

In The Matter Of:
*Department of Education
Of The State Of Delaware*

*In Re: First State Montessori Academy
February 1, 2016*

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BEFORE THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OF THE STATE OF DELAWARE

IN RE:)
First State Montessori Academy)

Carvel State Office Building
820 North French Street
Wilmington, Delaware

Monday, February 1, 2016

5:36 p.m.

BEFORE: JENNIFER NAGOURNEY,
HEARING OFFICER

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1 APPEARANCES:

2 CATHERINE T. HICKEY, ESQ.
3 DEPUTY ATTORNEY GENERAL
4 DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
5 102 West Water Street
6 Dover, Delaware 19904
7 on behalf of the Hearing Officer

8 - - - - -

9 THE HEARING OFFICER: Good

10 evening. I declare this public hearing to be
11 open. My name is Jennifer Nagourney. I am the
12 Executive Director of Charter School Office of
13 the Delaware Department of Education and I have
14 been appointed by the Secretary of Education to
15 conduct this public hearing. The charter of
16 First State Montessori Academy has applied for
17 major modification to its charter. As required
18 by law, the matter was referred to the Charter
19 School Accountability Committee.

20 This joint public hearing is
21 being held by the Department of Education and
22 the State Board of Education to assist in the
23 decision of whether the criteria set forth for
24 approval in the Delaware Code has been
satisfied. This hearing provides the school an
opportunity to give and receive public comment.



1 I will now ask my colleague to
2 introduce herself.

3 MS. HICKEY: Good evening. My
4 name is Catherine Hickey. I'm the Deputy
5 Attorney General with the Delaware Department
6 of Justice, and I am here serving as counsel to
7 the Hearing Officer this evening.

8 THE HEARING OFFICER: I would
9 like the record to reflect that the notice of
10 the time, date and place of today's public
11 hearing was published in the News Journal and
12 the Delaware State News. In addition, notice
13 was posted at the Charter School Accountability
14 Committee's official place of business, on the
15 Department of Education's official website, and
16 on the State Public Meeting Calendar on the
17 State's official website. Further, the school
18 was personally notified of the time, date and
19 place of today's public hearing.

20 A court reporter is present so
21 that a record of this hearing can be made. It
22 will be necessary for each speaker to clearly
23 identify himself or herself before beginning to
24 speak so that the court reporter will be able



1 to note who you are. The record of this
2 hearing will be provided to the Secretary of
3 Education and members of the State Board of
4 Education, together with any written or
5 electronic comments received at or before this
6 hearing.

7 We will proceed in the following
8 manner. First, we will hear from any
9 representatives of the charter who wish to
10 comment. We will take comments from anyone
11 else who desires to speak. I have the sign-in
12 sheet. If there is someone who wishes to speak
13 who has not signed in, come forward to speak,
14 and speak to me after the hearing and we will
15 insure you are signed in.

16 I would now like to see a show of
17 hands of all those who desire to make comments
18 so I can determine whether it will be necessary
19 to impose a time limit. Okay.

20 This is a lot more people raised
21 their hands than are signed in, so I will work
22 through that.

23 I ask everyone to please stick
24 within the three-minute time limit. If you



1 have comments you are not able to make, you
2 will have the opportunity to submit them
3 through other parts of the process or you can
4 also submit a written record of your comments
5 and they will be incorporated into the record
6 as though you said out loud. So we will make
7 sure everyone's feedback, everyone's comment is
8 fully incorporated.

9 I intend to be as liberal as time
10 and reason allow in accepting comments.

11 However, I do reserve the right to limit
12 comment if it is purely repetitive or
13 cumulative. At this point, we will accept
14 comments from representatives of the school.

15 MS. FOX: My name is Courtney
16 Fox. I am the head of school at First State
17 Montessori Academy, and for me this work
18 started about eight years ago. At that time I
19 was Delaware Teacher of the Year, and I spent
20 time traveling around the state and the country
21 visiting classrooms, and one of the things that
22 stood out to me as I traveled around was that
23 there were so many children who were in
24 classrooms who needed something different.



1 When I rewind to the writing of
2 our original charter, that's what our goal was,
3 to provide something for children who needed
4 something different, and to make a Montessori
5 education accessible to children in Delaware.

6 Fast forward to today, and that's
7 just what we are doing. We have made
8 Montessori accessible to children all over
9 Delaware, from Odessa to Bear, to Claymont, to
10 Hockessin, to Wilmington. We have children
11 from diverse family backgrounds, including
12 adoption and foster care. We have children
13 from diverse backgrounds, and we have children
14 who just needed something different.

15 In our school, a little bit about
16 us specifically, we have 14 percent of our
17 children receive special education services, 26
18 percent of our children come from Wilmington's
19 zip codes which is up from 21 percent last
20 year, 19.4 percent of our children qualify for
21 free or reduced lunch, and our children come
22 from a variety of different countries, speak
23 different languages.

24 And not only are we diverse, but



1 what brought our children to FSMA is also very
2 different. We have some children who came
3 because they were seeking a public Montessori
4 education, but we also have children who came
5 to First State Montessori because they were in
6 traditional school settings and they were told
7 that they needed alternative schools or a
8 different placement and they were looking for
9 something different, almost desperate for help.

10 Regardless of why our children
11 have landed here, they are ours now, and we are
12 hoping with this modification to be able to
13 grow them until they are in 8th grade.

14 With this modification, we also
15 seek to expand the number of children at FSMA
16 so that we can expand our impact even more.

17 In the beginning of my comments I
18 used the words rewind and fast forward. And
19 now I'm going to ask you to pause for a second.
20 I'm going to ask you to pause and think about
21 an ideal school or an ideal classroom. Picture
22 it in your head. It is a place where children
23 are happy, staff are happy, and there is
24 learning happening. People are engaged.



1 Behaviors are positive. It is a place that's
2 operating with financial discipline. It is a
3 place where the operations are smooth. Can you
4 picture it in your head?

5 Yeah, my teachers are nodding.
6 Does that help?

7 Now, let me tell you, it exists.
8 It exists right up the street. No, it is not
9 perfect, but it is a place where if you ask
10 anyone who has visited they will tell you
11 amazing things are happening.

12 With your support and with the
13 support of the State Board of Education and the
14 recommendation of the CSAC, we can bring the
15 amazing things that are happening up the street
16 to even more children.

17 We look forward to working with
18 the Department of Education to make this
19 happen. And thank you to your families and
20 staff that came out tonight in support of this
21 modification. Thank you.

22 MS. MADDEN: Hi. My name is Liz
23 Madden. I'm the education director at First
24 State Montessori Academy. Thank you for the



1 opportunity to speak to you this evening.

2 I'm very excited and proud of
3 what we have created at FSMA. As you are
4 aware, FSMA currently serves children through
5 6th grade. Part of our modification request
6 includes expanding vertically to serve students
7 through 8th grade. Adding these two additional
8 grade levels creates an important opportunity
9 for students.

10 First, research shows that
11 students who attend a Montessori school have
12 stronger outcomes in reading, math and science
13 the longer that they attend a Montessori
14 program.

15 We want to give them these two
16 additional years to continue to build off of
17 the foundation that they have already created.

18 In addition to stronger outcomes,
19 continuing through 8th grade will allow
20 students to continue their academic journey
21 without the additional middle school
22 transition.

23 This is typically a tumultuous
24 time for children. By reducing the amount of



1 transitions, our students will develop their
2 skills in a familiar environment, using a
3 similar learning format, with familiar peers,
4 which in turn allows students a greater focus
5 on their academic learning.

6 Aside from academic gains, middle
7 school students in Montessori programs are
8 found to have significantly higher motivation
9 and social skills than their
10 traditionally-taught peers, because students
11 are taught using a personalized learning
12 format. Employing their own innate sense of
13 curiosity, they develop the skills of
14 perseverance, curiosity and collaboration,
15 which we as educators know is key for all
16 learners.

17 We have created a place where
18 children want to come to school. They are
19 happy, excited, relaxed and social, all while
20 being engaged in high levels of academic work.

21 I ask that you consider our
22 modification request to extend our current work
23 through the middle school years so that we may
24 continue to impact students to see the full



1 benefits of the Montessori method. After their
2 journey with us, students will be poised and
3 ready to begin high school as active, engaged
4 learners. Thank you.

5 MS. CARROLL: I am Erin Carroll,
6 a founding and current member of First State
7 Montessori Academy, FSMA.

8 The mission of FSMA is to create
9 successful, contributing, life-long learners in
10 a Montessori public educational program for
11 students in kindergarten through 6th grade. We
12 hope for our mission to include students
13 through 8th grade.

14 An important early task with
15 opening a school is marketing and recruitment
16 of students and families. We were ready for
17 the task as we believed in FSMA completely.
18 Our grassroots efforts would be easy as I saw
19 it, meet and talk with people about our
20 excitement for and knowledge about the benefits
21 of making a Montessori school a public option
22 and --

23 MS. HICKEY: Ms. Carroll, would
24 you slow down just a little bit so the court



1 reporter can catch up with you. Thank you.

2 MS. CARROLL: Oh, sure. I've
3 heard that before.

4 -- and the essence of who we are
5 would be its own attraction, and it worked.

6 We were overwhelmed with the huge
7 reception by the community as we opened our
8 school. Due to such a significant response, we
9 had to operate a lottery for our first year and
10 the wait list that followed was not taken
11 lightly by any of us.

12 Our second and current year found
13 us in a similar situation, but with even more
14 applicants. Participation in our lottery
15 process the last two years has been bittersweet
16 because while realizing our dream of FSMA,
17 there were more applicants than spaces. Quite
18 a predicament to have.

19 During our strategy planning
20 within a very successful first year, the
21 consensus from the board of directors was to
22 explore data that was presented to us by the
23 head of school, particularly as it related to
24 the attrition of our students in the 5th grade.



1 We had heard anecdotally from
2 families about their desire for our school to
3 expand through 8th grade, a sentiment even
4 expressed during our initial recruitment
5 process. We began as we did because we wanted
6 to assure optimal functioning of our school,
7 which we have achieved; however, we had hoped
8 that we would expand eventually, and our
9 eventually is now. Children ask for it,
10 families ask for it, and most importantly, we
11 would like to avoid children having to make an
12 unnecessary transition from our school in 5th
13 grade or into an existing middle school in 7th
14 grade.

15 We decided to disseminate a
16 survey to our families inquiring about their
17 satisfaction of various aspects of our school,
18 including their interest in remaining with FSMA
19 as their children approach 6th grade. The data
20 were strong and presented us with evidence of a
21 need, expansion.

22 A potential expansion of our
23 school will not satisfy all of the needs of our
24 community, including a space for every child.



1 However, an expansion will allow us to better
2 meet the needs of those children we do educate.
3 We have a strong family involvement, within and
4 beyond our highly functioning and visible PTO,
5 we have passionate and effective educators,
6 joyful children who love to learn, supportive
7 community members, an engaged board of
8 directors, and extremely competent and
9 committed school leaders dedicated to a school
10 predicated on Montessori principles and driven
11 by a commitment to quality education.

12 Charter schools are about more
13 than providing options. It's about options
14 that meet the needs of children, families and
15 the community which clearly has been confirmed
16 for FSMA by the excitement of the children and
17 families and acceptance by the community.

18 We don't perceive our
19 modification request as being self-serving or
20 ambitious; rather, a privilege, opportunity and
21 responsibility to better serve the educational
22 needs of our children.

23 MS. CARTER: My name is Beth
24 Carter. I am a founding board member at First



1 State Montessori. My personal story is about
2 being the best mother I can be. As a result, I
3 began researching schools for my daughter when
4 she was a toddler.

5 In pre-school, my daughter used
6 to come home from school crying because she no
7 longer wanted her skin. I was heartbroken.

8 She no longer makes those
9 statements, in part because of the diversity of
10 the population at First State Montessori and
11 the Montessori community.

12 So with that said, it means so
13 much to me to know that I am doing the best I
14 can do as a parent for my daughter.

15 MR. SNOWBERGER: My name is Rob
16 Snowberger, S-N-O-W-B-E-R-G-E-R. Hello, and
17 thank you for allowing me to speak on behalf of
18 the Buccini/Pollin Group in support of First
19 State Montessori's major modification
20 application.

21 We are in full support of this
22 modification and would like to comment on First
23 State in three categories. First being as our
24 tenant, second being as our neighbor, and third



1 as a partner in developing and growing
2 Wilmington, both through economics and through
3 education.

4 First, as a tenant since
5 September of 2014, they have been an exemplary
6 tenant in terms of payments on time and good
7 communication, but also they keep their
8 facilities beautiful and perfectly maintained.
9 For us this is a strong sign of a tenant worthy
10 of a high credit rating and just a good, a good
11 partner.

12 Second, as a neighbor, their
13 students frequent the library, they frequent
14 the Grand Opera House, they are active in the
15 community, and we would like to see more of
16 that, as well as hands-on projects themselves
17 taken on as service projects, such as planting
18 bulbs in Rodney Square and continuing to
19 utilize that space for its students.

20 We think that's absolutely
21 exceptional for the community here downtown, as
22 well as their parents go out to restaurants and
23 whatnot. So it is a full, a full spectrum
24 activation of the downtown area.



1 And then, lastly, as a partner
2 for growth, more than half of their students
3 are from outside the city limits. So while
4 they are doing the important work of educating
5 students with Wilmington zip codes, they are
6 also bringing in students and parents from
7 outside, which we think helps to grow our
8 downtown community, which most of us, I would
9 say all of us would like to see happen.

10 And then, lastly, as they also
11 attract teachers and they attract talent to the
12 downtown area as well.

13 Lastly, for me personally, I also
14 was educated at a Montessori elementary school,
15 and I think the work they did is important
16 because above all what I learned at a
17 Montessori school was to love learning itself,
18 and that's continued through my life to this
19 day. Thank you very much.

20 THE HEARING OFFICER: Sir, would
21 you mind sharing your remarks with the court
22 reporter?

23 MR. SNOWBERGER: This was a
24 letter we already submitted.



1 THE HEARING OFFICER: All right,
2 in the record then.

3 Who would like to speak next?

4 MS. CHASTAIN: Good evening. My
5 name is Kristen Chastain, and I am a
6 kindergarten and 1st grade teacher, as well as
7 a teacher representative on the board of
8 directors of First State Montessori Academy.

9 I fully support the proposed
10 expansion plan for our school. I believe that
11 our school offers a unique opportunity to the
12 community which should be accessible to more
13 children.

14 I have personally taught in a
15 traditional classroom in another state, and
16 during that time I felt frustrated as a teacher
17 and I saw children who were frustrated every
18 single day. I love the Montessori environment
19 because it allows teachers and students to feel
20 successful.

21 The classroom is set up in a way
22 that it brings individualized instruction to
23 each and every child, which is so important in
24 the way that each child changes as they grow.



1 As a board member I'm familiar
2 with the way our school operates, and I know
3 that we operate in a way that is ready for this
4 expansion. Our school functions extremely well
5 for a second-year school. And we have a strong
6 administration, staff and parent community that
7 is ready for this transition. They have asked
8 for it. The parents have asked for it since
9 the very beginning. They have wanted to know
10 when this was going to be accessible for their
11 children because the heartbreak of tearing
12 their children away from their peers, 6th grade
13 or having their children come into a school at
14 7th grade is a frightening thought for most of
15 them.

16 I personally am excited also for
17 the opportunity of reaching more children
18 across all grade levels. I think that the
19 Montessori education is a strong way to teach
20 children.

21 As a board member, a staff member
22 and, most importantly, an educator, I confirm
23 that our school is ready to expand.

24 MS. PYLE: Hello. My name is



1 Jill Pyle, and I am a 2nd and 3rd grade teacher
2 at FSMA. I have been a Montessori teacher for
3 15 years. I believe strongly in the Montessori
4 method of teaching and learning. Every child
5 is treated as an individual and encouraged to
6 take an active role in their own learning.
7 They discover their personal learning style,
8 their affinities, their strengths, and their
9 challenges.

10 Together with their classmates,
11 parents and teachers, they strive for complete
12 understanding of themselves and the academic
13 concepts. They also learn how they can help to
14 encourage a peaceful, cooperative global and
15 local society.

16 While I strongly believe --
17 sorry. While I strongly value a Montessori
18 education, this type of public school was not
19 available until now, or two years ago, one and
20 a half years ago. To be able to offer this to
21 children that used to not have this option is
22 truly heartwarming to me.

23 I love the vast diversity in my
24 classroom. I have seen amazing growth in the



1 children, academically, socially, and
2 emotionally. The children learn to be
3 confident, independent, and fall in love with
4 learning and challenging themselves.

5 By extending our reach to 7th and
6 8th grades, we will give children an even
7 longer time to enjoy and develop with all the
8 advantages that a Montessori education can
9 bring. By also expanding the number of
10 classes, we will be able to reach even more
11 children.

12 I am also the teacher
13 representative of our CBOC, Citizens Budget
14 Oversight Committee. I am so impressed with
15 the careful fiscal responsibility of this
16 school. I feel totally confident that we will
17 be able to manage the growth from a financial
18 standpoint.

19 I am proud and honored to work at
20 First State Montessori Academy. The
21 camaraderie of the staff, the support of the
22 families, and the energy from the children make
23 it a very special place. Please consider the
24 modification in our charter. The more children



1 of Delaware that can take advantage of this
2 Montessori school option, the better. Thank
3 you.

4 MR. LAMBORN: Hi. My name is
5 Corey Lamborn. I was a founding member of
6 FSMA, founding board member, I'm sorry, and I'm
7 currently a parent of two girls there.

8 And I wanted to talk about, a
9 little bit about how much we love being a part
10 of the downtown Wilmington community. It has
11 just been so wonderful for the school, for the
12 kids, but starting out, leading up to the
13 enrollment period both years, I spent a lot of
14 time walking up and down the streets, and going
15 to the neighborhood pre-schools and day cares
16 and talking with the staff there, and any
17 family members I could get ahold of, to tell
18 them what we were doing and get them excited
19 about Montessori, because not very many kids,
20 not very many families were aware of it.

21 So I was really thrilled that we
22 got such a great turnout with the kids from the
23 city.

24 I guess just as far as being a



1 parent, it has been such an amazing experience
2 for my kids, and I feel like only good things
3 could happen by being able to provide that same
4 experience to as many kids as possible. That's
5 it. Thank you.

6 MR. SIMS: Good evening. DaWayne
7 D-A-W-A-Y-N-E, last name is Sims, S-I-M-S.
8 Good evening everyone, and obviously good
9 evening to Executive Director Nagourney and to
10 obviously our Deputy Attorney General Hickey as
11 well. Thank you for convening this open
12 session.

13 I'll speak up. I want to talk to
14 you very quickly. First I'll introduce myself.
15 As I mentioned, my name is DaWayne Sims. I am
16 a banker for CitiGroup in New Castle, Delaware.
17 I'm a resident of Newark. And I'm also a
18 parent of a 3rd grade, eight-year-old who
19 absolutely adores FSMA, and I must say I join
20 her in that sentiment.

21 So very quickly, just to give you
22 some background, I'm also the secretary for the
23 Citizens Budget Oversight Committee which was
24 referenced just a moment ago by our teacher



1 representative, Jill Pyle. I also serve on the
2 finance committee with, our chair is here as
3 well. Last, but not least, as I mentioned, my
4 very, very happy third grader, a parent of a
5 third grader.

6 So some thoughts very quickly,
7 and I want to touch on really quickly three
8 pillars that are particularly important when we
9 think about First State Montessori Academy.

10 One, from a financial
11 perspective, which I can't help but think
12 about, that's what I do every day. In my work
13 with the finance committee and the Citizens
14 Budget Oversight Committee, since the onslaught
15 -- onset, excuse me, in summer of 2014, working
16 very closely with the head of school and the
17 committee members, you know, there has been a
18 very specific and purposeful financial plan.
19 And I'm always looking for that. Right.
20 That's paramount for me because, as we have all
21 heard of all the other stories, etcetera, but
22 just in the course of my normal day to day,
23 that's particularly important as we begin in
24 the onset. Right. You want to start with a



1 very strong financial plan and fiduciary
2 responsibility not only to, obviously, the
3 school as an organization, but to the parents
4 who are taking a risk, like myself, taking
5 their children from an established, my youngest
6 was in a parochial school, and we needed
7 something different, as Courtney mentioned, and
8 that was particularly important for us.

9 We were struggling as a family,
10 and she was struggling as a young lady,
11 recovering from a traumatic brain injury, and
12 it was recommended that we select, try to find
13 a Montessori education. And, obviously, it
14 fell in our lap as an opportunity as a public
15 option, and it saved our family, and it saved
16 my child's education. So I can say that
17 personally as a reference.

18 But also financially, it is very
19 important, I'm always looking for that, strong
20 stewardship, a sound organizational structure,
21 and a significant commitment from the
22 administrative and parental community.

23 And as witness, I know we have
24 submitted already some documents in our



1 application with respect to finances and,
2 etcetera, so I won't belabor that point. Those
3 are easily verifiable and readily available.
4 Right. And so out of respect for our allotted
5 time, it is very important I think that I
6 double down on how financially sound this
7 school is and prepared.

8 When you talk about new
9 organizations starting, most of them implode,
10 right, from the beginning, from the onset. And
11 so that's very, very important. They are ready
12 for growth. First State Montessori is
13 positioned very strongly financially.

14 I believe in the mission, and I
15 believe personally that they are headed in the
16 right direction, and many, many families like
17 myself can benefit from it.

18 Thank you for your time. I
19 appreciate it.

20 MS. O'FERRALL: Good evening. My
21 name is Jodi O'Ferrall, and I'm a parent of two
22 students at FSMA. I am also on the school's
23 CBOC committee and have been since its
24 inception.



1 The decision at hand in whether
2 or not to approve this modification comes down
3 to a few key points.

4 First off, is the program sound?
5 The application provides ample evidence of
6 overwhelming interest to sustain the growth,
7 and the data shows a diverse student population
8 that is learning.

9 Walk through the hallways. You
10 will see classrooms full of students who are
11 engaged and excited about their activities.
12 There is a sense of community and personal
13 accountability, regardless of ethnicity,
14 religion, income or any other demographic
15 factor.

16 Students with IEPs receive the
17 services they need and are included and
18 accepted at every step of the way. This is a
19 school that works.

20 Next, is it financially feasible?
21 The numbers speak for themselves. And this
22 does not happen by accident. It was not luck.
23 The school's financial standing is due to
24 strong financial oversight and prudent decision



1 making process from the very conception of the
2 school. From the board, to the administration
3 and staff, to the CBOC, every person who has a
4 part to play in the financial health of FSMA is
5 very serious about their stewardship of public
6 moneys.

7 Information is fully transparent.
8 Decisions are made carefully and responsibly.
9 This is a serious responsibility to the
10 taxpayers of the state, and the financials
11 provided clearly show that this expansion can
12 be fully supported for the good students of the
13 students, and, quite frankly, for the good of
14 students outside of FSMA.

15 One of the reasons that charter
16 legislation was approved in Delaware was with
17 an eye towards innovation that charters could
18 bring to more traditional schools. Within the
19 walls of FSMA are strategies and tools that can
20 be leveraged within any non-Montessori
21 classroom to help improve student engagement
22 and facilitate learning. FSMA is more than
23 willing to share these strategies with other
24 schools.



1 In closing, I will just say that
2 we all read enough in the media about schools
3 who aren't doing the right things. Tonight we
4 are talking about one that is doing the right
5 things.

6 Delaware is a choice state and I
7 urge the CSAC, the Secretary and the Delaware
8 Board of Education to support this modification
9 and make this choice available to more citizens
10 who are so clearly asking for it for the good
11 of students.

12 Been up here before. You have to
13 talk fast.

14 MS. MONTGOMERY: Good evening.
15 My name is April Montgomery, and I am an
16 employee of Innovative Schools. I provide
17 business support services for First State
18 Montessori and work there two days a week. But
19 let me just state for the record, I am speaking
20 on behalf of myself and not Innovative Schools.

21 I was born and raised in
22 Brooklyn, New York, and I can remember my first
23 day of junior high school, and that consisted
24 of me walking through metal detectors each



1 morning. Fortunately, my parents were able to
2 provide me with a different life, and a better
3 environment, and I just remember walking into
4 First State Montessori and just being
5 completely amazed at children sitting on the
6 floor in the hallways, with their books, or the
7 vocabulary parade that not only were for the
8 students and the teachers and the staff but
9 also for the community.

10 Just to stand there in the middle
11 of the street with children dancing and dressed
12 up with their vocabulary word, and looking at
13 the businesses across the street, or the church
14 next door, and seeing the smiling faces. This
15 is exactly what our environment needs.

16 I know that transitioning from
17 elementary school to middle school is hard. So
18 having an environment where there is so much
19 learning, there is so much love, there is so
20 much independence, it is exactly what this city
21 needs. So I am in favor of the expansion for
22 First State Montessori.

23 MS. METZ: Good evening. My name
24 is Bonnie Metz, M-E-T-Z. I am here tonight to



1 speak in support of First State Montessori
2 Academy's requested modifications.

3 I am here as a parent. I have
4 4th graders, twins in 4th grade. I am also
5 here as a resident of the city, both personally
6 and corporately. I am the vice president of
7 state government affairs for Verizon, and we
8 are located on Tatnall Street.

9 First State Montessori really has
10 created a unique learning environment for the
11 children. It is one that meets the individual
12 needs of each child and prepares them to be
13 lifelong learners, so that they can grow and
14 meet their full potential.

15 Beyond the impact to the
16 children, I also believe that the school has
17 had a positive impact in the city and that the
18 expansion will actually have a positive impact
19 in the city, at a time when it is greatly
20 needed.

21 From an economic development
22 standpoint, it brings new jobs. The employees
23 and the families and children patron the local
24 businesses and restaurants. It also, as has



1 been said, has had a positive impact in the
2 community. Students regularly frequent the
3 YMCA, the Grand, the Queen, the library, but
4 they also give back to the community, such as
5 donating coats, winter coats to the Sunday
6 Breakfast Mission, planting bulbs, as was
7 mentioned, donating to the Food Bank.

8 So I would urge approval of the
9 modification because I believe that the
10 expansion benefits our children by exposing
11 them to a truly unique learning environment,
12 but it also benefits the City of Wilmington and
13 the state as a whole in its revitalization
14 efforts. Thank you.

15 MS. NASS: Yvonne Nass. Good
16 evening. Thank you for this opportunity. I
17 wasn't going to speak, but now I feel I have
18 to, just to bring another element to this.

19 I am a founding board member, and
20 I am now co-chair of the board. And what I
21 want to bring to this, I have given a lot of
22 energy to get this school going because I have
23 seen my grandchildren benefit from Montessori
24 education.



1 My granddaughter is a graduate of
2 a Montessori school, and she is now working in
3 the work world, and has gone all through, and
4 as I talk to her about what were the gifts that
5 she got and that she will never forget, they
6 are the gifts of being able to work as a team
7 member, being able to accept everyone.

8 There is no competition in the
9 classroom. It is all about honoring people's
10 talents and what they do well. We know who to
11 go to for help in math, we know who to go to
12 for a drawing. So they honor each other.

13 They build strong relationships
14 and they stay connected. The ability to
15 problem solve. And what she said to me I
16 thought was interesting. She said, when she
17 was in college, she said I was able to make my
18 choices. I wasn't directed by my family to
19 become something. I was able to create what I
20 wanted to be. And I thought that was so
21 powerful.

22 So thinking about this
23 modification and bringing more students through
24 the 7th and 8th grade, preparing them for high



1 school, where they can go on and create their
2 world, become team members, and make their
3 choices, and contribute to the community as
4 they all now do, they will even do more so.
5 Thank you for the time. Thank you for the
6 consideration.

7 MS. ANGENY: I wasn't signed up
8 either, but I have been moved.

9 Good evening. My name is Angela
10 Angeny. I am honored to be a part of FSMA and
11 to be able to speak to you this evening.

12 Anybody who knows me knows how
13 much I love a quote, and one that speaks to me
14 in this whole process is, "Of all things, love
15 is the most potent," and that's a Maria
16 Montessori quote. And where you will find love
17 at FSMA is every day.

18 People make choices for their
19 children based on the love of their children.
20 The children make choices each day based on how
21 they love to learn, what their curiosities are,
22 how they are being respected in their
23 classroom, not only by their teachers but also
24 by their classmates.



1 We are so honored to live in a
2 building that is filled with vision, and the
3 vision doesn't just come from our
4 administrators. It comes from our children.
5 Each day they contribute ideas that make their
6 classrooms grow. Each day they come to me as
7 the head of the PTO when I see them and tell me
8 the things that they would love to be a part of
9 inside and outside of the classroom. Each day
10 they talk to their teachers about what their
11 curiosities are and how they can help expand
12 them. And they bring that home to us.

13 The love that I have grown for
14 this school comes out of the choice that I made
15 for my own daughter. And she was in a great
16 environment where she was, but now she is in a
17 place that is exceptional, and it is turning
18 her into an exceptional person beyond who she
19 was.

20 Beyond that, though it has made a
21 huge impact on our home, which I did not expect
22 as a side benefit to making a choice out of
23 love for my child. So please honor that love
24 and let 7th and 8th graders be able to enjoy it



1 for as long as they can, but also to have more
2 young learners come to us at FSMA to begin
3 their learning careers, where they are
4 respected, where they will learn how to make
5 choices, where they will learn how to
6 contribute to a world that loves them back.

7 Thank you for the time.

8 THE HEARING OFFICER: Is there
9 anyone else who wishes to speak?

10 If not, this hearing is now
11 closed. I thank you all for participating
12 today. Your comments will be available for the
13 Secretary and the State Board to consider.

14 MS. HICKEY: There were a couple
15 that came in after we took the signup sheets.
16 If you haven't signed up, please.

17 (Proceedings conclude at 6:16
18 p.m.)



1 State of Delaware)
2 New Castle County)

3
4
5 CERTIFICATE OF REPORTER

6
7 I, Eleanor J. Schwandt, Registered
8 Merit Reporter and Notary Public, do hereby
9 certify that the foregoing record, pages 1 to
10 36 inclusive, is a true and accurate transcript
11 of my stenographic notes taken on February 1,
12 2016, in the above-captioned matter.

13
14 IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto
15 set my hand and seal this 3rd day of February,
16 2016, at Wilmington.

17
18
19
20 

21 Eleanor J. Schwandt
22
23
24



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