

FIRST YEAR SITE VISIT: IS THE ORGANIZATION MEETING COMPLIANCE-RELATED STANDARDS?

The purpose of site visits is to serve as a tool to inform continuous improvement for the Charter School Commission and its authorized schools and to provide data points in determining a charter school's compliance with the Organizational Performance Framework. The following notes are based on observations, data and artifact collection, and interviews following the First Year Site Visit.

1. EDUCATION PROGRAM
Sub-indicators
1a. Is the school implementing the material terms of the education program as defined in the current charter contract?
Area of Review
Compliance with the material terms of the education program in all material respects, and the education program in operation reflects the materials as defined in the charter contract, or approved amendments.
The mission of the School is as follows: To prepare all students to reach their full potential for future success in high school, college, career, and life, using the rich resources of our community.
Evidence to Support
<p>Pullman Community Montessori (PCM) had a challenging first year but continues to persevere. The most obvious issue was an overworked and under resourced school leader. The school's model originally included the Head of School and a Montessori Coach. Together, these two positions would work to ensure that the school was operationally and academically sound. The mid-year departure of the Montessori Coach caused significant disruption to the school, and particularly to the teaching staff who shared their concerns, frustrations, and exhaustion during their interviews. Significant culture-building work is an area of opportunity if the school is going to attract, recruit, and retain a high-quality teaching staff – particularly given the school's rural location and size.</p> <p>As the Head of School worked to ensure that the school could operate and serve students daily, some of the adult culture-building pieces could not occur and were not prioritized. Unfortunately, this bred distrust, resentment, and burnout amongst staff. A decision was made not to rehire for the Montessori Coach role mid-year. Leadership believed that they were likely to have a better candidate pool during a more traditional school hiring timeline – especially given the location of the school and the specialized Montessori training it requires. Leaders were also concerned about the impact of bringing in a new coach mid-year would have on the school's culture. In the interim, the school was able to rely on several other entities for support. The Montessori Coach was a priority hire for the 2022-23 school year (this position has been filled at the time of this report) so there is hope that the original leadership structure of the school will be brought to fruition and that will lead to a better second year.</p> <p>Additionally, the building of systems will be essential for the long-term sustainability of the school. Clear systems and structures will help to increase communication and transparency with teachers and help to ensure that decision making is not seen as arbitrary or subjective.</p> <p>However, it is worth noting that while teachers may have had challenges with administration and each other, there was clear evidence of their support to students and families. Observers witnessed supportive interactions between students and teachers that were consistent with the Montessori model.</p> <p>Most of the parents that were interviewed reported a generally positive experience and plan to enroll their students the following year. They are also looking forward to next year when they can have larger community activities to not only build relationships amongst school stakeholder groups but also with the larger community. This should help in potentially attracting new teachers and families to the school.</p> <p>While PCM had a challenging first year, the hiring of a new Montessori Coach should alleviate some of the concerns of the site visit team.</p>

Area of Review
<p>Education Program Terms:</p> <p>Education Program Term #1: Developmentally appropriate age-grouped classrooms</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three-year blocking of ages by developmental appropriateness in accordance with international Montessori standards. • Classrooms feature a dual certificated teacher paired with a trained classroom assistant with paraprofessional certification. • Specialized services for special education students (SpEd), ELL, highly capable students (HiCap), and others will be provided in the general education classroom, with staffing support to meet the needs of all students. • Teachers employ an integrated, place-based, Montessori curriculum aligned with all state standards. <p>Observable Indicators</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Developmentally appropriate mixed-age classrooms: Classroom age groupings will adhere to the developmentally appropriate groupings detailed above with the aforementioned modification. 2. Transitions and Progression: Mixed-age classrooms feature smooth and logical transitions, both throughout the day and as students progress through age groupings. Throughout a school day devoid of bells, students focus on personalized work plans, progressing through material in an order that fits their needs and interests. Similarly, progression between age groupings is based, not on definite ages, but on readiness of the student displayed through competency-based assessment. 3. Integrated standards-aligned curriculum: Traditional core content curriculum is fully integrated in all age groupings. Students may be working on goals in multiple subject areas at the same time. Personalized work plans allow teachers and students to track progress on standards and ensure standards are met in a timely manner. <p>Education Program Term #2: Self-directed learning environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Morning and afternoon blocks of uninterrupted work time build focus and respects students' work. • Students build agency over their education by taking increasing ownership in the creation of personalized work plans (PWP) that incorporate their interests, setting SMART goals, reflecting on progress, and recalibrating. Unhealthy comparisons based on who is advanced or behind are diminished as each student has their own PWP, and they work collaboratively in a variety of different groups and settings to achieve their goals. • Learner-centered classrooms, where freedom is expanded with show of responsibility, builds intrinsic motivation. Flexible work groups, where students may work alone or in teacher-devised groups, provides another avenue for building agency, displaying responsibility, practicing collaboration skills, and participating in group problem solving. <p>Observable Indicators</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Uninterrupted work time: Students are provided 3 hours of uninterrupted work time in the morning and 2-3 hours in the afternoons. Teachers will provide individual and/or small-group lessons at this time and specialists may work one-on-one or with small groups of students with similar needs within the classroom to advance skills. Students, with input from the teacher, may choose to work individually or with each other. Classroom

assistants ensure students are building and honing strong collaboration skills with as little interference as possible, unless guidance is needed.

2. Student-driven, personalized work plans: Students are provided with teacher-guided opportunities to schedule, plan, prioritize and reflect on their own daily, weekly, and long-term learning tasks. All students will have goals they are working towards that are driven by their personal interests. They will have the flexibility of deciding (within limits) when, how often, and for how long they will work to reach their goals, helping students to develop an intimate understanding of how they learn. Personalized work plans are hosted on Transparent Classroom.

Education Program Term #3: Learning through action and community

- Ample opportunities for movement within an untraditional classroom environment and outdoor learning experiences increase engagement.
- Authentic, hands-on, engaging Montessori materials are featured in every K-upper elementary classroom. In the adolescent community program, physical materials give way to project-based learning through a place-based approach, which allows students to learn through authentic activities and build understanding in a local-to-global community context.
- Activities are grounded in a real-life context as frequently as possible, increasing student's ability to find relevance and make connections. Knowledge is further constructed through authentic experiences during project-based learning.
- Explicit and integrated social-emotional learning curriculum is featured across all grades. Employability skills are introduced in the adolescent program during project-based learning.

Observable Indicators

1. Hands-on, authentic materials and activities: Students physically engage with Montessori-aligned didactic materials. Materials, strategically featured and rotated in the classroom, are available to students based on displaying proficiency on sequential works. Project-based learning through a place-based approach allows students to learn through authentic activities and build understanding in a local-to-global community context. The physical space of the facility itself also presents a variety of authentic activities and experiences (community gardens, classroom organisms, etc.).

2. Building Community: Students engage in learning with and from each other daily through morning circle and work time. They frequently engage with the diverse resources of our local community—community members, businesses, libraries, the museums, university labs, parks, trails, and nature reserves—to complement and deepen classroom learning.

Evidence to Support

Observers were able to see evidence of all program terms during the site visit. Classroom visits were a particular highlight of this visit. Students, even those who were very young, could articulate what they were working on and what they were learning. Classrooms were quiet and calm and most students appeared to be engaged in their own learning.

Classrooms were filled with high quality materials. They were clean and organized and appeared developmentally appropriate. Interviews highlighted the ways in which the curriculum was aligned to state learning standards – which freed teachers from having to do this extra step in their planning.

PCM's teaching model of two adults in the classroom (a dual certificated teacher paired with a trained classroom assistant with paraprofessional certification) was observed. However, given some of the turnover within the school, the model was stretched very thin and teachers reported that their classroom assignments changed frequently in order to cover all classrooms daily. Given the Montessori model, teachers must have specific training in order to ensure they are implementing the educational program with fidelity. This makes finding substitute teachers challenging, if not, impossible. Given the realities of the COVID-19 pandemic, this placed a lot of pressure on the teachers and school as a whole as individuals dealt with their own health issues as well as community school closure, etc.

PCM is the only public Montessori option in Pullman. Since Montessori schools are often private and prohibitively expensive for some families, having this school as an option in the community is important. This sentiment was expressed by families and the board.

Overall, the academic programming appeared strong and was implemented with fidelity to the Montessori model and to what was proposed in the application.

1b. Is the school complying with applicable education requirements?

N/A for Site Visit

1c. Is the school protecting the rights of students with disabilities?

Area of Review

Equitable access and opportunity to enroll; identification, location, and evaluation of students who may be eligible for special education; provision of a Free and Appropriate Public Education in the least restrictive environment; provision of procedural safeguards to students with disabilities and their families; identification, location, and evaluation of students who may be eligible for 504 Plans; and provision of services and accommodations under Section 504.

Evidence to Support

Although staff described frustration with conflicts between the Montessori model and traditional Special Education provisions, particularly with contractors, there was evidence of integration and inclusion for all students. Special Education staff provide push-in support to all students to support their IEP goals. There is collaboration with general education staff to plan out lessons that students need to work on based on their needs, however, the majority of Specially Designed Instruction is performed by Special Education Staff.

Staff has a chart that shows which students need which services need to be provided at a particular time. There is a Special Education schedule and individual schedule for each student.

There were several challenges from this year that special education staff named, including solely acting as the Special Education Director, Nautilus Lead (for teacher evaluations), and PE teacher simultaneously. As these were intended to be filled by at least two full-time staff members, there was seemingly not enough time to manage the tasks required for each position. Further, having a Montessori coach was integral to the school model and support of staff in each of these roles, but was a vacancy for the second half of the school year. When asked if this workload/model is sustainable, they did not feel that it was, especially not long-term.

Special Education staff maintained appropriate records and service provisions from Commission observations.

1d. Is the school protecting the rights of English Language Learner (ELL) students?

Area of Review

The school has removed barriers to the enrollment and retention of ELL students. The school communicates with all English learners in a language they can understand. The school provides English language development services to English Language Learners (ELL)---national origin minority students with emerging English proficiency.

Evidence to Support

Teachers deliver ELL services themselves using a fully inclusive model. ELL Staff gives them tips and strategies to implement in their classrooms. ELL Staff meets with teachers to obtain anecdotal information about where students are and how they are progressing.

As for professional development opportunities, there was a training on WIDA during the summer. There was also a training one month prior to the site visit, which provided strategies and helped staff understand learning process for students, as well as big ideas for building students' vocabulary and background knowledge.

One challenge is that ELL lessons that have been taught to staff are not Montessori lessons, so staff are struggling to figure out what ELL support looks in the Montessori model.

Corrective Action

None

2. FINANCIAL MANGEMENT AND OVERSIGHT

Sub-indicators

2a. Is the school meeting financial reporting and compliance requirements?

N/A for Site Visit

2b. Is the school following Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP)?

N/A for Site Visit

3. GOVERNANCE AND REPORTING

Sub-indicators

3a. Is the school governing board complying with compliance requirements?

Area of Review

The board complies with and presents no concerns in the following areas: 1) Adherence to board policies and procedures, including those established in the by-laws, and revision of policies and procedures, as necessary 2) Holding of all meetings in accordance with Open Public Meeting Laws and adhering to the rules and regulations of the Public Records Act 3) Effective and transparent management of conflicts of interest and code of ethics.

3b. Is the governing board holding the school management team accountable?

Area of Review

Annual utilization of a performance-based evaluation to assess the board's own performance, as well as that of the school leader; collaboration with the school leader to establish clear objectives, priorities, and goals; the school governing board's willingness and skill in identifying issues with the school management team, taking corrective action, and implementing any corrective actions imposed

Evidence to Support

PCM has a committed board with a strong board chair. Most members are from the local community with at least one member who is not local but has strong charter experience. The board acknowledges that it was a hard year but had faith in the school leader and the school overall. They too believe it is important to have this school as an option for families in the community.

The board members interviewed felt as though they were holding the school leader accountable and that they could have frank conversations about the school's operations. This was evident in board meetings throughout the year. They did indicate that there was a bottleneck of information since everything has to go through the Head of School.

At the time of the interview they had not conducted the school leader evaluation, but would be conducting a 360 process using a Montessori-specific tool. They also intend to conduct stakeholder surveys so that they have broader feedback about the school in general.

Board members discussed various professional development that they are receiving with regards to diversity, equity, inclusion, and school finance – utilizing consultants.

The board has several vacancies so this is an area of opportunity for the school, but overall the board appears to understand their role, is committed to continuous improvement, and is holding the school leader accountable.

3c. Is the school complying with reporting requirements?

N/A for Site Visit

Corrective Action

None

4. STUDENTS, PARENTS AND EMPLOYEES

Sub-indicators

4a. Is the school protecting the rights of all students?

Area of Review

The school complies with and presents no concerns in the following areas: 1) designated at least one employee to coordinate and monitor the school's compliance with its responsibilities under Section 504, Title IX, ELL, McKinney-Vento, Foster Care and state nondiscrimination laws; 2) provides continuous notice regarding student civil rights; 3) has adopted discrimination complaint and appeal procedures and a sexual harassment policy and procedure that are consistent with the requirements in state law; 4) does not discriminate in the counseling, or guidance of students; 5) does not discriminate in the discipline of students 6) has an instructional materials policy and an accompanying procedure that includes a process to evaluate and eliminate bias pertaining to sex, race, creed, religion, color, national origin, veteran or military status, sexual orientation, gender expression, gender identity, disability, or the use of a trained dog or service animal in all textbooks and instructional materials; 7) has removed barriers to the enrollment and retention of all students.

Evidence to Support

Based on the materials submitted and the interviews conducted, observers did not have concerns in these areas. The school had appropriate signage and coordinators listed. The school has all required policies in place.

4b. Does the school's recurrent enrollment rate indicate equitable access to the school?

N/A for Site Visit

4c. Is the school meeting teacher and other staff credentialing requirements?

N/A for Site Visit

4d. Is the school respecting employee rights?

N/A for Site Visit

4e. Is the school completing required background checks?

N/A for Site Visit

Corrective Action

None

5. SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

Sub-indicators

5a. Is the school complying with facilities and transportation requirements?

Area of Review

The school complies with and presents no concerns in the following areas: 1) Health, Safety, Facility and Fire Code Requirements; 2) Facility Accessibility; 3) Compliance with legal obligations for providing student transportation.

5b. Is the school complying with health and safety requirements?

The school complies with and presents no concerns in the following areas: 1) Health and Safety Code Requirements; 2) Updated safety and emergency management plans.

Evidence to Support

The school is housed in a building with other community-based organizations. Observers witnessed adults escorting students to bathrooms, etc. to ensure they were not alone. One area that the school will need to improve upon in the 2022-23 school year is fire and safety drills. Given the co-location, this was a challenge this

year. The Commission will be working closely with the school to ensure this happens in accordance with state law.
5c. Is the school maintaining and handling information appropriately?
Area of Review
The school complies with and presents no concerns in the following areas: proper and secure maintenance of student, governance, and finance records and proper and secure maintenance of testing materials.
Evidence to Support
No concerns were identified with regards to the proper and secure maintenance of school records.
Corrective Action
None