the school community. This research based approach has been shown to positively impact student achievement, improve teacher-student interactions, and increase the amount of time children are engaged in the classroom. The Responsive Classroom approach provides a framework for the social climate of the Montessori classroom and school.

b. Briefly describe the learning environment and culture.

The learning environment in a Montessori School is uniquely suited to support children’s learning due to the cohesiveness created by the commitment to Montessori principles across the school community. Montessori Teachers are all specially trained in the philosophy and use of Montessori materials in the classroom.

The culture in Montessori classrooms is one of mutual respect between adults and students. The result is a classroom and school environment in which students are free to learn on a personalized level, working at their own pace in content that engages them. Montessori classrooms are “responsive classrooms” where prepared teachers allow students to engage, explore, test their assumptions and learn from their peers.

A Montessori classroom is staffed by two adults, at least one of whom is trained as a Montessori teacher. Students work with materials individually, or more often in pairs or small groups that provide opportunities for student-to-student discussions. Students have an increasing level of choice in scheduling which lessons to engage in at what times—although they are expected to complete specific lessons, they may choose to work on this lesson in the morning, that lesson in the afternoon, or as they get older, this lesson one day and that lesson the next. The opportunities to choose activities and discuss with peers foster skills for independent learning and time management.

A distinctive feature of a Montessori school is the celebration of cultural and global awareness. The immediate and extended families of Montessori students are an integral part of the school culture. Their expertise about their personal culture and unique experiences provide breadth and depth to the curriculum resulting in the development of empathy and multicultural appreciation.

c. Briefly describe the plan to improve student learning for *all* students, including exceptional children, English language learners, gifted learners, migrant and homeless children, and any other special student populations.

Because the Montessori Method is often viewed by parents as an alternative to the traditional classroom (whether their child be gifted, have some exceptionalities, or are English Language Learners), we anticipate a diverse population of students. The Montessori method accommodates the varied needs of learners by providing a personalized learning approach allowing students to explore and achieve at their own pace and opportunities for students to test their learning through practical application. Students interact with peers in multi-age classrooms to gain different perspectives on problem solving and relationships. This approach is particularly effective for students who a) are learning-challenged and need additional time, resources and attention to problem-solving, and/or b) may benefit from opportunities to work with peers and teachers in a personal way. In this fluid environment, students who are gifted have opportunities to explore subjects more deeply, investigate areas of interest, and challenge themselves to constantly achieve their personal best. Students who require more time with

materials or adaptations because of an identified learning need are easily accommodated. Teachers are trained to encourage an open and exploratory classroom yet to intervene and restructure the classroom environment to support each child as an individual.

d. Briefly describe how the school will use assessment to improve student learning.

SMS will hold to the Montessori philosophy of embedded, ongoing assessment in the classroom. Each student is frequently and regularly observed while working with the Montessori materials. Through observation and careful tracking of the student's work, the teacher can assess which skills a child has mastered and determine their readiness to advance in the curriculum. A student who cannot demonstrate mastery with the materials receives additional lessons or alternate approaches until mastery is achieved. In addition, teachers utilize a variety of classroom-based and summative assessment tools to confirm their observations and inform instructional decision making.

5. Leadership and Governance

a. Briefly outline the role of the Board in regards to school governance, academic oversight and fiscal oversight.

The board hires a school leader to manage the day to day work of the school according to the school's mission and philosophy. Management of the school, including oversight of the budget, finances, human resource management, and student and teacher behavior will reside with the school leader who will ultimately report to the Sussex Montessori School Board. The board will establish a monthly meeting process whereby the school leader reports on the academic performance of students and the adherence of the school to the Montessori philosophy. The board will establish a Citizen Budget Oversight Committee and a standing board Finance Committee to monitor the financial viability of the school and to prevent any misuse of funds. The board will also be responsible for its own development in non-profit governance establishing a governance committee that will ensure that new board members are continually provided training and development for their role.

b. Highlight the strengths of the School Leadership team and the proposed Board.

The Sussex Montessori School Founding Board includes leaders who bring diverse skills including district and charter school leadership, Montessori expertise, connections to higher education including teacher preparation and curriculum development, financial, legal, non-profit and human resource management.

The Sussex Montessori School Founding Board has additional expertise in Montessori charter development, public school policy and curriculum from their Advisory Board. Additionally, board members have developed strong relationships with the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector (NCMPS), The Trust for Learning, Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education, and regional Montessori schools both public and private. The Board has also maintained strong connections with local foundations and corporations: The Longwood

Foundation, Welfare Foundation and Discover Bank join Montessori Works, Inc. in their commitment to the development of a Montessori school in Sussex County and have provided the necessary funding to begin this process.

The depth of expertise and the established relationships of the Sussex Montessori School Founding Board will support the initial stages of SMS, including the identification of an operational board and school leader who will ultimately assume leadership of the school. It is expected that the Operational Board will be comprised of business leaders, educators, parents, legal and government officials who have a keen interest in Montessori as an elementary education option.

c. **Explain how the governance and management structures will provide for stable, effective governance and leadership throughout the five-year charter term and thus fulfill the school's mission and vision.**

The Sussex Montessori School Founding Board has taken on the responsibility of preparing and submitting the charter application, and in 2018, will take on the three following primary responsibilities:

- Identifying and hiring a school leader
- Identifying and securing a school site
- Identifying and recruiting Sussex Montessori School Operational Board members who will assist as the board transforms from a founding board to the board of an operating charter school

To continue this commitment, the Sussex Montessori School Board Founding Board will identify individuals to serve on the Sussex Montessori School Operational Board in 2019 and beyond who are similarly dedicated to increasing access to Montessori education for children in Delaware. It is expected that the Sussex County residents currently on the Founding Board will continue as Operating Board members providing continuity and history to the governance process.

d. Identify the critical qualifications, credentials and attributes you have identified for your School Leader.

The preferred candidate for the School Leader will need to have an understanding of the unique intersection of Montessori education in the context of public education. We will seek a leader who has Montessori certification either as a teacher or an administrator. In addition, he or she must also have a demonstrated ability for working with a board to develop strategic plans, monitor the financial needs of the school, and comply with the State of Delaware's policies and legislation as related to charter schools. In the event that a school leader with both of these strengths cannot be found, preference will be given to a school leader who has a strong understanding of running a public school and an appreciation for the Montessori philosophy.

6. Business Plan

Provide a brief overview of the business plan that includes facilities, financial management, transportation, prospective partners, and access to financial resources.

Facilities: Montessori Works has begun the process of facility identification for Sussex Montessori school engaging Mark Chura of Chura & Associates to assist with the identification of a site, securing financing, and project management for construction or repurposing of a site. Montessori Works has identified three potential sites which are described in the application.

Financial Management: Section 1.10 and Attachment 16 depicts the financial needs for Sussex Montessori. We anticipate 260 students to be enrolled in Year 1 while growing to 455 students by Year 4. Except for federally funded programs, the school budgeted only state and local allocations for its operating budget in Years 1-5. The school will meet its 2% contingency requirement. Additional private funds will be sought; however, they will fund supplemental programming and facility choices, and not supplant state and local appropriations for the purposes of operations. We have also provided a budget scenario for 80% of enrollment (208 students). The school will use private contractual services for its accounting, legal and audit services, and for its start-up operations.

Transportation: Due to the rural nature of Sussex County, we anticipate that 90 percent of students will require longer distances to get to school. The average commute time in Sussex County is 25.2 minutes. We anticipate utilizing local private bus transportation, or potentially purchasing our own vehicles and providing transportation to our students.

Prospective Partners: Montessori Works, Inc. will continue to partner with Sussex Montessori School to support the start-up of the school, to enhance community engagement, to build a teacher pipeline, and to provide guidance and support in the implementation of the Montessori approach. Sussex Montessori School will also partner with First State Montessori Academy as an successful example of a Montessori charter school in Delaware and with national partners such as the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector.

Financial Resources - Throughout the process leading to the development of this charter application, Montessori Works has received funding from the Longwood Foundation, the Welfare Foundation, and Discover Bank to initiate the charter application and engage the community in conversation about the school. Sussex Montessori School will build on these and other relationships for the benefit of the school. Currently, upon approval of the application, Sussex Montessori School will receive \$350,000 from the Longwood Foundation and is encouraged to apply for another \$500,000 in the March funding cycle. These funds will secure a school leader and provide funding for the facility. In addition, the Welfare Foundation has provided a letter of support. Separately from this funding, Montessori Works has received funding from the Longwood Foundation to continue to support the start-up of the school during the application review process. Montessori works will engage Horizon Philanthropic in a

fund-raising campaign in Sussex County. It is expected that as the charter is approved; this local campaign will provide additional support for the facility and classroom materials.