



# SUSSEX MONTESSORI SCHOOL

## ANNUAL REPORT

**Report Date: January 15, 2025**

**Delaware Department of Education**

Charter School Office

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## I. OVERVIEW

### 1.1 SCHOOL PROFILE

<b>Sussex Montessori School</b> 24960 Dairy Lane   Seaford, DE 19973 <a href="https://www.sussexmontessoricharter.com/">https://www.sussexmontessoricharter.com/</a>			
<b>Year Opened</b>	2020	<b>District(s) of Residence</b>	Seaford School District
<b>2023-24 Enrollment</b>	439	<b>Approved Enrollment</b>	455
<b>Current Grade Span</b>	K-6	<b>Approved Grade Span</b>	K-6
<b>School Leader</b>	Lisa Coldiron	<b>School Leader Phone &amp; Email</b>	(302) 404-5367 Lisa.coldiron@sussexms.k12.de.us
<b>Board President</b>	Linda Zankowsky	<b>Board President Email</b>	Lindaz@montessorionworksde.org
<b>Mission Statement:</b> The mission of the Sussex Montessori School (SMS) is to nurture the development of empathetic, collaborative, persistent and innovative global citizens in accordance with the time-tested philosophy of Maria Montessori.			

### 1.2 STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Enter the number of students on your waiting list (if applicable).

	2023-2024
Total Enrollment	439
Students on Waiting List	
% Male	51.25%
% Female	48.75%
% African American	28.70%
% American Indian	0.23%
% Asian	1.14%
% Hispanic/Latino	11.85%
% White	49.66%
% Multiracial	8.43%
% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0.00%
% Special Education	10.71%
% English Learners	9.34%
% Low-Income	32.8%

### 1.3 APPROVED MINOR AND MAJOR MODIFICATIONS

Date	Modification Requested	Outcome
April 24, 2020	Facility Modification – stall modular units for classroom space due to the impact of COVID-19 on the construction timeline	TCO of June 15, 2020, was met as per the requirement of Delaware Code Title 14, Chapter 5, § 511 (I) that the school have a temporary certificate of occupancy (TCO) by June 15th.

### 1.4 SCHOOL ENROLLMENT

	Approved Enrollment	30-Sep Enrollment Count	% of Actual Enrollment
K		81	
1		67	
2		78	
3		67	
4		50	
5		59	
6		37	
<b>Total</b>	<b>455</b>	<b>439</b>	<b>96%</b>

#### 1. Explain successes or challenges of implementing the school’s recruitment plan.

School Comments:

#### **Successes and Challenges of Implementing Our Recruitment Plan**

As a fairly new Montessori charter school that opened in the midst of the pandemic, Sussex Montessori has faced both unique challenges and rewarding successes in implementing our recruitment plan.

#### **Successes:**

##### **1. Community Engagement and Awareness Efforts:**

Despite the challenges of launching during the pandemic, we prioritized establishing a strong community presence. We successfully hosted a series of virtual open houses, information nights, Parent Camps and community events that attracted local families

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and piqued their interest in Montessori education. The success of these efforts is reflected in the growth of early enrollment interest during the initial two years, particularly in younger age groups where the Montessori model is most familiar.

**2. Partnerships with Local Organizations:**

We have built valuable partnerships with local nonprofits and educational support networks. These partnerships have amplified our outreach efforts, helping us reach a more diverse population and increase awareness of our mission and programs. We've also worked to highlight the value of Montessori for underserved communities, aligning with our goal of equitable access to high-quality education.

**3. Montessori Pedagogical Training and Professional Development:**

Our commitment to teacher training and fidelity to the Montessori model has been a cornerstone of our recruitment plan. In the 2023-24 school year, staff completed comprehensive professional development to enhance evidence-based instruction and data-driven decision-making. This commitment to excellence has built a foundation of trust with our community and reassured families of our educational quality.

**Challenges:**

**1. Navigating Public Perceptions and Misunderstandings of Montessori Education:**

As a relatively new and unique educational model in our region, one of our most significant challenges is helping families understand the Montessori method and its long-term benefits. Many parents unfamiliar with this approach have hesitated to enroll, seeking more traditional models. To address this, we've incorporated more parent education sessions, Montessori Visiting Days, and one-on-one consultations to demystify Montessori's individualized, hands-on learning framework.

**2. Post-Pandemic Enrollment Decline:**

Like many schools across the country, we experienced a dip in enrollment following the pandemic. Changing family dynamics, economic uncertainties, and shifts in schooling preferences have all impacted recruitment. In response, we've refined our strategies by investing in targeted marketing campaigns, enhancing social media presence, developing and sharing videos of classroom experiences and expanding outreach to new geographic areas to attract a broader audience.

**3. Facility Constraints During Early Growth:**

Our growing enrollment has highlighted the need for additional facilities and space to support a thriving student body. While this growth is promising, it has also produced facility challenges.

**Looking Ahead:**

We remain committed to strengthening our recruitment plan by deepening community partnerships, expanding our parent education series, and implementing new marketing initiatives that communicate the proven benefits of Montessori education. By continuing to

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invest in robust outreach, we are confident in achieving our enrollment goals and further embedding our school as a trusted and dynamic part of the community.

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## 1.5 SCHOOL REENROLLMENT

Reenrollment Rate is the percentage of students continuously enrolled in the school from one year to the next.

Grades	NUMBER OF STUDENTS REENROLLED	PERCENT OF STUDENTS REENROLLED
K	0	
1	49	75.38%
2	54	69.23%
3	59	71.08%
4	35	56.45%
5	50	75.76%
6	33	67.35%
<b>Total/Avg</b>	280	69.48%

## 2. Explain successes or challenges of implementing the school's retention plan.

School Comments:

### Successes and Challenges of Implementing Our Retention Plan

As a relatively new Montessori charter school, Sussex Montessori has developed and refined strategies aimed at retaining students by fostering a supportive, engaging, and inclusive learning environment. Below are key successes and challenges we have encountered in implementing our retention plan.

#### Successes:

##### 1. Strengthening Parent Engagement and Communication:

A cornerstone of our retention strategy has been proactive, transparent communication with families. We've implemented regular newsletters, parent-teacher conferences, parent camp, and family education workshops to deepen parents' understanding of Montessori principles and practices. Parent information sessions along with several Parent Listening Sessions, have helped build trust and a sense of partnership in their children's education, contributing to stronger family-school connections.

##### 2. Focus on Whole-Child Development and Personalized Learning:

Our Montessori approach prioritizes individualized learning paths and the holistic development of each student. This educational philosophy has fostered high levels of

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student engagement, increased autonomy, and intrinsic motivation, which have been instrumental in creating a positive school culture. Families that recognize the benefits of this approach often become our strongest advocates, helping to promote retention through word-of-mouth referrals and community testimonials.

3. **Ongoing Staff Professional Development and Data-Driven Practices:**

A critical investment in retention has been ensuring high-quality instruction through continuous staff development. During the 2023-24 school year, staff completed comprehensive professional development focusing on evidence-based instructional practices and effective data collection to inform teaching strategies. This has enhanced student outcomes and improved family confidence in our program's long-term academic benefits.

4. **Nurturing a Safe, Inclusive School Community:**

We place strong emphasis on social-emotional learning (SEL), student well-being, and inclusive practices that foster a welcoming, supportive atmosphere. By addressing students' emotional and social needs, we have created an environment where students feel safe, loved and valued—key factors in long-term retention.

**Challenges:**

1. **Parental Perception of Montessori for Older Grades:**

One challenge has been retaining students as they transition from Lower Elementary to Upper Elementary. Some families express concerns about whether the Montessori model adequately prepares students for traditional middle school settings. To address this, we have developed more robust parent education efforts focusing on the success of Montessori graduates, highlighting critical skills such as executive functioning, problem-solving, and self-regulation. Additionally, Middle School begins at Grade 6 for most surrounding districts. Parents often want their child to begin at the same time as their peers.

2. **Adapting to Post-Pandemic Shifts in Family Priorities:**

Like many schools, we have observed shifting family priorities in the wake of the pandemic. Increased interest in alternative schooling models such as homeschooling has presented retention challenges. To combat this, we are investing in more personalized family engagement strategies to strengthen the sense of belonging and community that sets us apart from other educational options.

3. **Facility Limitations Affecting Program Expansion:**

As our student body grows, limited space for extracurricular activities and specialized programs has become a retention concern. Families value comprehensive educational experiences, including competitive sports, art, and music, which require additional facilities that we do not have at this time. In response, we are pursuing funding to develop a sport court as well as have offered many afterschool clubs such as chess,

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games club, sports club, photography club and many other enhancements to better serve our students.

**Looking Forward:**

We are committed to refining our retention efforts by expanding student enrichment opportunities, increasing targeted family engagement strategies, and continuing our focus on staff excellence and retention. Through intentional planning and consistent improvement, we aim to maintain a thriving student community where children and families feel deeply connected, supported, and inspired to grow together.

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## II. ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Delaware operates under the belief that all schools benefit from continuous improvement – including those that receive exceeds expectations ratings – to best support all students. The [Delaware School Success Framework \(DSSF\)](#) outlines the accountability standards by which all Delaware public schools are measured. This state- and school-level data helps identify each school’s needs and determine how best to support students across the state.

DSSF measures the following areas to determine school success. This annual data is publicly available on the [Delaware Report Card](#).

- Academic achievement – Proficiency for ELA and math (grades 3-8 and 11)
- Academic progress – Growth in ELA and math (grades 4-8); includes growth of the lowest and highest performing students in a school
- School quality/student success – On-track attendance (K-12), science proficiency (grades 5, 8 and biology), social studies proficiency (grades 4, 7 and 11), college/career preparedness (grades 9-12), and on-track in 9<sup>th</sup> grade
- Graduation rates – 4-year, 5-year and 6-year adjusted cohort graduation rates
- English language proficiency (ELP) – Progress toward English language proficiency (grades 1-12)

### 2.1 DELAWARE SCHOOL SUCCESS FRAMEWORK – SY 2023-2024

Indicators	Weight	Metric Value	Points Possible	Points Earned
<b>Academic Achievement</b>	<b>30%</b>		<b>150</b>	<b>38</b> <b>Well Below Expectations</b>
Proficiency ELA (grades 3-8)	15%	32.01%	75	24
Proficiency Math (grades 3-8)	15%	18.80%	75	14
<b>Academic Progress</b>	<b>40%</b>		<b>175</b>	<b>92</b> <b>Well Below Expectations</b>
Growth in ELA (grades 4-8)	15%	54.45%	75	41
Growth in Math (grades 4-8)	15%	48.96%	75	37
Growth of lowest quartile ELA (grades 4-8)	2.50%	53.56%	12.5	7
Growth of highest quartile ELA (grades 4-8)	2.50%	30.08%	12.5	*
Growth of lowest quartile Math (grades 4-8)	2.50%	53.51	12.5	7
Growth of highest quartile Math (grades 4-8)	2.50%	49.29%	12.5	*
<b>School Quality/Student Success</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>59.71%</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>35</b> <b>Well Below Expectations</b>
On Track Attendance (grade K-12)	10%	58.22%	50	29
Proficiency Science (Grades 5 and 8)	5%	22.57%	25	6
Proficiency Social Studies (Grades 4 and 7)	5%	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Progress toward English Language Proficiency</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>		<b>400</b>	<b>165</b>
<b>Overall Percentage / Rating</b>				<b>42.89%</b> <b>Well Below Expectations</b>

## 2.2 ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE EXPECTATIONS

### PERFORMANCE AGREEMENT

By September 30, 2028, our expectation is to achieve an overall rating of “Meets” or “Exceeds” on the Delaware School Success Framework (DSSF). Each year, we will show growth within each metric area, putting us on track to achieve our academic performance expectations. This progress will be monitored through our annual performance review.

3. Reflect on your school’s academic performance in relation to the goals set forth in the performance agreement. Please reference the specific Delaware School Success Framework (DSSF) listed below. Highlight successes, challenges, root causes, and describe how the school will address the challenges.
  - a. Academic Achievement
  - b. Academic Progress
  - c. School Quality/Student Success
  - d. Graduation Rate (if applicable)
  - e. Progress toward English Language Proficiency

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School Comments:

#### **Reflecting on Our School’s Academic Performance Relative to the Performance Agreement**

As a new Montessori charter school, Sussex Montessori is committed to achieving the goals outlined in our performance agreement and the Delaware School Success Framework (DSSF). Our reflections highlight areas of success, challenges, root causes, and steps for improvement across key academic performance indicators.

#### **A. ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT**

##### **Successes:**

- Our individualized, hands-on Montessori approach fosters deep conceptual understanding in foundational subjects, with strong performance in reading and language arts, particularly among younger students where Montessori methods are most well-established.
- Early literacy benchmarks have been met or exceeded due to the structured, multi-sensory phonics instruction embedded in the Montessori curriculum.

##### **Challenges:**

- Math performance has lagged behind reading achievement. The transition to using data-driven instruction has revealed gaps in students' ability to apply mathematical reasoning on
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standardized assessments, despite demonstrating mastery in hands-on, practical applications. Our Star Assessments show consistent growth across every grade level. Historically, our students have not done as well on the Smarter Balance State testing, consequently, we have increased practice testing more frequently with chromebooks.

**Root Causes:**

- Misalignment between Montessori materials-based instruction and traditional standardized test formats.
- Limited time dedicated to test-taking strategies and familiarity with multiple-choice question styles and navigating the chromebooks for testing.

**Action Steps:**

- Continue integrating targeted interventions and small-group instruction aligned with data insights from formative assessments.
- Incorporate test-taking strategies and practice with traditional assessment formats into classroom routines to boost student comfort and performance.

**B. ACADEMIC PROGRESS**

**Successes:**

- Significant growth has been observed among students who have been enrolled for two or more consecutive years, reflecting the cumulative benefits of Montessori's individualized, self-paced learning.
- Progress monitoring systems implemented during the 2023-24 professional development cycle have improved teachers' ability to track and respond to student growth trajectories.

**Challenges:**

- Inconsistencies in growth across student subgroups, particularly among students entering mid-year or with limited prior Montessori experience.

**Root Causes:**

- Transition challenges for new students unfamiliar with self-directed learning.
- Gaps in foundational skills for students transferring from non-Montessori schools.

**Action Steps:**

- Strengthen onboarding programs for new students to better acclimate them to the Montessori model.

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- Implement intensive support for skill-building in key content areas during the initial transition period.

### C. SCHOOL QUALITY/STUDENT SUCCESS

#### **Successes:**

- High student engagement and strong attendance rates reflect a positive school culture and an engaging learning environment.
- Social-emotional learning (SEL) is deeply embedded in daily routines, contributing to strong student-teacher relationships and a sense of community.

#### **Challenges:**

- Consistency in measuring non-academic indicators, such as behavior and emotional growth, which are central to the Montessori philosophy but not easily captured in standard reporting metrics.

#### **Root Causes:**

- Limited tools to quantitatively measure SEL outcomes and other Montessori-based success indicators.

#### **Action Steps:**

- Develop and implement more robust tools for tracking and reporting non-academic growth, aligned with the DSSF's School Quality/Student Success indicators.
- Incorporate SEL assessments and feedback loops to evaluate progress.

### D. GRADUATION RATE (IF APPLICABLE)

**NOT APPLICABLE FOR OUR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AT THIS TIME.**

### E. PROGRESS TOWARD ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

#### **Successes:**

- English Learner (EL) students benefit from individualized learning, with Montessori's hands-on materials supporting language development through concrete, visual experiences.

#### **Challenges:**

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- EL students require additional scaffolding to build academic vocabulary and language structures used in standardized assessments, where context differs from everyday conversational language.

**Root Causes:**

- Limited direct instruction in academic English language skills due to the Montessori emphasis on experiential learning.

**Action Steps:**

- Implement targeted English language interventions that integrate Montessori principles while explicitly addressing vocabulary and grammar needed for academic success.
  - Expand professional development to equip teachers with effective strategies for integrating language acquisition support across the curriculum.
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**Conclusion**

While we are proud of our successes and the strong foundation we are building; Sussex Montessori recognizes the importance of continuous improvement. By addressing the outlined challenges with intentional strategies, we are confident that our academic performance will meet and exceed the goals set forth in our performance agreement.

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## 2.3 SUPPLEMENTAL ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE DATA

4. Provide any academic performance-related evidence, supplemental data, or contextual information. In this section, you may provide graphs and/or charts to supplement your narrative as Appendix 1.

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School Comments:

**Growth across years** – Percentages represent Students at or above Grade Level for Reading (Dibels Testing)

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	2020-21 EOY	2021-22 EOY	2022-23 EOY	2023-24 EOY
<b>K</b>		27%	41%	56%
<b>1</b>		34%	34%	55%
<b>2</b>		34%	47%	46%
<b>3</b>		51%	45%	53%
<b>4</b>	N/A	40%	39%	38%
<b>5</b>	N/A	N/A	49%	40%
<b>6</b>	N/A	N/A	N/A	45%

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5. Reflect on other aspects of the school’s academic performance that may not be captured by the DSSF. Highlight successes, challenges, root causes, and describe below how the school will address the challenges.

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School Comments:

**Additional Reflections on Academic Performance**

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While the Delaware School Success Framework (DSSF) provides a comprehensive view of key performance indicators, Sussex Montessori’s unique educational approach yields additional successes and challenges not fully captured by these measures. Below are reflections on these aspects and the steps we are taking to enhance overall academic outcomes.

## SUCSESSES

1. **Student Independence and Executive Function Skills**
  - One of the core strengths of the Montessori model is the development of independence, time management, and problem-solving skills. Our students exhibit strong abilities in self-directed learning, critical thinking, and collaboration—skills that are highly valued but not easily quantified by standardized assessments.
  - The multi-age classroom structure has fostered mentorship and leadership among older students, creating a collaborative and supportive learning environment.
2. **Social-Emotional Development and Conflict Resolution**
  - Montessori’s emphasis on peace education and social-emotional learning (SEL) has resulted in students demonstrating effective conflict resolution, empathy, and respect for diversity. These attributes contribute to a positive school culture and well-rounded personal development.
3. **Hands-On, Experiential Learning in Science and Cultural Studies**
  - Our students excel in project-based, experiential learning environments, particularly in science, geography, and cultural studies. Real-world, inquiry-based projects have led to strong engagement and deep learning, though these strengths are not directly measured by DSSF indicators.

## CHALLENGES

1. **Assessing and Documenting Holistic Learning Outcomes**
  - Traditional standardized tests do not fully capture the broad range of competencies developed in a Montessori environment, particularly creativity, perseverance, and collaborative problem-solving.
  - The lack of established metrics for assessing executive function and social-emotional growth presents a challenge in articulating the full impact of our program.

## Root Causes

- A misalignment between Montessori’s authentic assessment methods (e.g., portfolio reviews, student self-assessments) and conventional data-driven performance frameworks.
- Limited integration of Montessori-specific data collection tools into broader accountability systems.

## ACTION STEPS TO ADDRESS CHALLENGES

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1. **Montessori-Aligned Performance Metrics**
    - Continue to develop our portfolio-based assessment system that documents student growth in executive functioning, creativity, and collaboration. This complements existing standardized assessments and provides a fuller picture of student achievement.
  2. **Enhance Parent and Community Understanding of Holistic Success**
    - Expand parent education initiatives to highlight the benefits of non-traditional academic indicators, including SEL, critical thinking, and real-world problem-solving skills. Sharing success stories and case studies will illustrate the long-term impact of Montessori education.
  3. **Expand Data Collection on Social-Emotional and Executive Function Development**
    - Adopt SEL assessment tools, such as student self-reflection surveys and teacher observation rubrics, to track progress in emotional regulation, conflict resolution, and leadership skills.
    - Provide ongoing professional development to support teachers in integrating these assessment tools effectively.
  4. **Bridge the Gap Between Hands-On Learning and Standardized Testing**
    - While maintaining the integrity of our Montessori philosophy, we will provide students with more opportunities to practice test-taking strategies, engage in regular practice test opportunities, increased chromebook usage all to aid in becoming more familiar with traditional assessment formats.

### **Conclusion**

By enhancing our ability to measure and communicate the full spectrum of student learning, Sussex Montessori will continue to celebrate and build upon its strengths while addressing areas for growth. These efforts will ensure that our academic performance reflects the comprehensive, transformative education we provide.

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6. Provide and reflect on additional information regarding academic-related indicators your school would like the Accountability Committee to consider. (This could include social and emotional development, attendance and retention, student engagement, student discipline, and others as appropriate.) Highlight successes, challenges, root causes, and describe how the school will address the challenges.



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School Comments:

### **Additional Academic-Related Indicators**

Sussex Montessori embraces a holistic educational philosophy that extends beyond traditional academic measures. We prioritize developing well-rounded students who thrive socially, emotionally, and academically. Below, we highlight key indicators of success, challenges, root causes, and action steps for addressing areas of need.

#### SUCSESSES

##### **1. Social and Emotional Development**

- **Student Strengths:** Students demonstrate growth in empathy, collaboration, and conflict resolution skills through peace education and Montessori's Grace and Courtesy lessons.
- **Impact:** Our emphasis on social-emotional learning (SEL) has created a nurturing school culture where students feel safe, respected, and supported.

##### **2. High Levels of Attendance and Engagement**

- **Student Engagement:** Our hands-on, student-driven learning model fosters deep engagement. Students exhibit a love of learning and strong intrinsic motivation, which contributes to positive academic outcomes.
- **Attendance:** Since the initial opening years during the global pandemic, Sussex Montessori's attendance rates are high, reflecting student enthusiasm and family investment in our learning environment.

##### **3. Low Rates of Student Discipline Referrals**

- **Positive Behavioral Outcomes:** The Montessori approach prioritizes respectful interactions and student self-regulation. As a result, incidents requiring formal disciplinary action have significantly decreased every year.

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#### CHALLENGES

##### **1. Measuring Social-Emotional and Behavioral Growth.**

##### **2. Retention**

- The availability of other educational options and misconceptions about Montessori's academic rigor have created retention challenges, particularly as students transition into upper grades.

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#### ROOT CAUSES

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- **Limited Tools for Non-Academic Data Collection:** Montessori emphasizes observational assessments rather than traditional metrics for behavioral and social-emotional growth.
  - **External Barriers to Attendance:** Transportation, family economic challenges, and health-related absences disproportionately affect some students.
  - **Perception Gaps About Montessori’s Academic Rigor:** Families unfamiliar with Montessori often question its alignment with traditional expectations, leading to potential attrition.
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## ACTION STEPS

1. **Implement Tools for Social-Emotional Learning Assessment**
    - Use SEL surveys, teacher observation rubrics, and student self-assessments to systematically measure and report on SEL progress.
  2. **Targeted Attendance Interventions**
    - Develop personalized attendance support plans for students with chronic absenteeism, including outreach to families to identify and mitigate barriers.
    - Continue to utilize partnerships with local van transportation services and community organizations to further support families.
  3. **Enhanced Parent Education and Communication**
    - Strengthen family engagement by hosting more workshops that demystify Montessori pedagogy and highlight research on its long-term academic and life benefits.
    - Share success stories and academic data demonstrating students' readiness for middle school.
  4. **Strengthen Transition Planning for Upper Elementary**
    - Develop a robust transition plan that highlights skill development in executive functioning, leadership, and advanced academic concepts to retain students through upper grades.
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## Conclusion

Sussex Montessori’s commitment to holistic student growth is evident in the strong engagement, social-emotional resilience, and community trust we have built. By formalizing data collection on these outcomes and addressing attendance and retention challenges with targeted strategies, we will continue to provide a transformative educational experience for all students.

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## III. ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE



7. Describe the school's organizational performance during school year 2023-24. (This section is for the school to address any overall rating where the school has not met standards. The school will be able to address individual metrics in the sections below.)

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School Comments:

### **Commitment to Special Education Practices and IDEA Compliance**

Sussex Montessori is fully committed to providing an inclusive, equitable learning environment for all students, particularly those with disabilities. To support this commitment, our staff has undergone a year-long professional development program focused on the writing of effective Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), a comprehensive understanding of all aspects of the **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)**, and ensuring the implementation of required accommodations.

#### KEY AREAS OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

- **Writing Effective IEPs:** Our staff participated in in-depth training to enhance their ability to develop high-quality, student-centered IEPs that align with the goals of IDEA. The training focused on setting measurable, achievable goals and ensuring that each IEP reflects the unique needs and strengths of the student.
- **Understanding IDEA and Its Requirements:** Staff received training on the legal aspects of IDEA, including the rights of students with disabilities, the process for identifying and assessing these students, and the legal obligations of the school in providing appropriate services and supports.
- **Accommodations and Modifications:** Teachers were trained on identifying and implementing necessary accommodations and modifications to support students with disabilities. This includes making adjustments in classroom instruction, assessments, and learning environments to ensure equal access to education.

#### IMPACT OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT:

- **Improved IEP Implementation:** This professional development ensures that all staff members are not only knowledgeable but also highly skilled in writing and implementing IEPs that meet the individual needs of students with disabilities.
- **Increased Compliance with IDEA:** The training has empowered our educators to fully comply with IDEA's requirements, ensuring that all students with disabilities receive the services and supports they need.
- **Enhanced Support for Students with Disabilities:** As a result of the training, we've seen stronger collaboration among general education teachers, special education staff, and families to ensure students with disabilities are supported in all aspects of their learning.

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This ongoing commitment to staff development reinforces Sussex Montessori’s dedication to fostering an inclusive and supportive learning environment for every student, regardless of their abilities.

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8. Discuss management and operations successes and challenges during the 2023-24 school year. Areas you may want to consider as appropriate:
- School leadership
  - Day-to-day operations including: transportation; facilities; food service; staffing (hiring, retention, professional development, evaluation); health and safety; community engagement

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School Comments:

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9. Address any measure(s) where the school did not meet standard or is approaching standard (if applicable).

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School Comments:

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### 3.3 AT-RISK STUDENTS, STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES, AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

10. If applicable, describe any changes or enhancements the school has made based on findings from audits, investigations, or other administrative proceedings related to at-risk students, students with disabilities, gifted and talented students, or Multilingual Learners.

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School Comments:

#### **Changes and Enhancements for Student Support Based on Findings**

Sussex Montessori continually refines its educational practices to ensure equitable access to quality education for all students, including those who are at risk, students with disabilities, gifted and talented students, and multilingual learners. Based on feedback from audits, investigations, and other administrative reviews, we have implemented the following improvements:

##### 1. ENHANCEMENTS FOR AT-RISK STUDENTS

**Findings:** A review of student performance data indicated a need for more targeted interventions for students performing below grade level, particularly in mathematics and reading comprehension.

**Changes:**

- **Implementation of Tiered Intervention Systems:** We strengthened our Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) by embedding regular progress monitoring and data-driven decision-making.
- **Additional Support Personnel:** We added dedicated intervention specialists to provide small-group and one-on-one support through the Reading Assist Institute as well as hiring a part-time Reading Specialist.
- **Social-Emotional Support Structures:** Through the support of grant funding, we hired an additional Social Worker part time to provide expanded access to school-based counseling and therapy. We also hired a student support guide.

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##### 2. SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

**Findings:** Compliance reviews highlighted the need for more streamlined Individualized Education Program (IEP) implementation and documentation processes.

**Changes:**

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- **Enhanced Professional Development:** All staff participated in training on IEP accommodations, modifications, and best practices for inclusive instruction.
  - **Collaborative Planning:** Special education teachers now collaborate more closely with general education teachers to ensure that IEP goals are integrated into daily classroom instruction.
  - **Improved Documentation Processes:** We updated internal procedures for tracking IEP compliance, progress monitoring, and family communications to ensure timely and accurate reporting.

### 3. MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS (MLLS)

**Findings:** An audit revealed a need for more targeted language development support to help MLLs achieve academic language proficiency.

**Changes:**

- **Specialized English Language Development Instruction:** We integrated a more intense focus on our explicit vocabulary, grammar, and academic language support that exists in our Montessori materials curriculum.
- **Bilingual Family Engagement:** Improved bilingual communication strategies, including translated materials and multilingual parent workshops, have strengthened family-school partnerships.
- **Enhanced Professional Development:** Staff received training (PLC's) on scaffolding content for English learners and strategies for integrating language objectives into content instruction.

### 4. Gifted and Talented Learners

As a Montessori School, each classroom environment has not only copious grade level materials, but materials for students who are ready and capable of working above their grade level. We call these projects and works 'extensions' to the grade level standards. The learners are working at a Depth of Knowledge solid 3 and 4 level. They are thinking strategically and extending their thinking to innovate and apply what they have mastered at the Depth of Knowledge 1 and 2 levels. They are also encouraged to go beyond the classroom to do research, hold interviews and make presentations to the class as follow up work. Because we are a Montessori school, no child is left behind, and no child's growth is hindered. Staff serving our 5-7 year old learners will allow a child to spend time in the 7-9 year old classrooms during work cycle to support their present level of instructional needs. This flowing back and forth allows children to receive continued support and/or explore higher level content areas. While classroom work cycle time offers grade level content, no child is refused the opportunity for extra support or extension opportunities.

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## Conclusion

These changes reflect Sussex Montessori's commitment to continuous improvement and equitable access for all learners. We will continue to monitor the effectiveness of these enhancements and adapt as necessary to ensure the success of every student.

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11. Describe any changes or enhancements to the process by which at-risk students, students with disabilities and gifted and talented students are identified and the evidence that the school was able to provide the right resources and services for these students.
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### School Comments:

Gifted students and at-risk students are identified through regular assessment. Assessments are done in the Fall, in February and again in May.

### Montessori Approach to Gifted Learners:

In a Montessori classroom, **gifted students are not held back by traditional grade-level pacing**. The Montessori materials are designed to span multiple curriculum years, allowing students to advance independently as they master concepts. This structure inherently supports differentiated learning, enabling students to pursue more complex, abstract concepts at their own pace.

**At risk students** are supported by one-on-one tutoring with Reading Assist Institute tutors. The following demonstrates the growth trajectory for the students engaged in the program.

### Reading Assist Institute Reading Growth – Overall Results

#### Highlights

- **86%** of students grew in at least one measure from start- to end-of-program.
- Average growth toward final PSF grade-level benchmark: **88%\***
- In each measure, **average test scores increased** from start- to end-of-program

*\*For students who made progress in the measure from start- to end-of-program.*

Reading Assist uses Acadience Reading K-6 to measure student progress in several foundational reading skills. Reading Assist measures progress using three Acadience measures: Phoneme Segmentation Fluency (PSF), Nonsense Word Fluency – Clear Letter Sounds (NWF-CLS), and Nonsense Word Fluency – Whole Words Read (NWF-WWR).

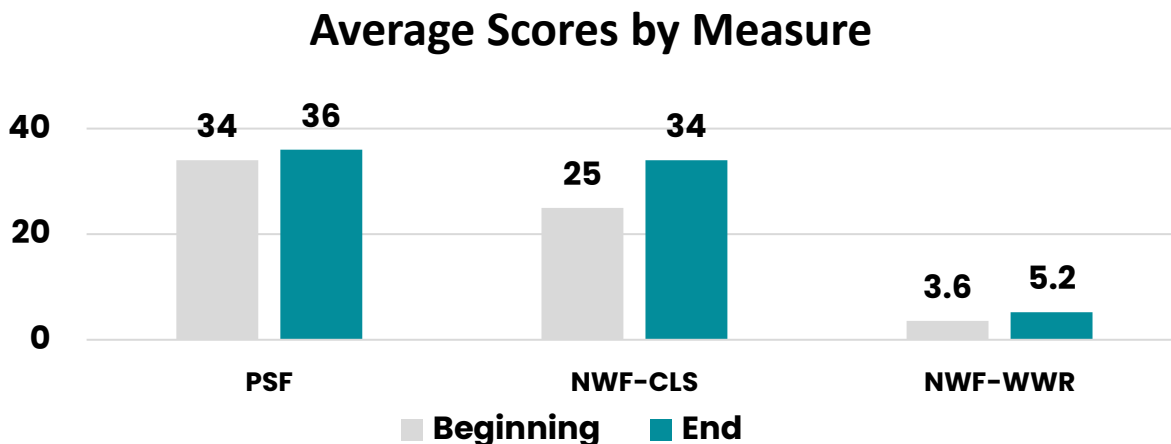
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The growth of students in these measures is presented in Figure 1 below. Bars represent the average scores at the beginning of the program (gray bars) and end of the program (blue bars) for each measure.

Figure 1. Reading Growth of Reading Assist Sussex Montessori Students – Overall Results



Across measures, student average scores increased over the duration of the program. In the foundational measure of PSF, the average score increased 6% from 34 to 36. In the intermediate measure of NWF-CLS, the average score increased 36%, and the average NWF-WWR score increased 44%.

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12. Describe any changes or enhancements to the process by which Multilingual Learners are identified and the evidence that the school was able to provide the right resources and services for these students.

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School Comments:

ENHANCEMENTS IN RESOURCE PROVISION AND SUPPORT SERVICES

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### Timely Screening and Assessment:

- Implemented consistent use of the **WIDA ACCESS Placement Test (W-APT)** or **WIDA Screener** within the first 30 days of school for all new students with non-English language indicators.
- Established routine monitoring of language proficiency progress for students previously identified as MLLs.

### Changes Implemented:

- **Individualized Language Support Plans:** Each MLL now has a tailored support plan, integrating language goals aligned with Montessori principles.
- **Increased Language Development Resources:** Additional language development materials and dual-language learning tools have been incorporated into classrooms to reinforce academic vocabulary and grammar skills.
- **Focused Professional Development for Teachers:** All staff received training on integrating language development strategies into Montessori practices.
- **Dedicated ELD Instruction:** Provided targeted small-group instruction using research-based strategies for language development integrated within the Montessori framework.
- **Classroom Integration of Language Support:** Introduced more explicit language scaffolding during core instruction, with a focus on developing academic vocabulary alongside hands-on, experiential learning.
- **Increased Collaboration with Families:** Developed bilingual communication tools, translated materials, and family information sessions to strengthen home-school partnerships.
- **Professional Development for Educators:** Staff participated in workshops on best practices for language acquisition, culturally responsive teaching, and differentiated instruction for multilingual learners.

### 3.4 GOVERNANCE AND REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

#### 13. Describe how the board has provided oversight in the areas of academics, finance, and operations, including legal compliance

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##### School Comments:

Sussex Montessori's Board of Directors and its associated committees meet monthly, if not more frequently, to ensure proper oversight of academics, finance, and operations. Board committees include an executive, finance, development and facilities committee. All board members serve on at least one board committee and attendance by all board members, at committee and board meetings, is consistently at or above 90%.

The executive committee meets weekly. Its agendas are established based upon needs identified during Head of School and Board Chair meetings. In these initial years of operation, the executive committee has leveraged its vast experience in educational leadership, legal and compliance related areas, and operational insight to support the Head of School's development and the establishment of board level systems. These systems, including regular committee engagement and tri-annual board retreats, are designed to strengthen the school's protocols and policies, monitor academic progress, and encourage organizational resilience and operational efficiency. The executive committee and board chair have also enlisted outside experts as needed. These include national organizations designed to support and evaluate public Montessori initiatives, consultants with expertise in executive leadership development and school culture initiatives. Over time, and with the expansion of leadership roles at the school level, more of these responsibilities are being led by the Head of School and her leadership team with oversight from the executive committee. The executive committee has designed and overseen the annual Head of School evaluation process.

The finance committee meets monthly to review the budget and advise the Head of School on asset allocations, grants management and budgetary planning. They have worked closely with a business manager who has a strong understanding of Delaware school finance. Anticipating her pending retirement, a new position was recommended by the Head of School and, with board approval, a Director of Finance and Operations was added to the school's leadership team in Fall 2023. This person is getting support and training from our current finance manager throughout fy24. This person continues to work closely with the finance committee to ensure continued excellence in fiscal management. A Citizen's Budget Oversight Committee also meets regularly to provide additional input.

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The development committee works closely with a contracted fundraiser to identify, apply for and manage grants and donations that have significantly increased the school's ability to provide high quality programming and facilities for our students.

The facilities committee meets weekly to oversee the extensive renovation of Sussex Montessori's campus. This has included the building of three classroom quads, the renovation of a large barn into classrooms, common space and breakout space for supplemental instruction and special services (speech, OT, etc.) and the renovation of a house that serves as the school's main offices and health/wellness center. Another shared building provides additional space for related arts classes and food/nutrition. The facilities committee has worked closely with the finance committee and facilities staff to fund contracts for all construction and maintenance needs. Additionally, based on recommendations from the Head of School, this committee has overseen the installation of safety and security measures and a new outdoor play area for SMS students.

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14. Discuss board-related success and challenges during school year 2023-24. Areas you may want to consider as appropriate include:

- Membership and recruitment
- New member induction and ongoing governance training
- Meeting attendance
- Board self-evaluation
- Progress on particular board-level projects

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School Comments:

Sussex Montessori's founding board has evolved into an operational board with increasing membership from the surrounding community. Retention of key founding board members has lent stability to the school's leadership while some members transitioning off also allowed for the recruitment of new, skilled and passionate community members. Succession planning for the position of Board President is underway with full board involvement and alignment to a newly developed strategic plan.

- New member induction and ongoing governance training

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The SMS board has developed a new member recruitment and induction process aimed at transparency, consistency and board stability. Interested community members can learn more about becoming a member on the school's website. Resources located on the site include a school board guide to provide insight into the role and responsibilities and a board member application. One to one outreach is also done by the Board President, Development committee and Head of School as needed. Continuing to transition founding members off the board and adding additional local community members is an ongoing goal as terms expire.

- Meeting attendance

Sussex Montessori enjoys almost 100% board member attendance at monthly meetings. Committee members also attend their committee meetings with great regularity.

- Board self-evaluation

Through both tri-annual board retreat practices and a 2022 board member self-evaluation, the SMS board has reflected on our practices, developed and implemented a regular self-evaluation process. This process also informed the board's recent strategic planning initiative that included input from board members, school faculty and staff and SMS families. The new strategic plan now includes metrics to measure progress across all board and school initiatives that will be monitored by board and school committees. The board is focused on continually evaluating and implementing best practices in board governance and committee leadership for charter schools.

- Progress on Board Level Projects

The Board has focused in these first years on the work of hiring and supporting the Head of School, ensuring that classrooms spaces were ready for the start of the year, fund raising, and ensuring that we operating a financially sound school. The FY23 year brought an opportunity to focus on strategic planning. Now that we have children in the school, families that we serve, and teachers who are ready to work with the Head of School to move the school forward we can focus the board's energies on supporting this work. The Board established these goals:

- 1) Successful Reauthorization
  - 2) Become a model for future Public Montessori Schools in Delaware,
  - 3) Create a diverse, equitable and inclusive community mindset.
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4) Maintain procedural, governance and financial goals to ensure long-term stability and sustainability

5) Complete the facilities vision of the campus to include k-6 classrooms, shared space, outdoor education opportunities and community involvement – the school is a community resource.

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15. Describe the process used by the board to evaluate school leadership.

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School Comments:

The SMS board submitted to DDOE and received approval for an alternative Head of School evaluation tool prior to the opening of the school. The board completes this evaluation annually. Each board member completes an assessment of the HOS using a common rubric. Those results are shared with the executive committee, aggregated for distribution to the whole board and shared with the Head of School. The Board President shares the feedback with the Head of School and works with her to develop related goals for the subsequent year. The Board President also provides the Head of School with regular feedback through weekly meetings and a mid-year check in. The Board has also engaged a leadership mentor for the Head of School to provide personal feedback and support in these initial years of the school's operations.

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16. Describe the school's process for success planning including identification, development, and retention of school leaders.

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School Comments:

The SMS strategic plan goal 4 states that the board will, "Maintain procedural, governance and financial goals to ensure long-term stability and sustainability". A priority for fy24 is to develop and implement a succession planning strategy to ensure that board membership and school leadership is aligned with the mission/vision of SMS. The board has begun discussions about succession planning for both the Head of School and the Board President. Stability in these positions have been key in these initial years but for the health of the school long term, we recognize the need to plan for succession as needed. Leading a Montessori school takes a unique leadership approach so board members stay involved with national organizations focused on Montessori education and leadership. These organizations serve as potential recruitment sources for future school leaders. Leadership pipelines also exist within SMS. A teacher serves on the board of directors, and teachers serve on site-based leadership teams

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17. [Share how the board supports the school. Speak to the board’s involvement in events, operations, and fundraising activities.](#)

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School Comments:

The SMS board is actively engaged in supporting the school.

**Events**

The board attends a variety of school events throughout the year including the “watch me work days”, board visitation day, special recognitions of students or staff, school cookouts, meetings with funders, and events to thank our funders to name a few. Going forward, the board chair has charged each board member to be present informally in classrooms several times a year so that the board members understand and can support the Montessori philosophical stance of the school. Board members have held meetings with the staff on the funding of the school, the facility needs, and for input in the strategic planning process. The board understands that to support the school, we must be actively engaged in the life of the school.

**Operational:**

Charter schools have limited staffing for the vital operational functions during the start up years. This is particularly evident in western Sussex County where the local schools receive

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fewer local dollars than any other district in Delaware. In addition, Sussex Montessori School opened at the height of the pandemic when additional operational issues needed to be addressed. The Sussex Montessori School board has risen to support the HOS throughout these initial years by providing operational support in areas of our expertise. For example:

- one of our board members, the president of the local hospital, stepped quickly into the role of COVID Task force chair and was available to assist the head of school with all the various issues related to the pandemic.
- Other board members had backgrounds in teacher certification and were able to support the Head of School as we filled teaching positions and served on initial interviews as requested.
- Another board member has knowledge of transportation issues and was able to support the creation of the van hubs and creatively consider the double bus runs required to safely bring children to school.
- Others participated in the facility committee providing weekly oversight ensuring that we had facilities ready to welcome children each year as the school grew.
- The SMS board is also focused on the funding and infrastructure that is needed to support children, teachers, and parents in the school. Some examples include that the board has supported the Head of School to add more PD days to the calendar, to provide funding for transportation support for children, and to be available to engage with parents as needed.

These are just a few of the many ways that the SMS board has supported the many operational issues that needed to be addressed as the school opened.

### **Fundraising:**

This has been a primary focus of the board as there is no funding for capital expenses for charter schools. The board settled on the property on Stein Highway shortly after the charter approval. We had a USDA backed construction loan that enabled us to initiate the construction of the first two classroom quads to open in 2020. In addition to that loan, the board has raised approximately \$8,000,000 dollars in grants and donations since the school's inception to allow us to expand classrooms spaces for each year of the school's growth. These funds have come from our Delaware Foundations who have generously supported this initiative in Western Sussex County as well as our local leaders who see the value that the school brings to the community. Going forward we look forward to turning our attention to funding to support student programming and teacher professional growth.



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### 3.5 STUDENTS AND SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

18. Describe how the school solicits feedback from parents and students regarding satisfaction with the school. Provide summary data and reflect on the feedback. How does the school use this information to inform ongoing school improvement?

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#### School Comments:

The school has contracted with Panorama Education to allow us to collect valid and reliable feedback regarding teacher/student relationships, engagement, school safety, parent satisfaction, teacher satisfaction etc. Panorama allows us to consistently collect climate surveys. As a school, we review all survey data to look closely for areas of potential growth. Parent/Educator and student surveys specifically drive the schools strategic plans and staff day to day programming.

#### Parent EOY Survey summary results:

Academic Skills

92% Parent Satisfaction

MTSS/Work Habits

96% Parent Satisfaction

Over-all Satisfaction

86%

July board retreats are the time for the board and Head of School to review the survey data which is used to focus and inform decisions and progress areas for improvement for family relations and academic progress. The Board and Head of school use this information to review the long-term

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strategic plan goals, short-term goals for the upcoming year, and where funds or grants may be obtained to ensure that we have the resources needed to accomplish our goals.

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### 3.6 TEACHER RETENTION

Is the school monitoring and minimizing teacher attrition rates and maintaining a stable teacher staff?

Note: Complete the table below.

SCHOOL YEAR	PERCENT OF TEACHERS RETAINED	NUMBER OF TEACHERS RETAINED	NUMBER OF TEACHERS ELIGIBLE
2023-24			

19. Explain successes or challenges of implementing the school's teacher retention plan.

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School Comments:

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20. Describe how the school's professional development plans have evolved to support teachers and leadership.

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School Comments:

As a Montessori School, we strongly believe in the efficacy of the Montessori philosophy and pedagogy. All of our Lead teachers participate in a 24-month MACTE certified Montessori teacher education program through the University of Delaware's professional development division. In many states, this is the equivalent to a master's degree in Montessori education. Additionally, we have included a few associate teachers in Montessori training to further solidify Montessori efficacy in every classroom. Tuition is provided by the school. All teachers are supported with on-site coaching from the University of Delaware Montessori Teacher Residency Program.

On site professional development for staff has consisted of the following: Responsive Classroom, Playworks, Trauma Informed Care, MTSS/ Data Based Decision Making, IEP writing and Literacy. We have sent several of our Associate Teachers to the Reading Assist Institute for training on the Orton Gillingham Reading Program for additional K-1 classroom-level support. Additionally, we have had an internationally respected Montessori

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consultant (Jonathan Wolff) provide professional development twice a year for all staff. The Leadership team is coached regularly by Jonathan Wolff as well.

The way in which we approach professional development is in line with how we prepare our learners. We center teacher needs, are responsive to those needs and design professional development and modeling to support their needs. Our overarching goals for the 2022-23 school year are outlined below. The goals were derived from the strategic planning goals that came out of SMS Board retreat meetings. The goal is to become a Public Montessori School of Distinction.

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21. Describe how the school's completion of educator evaluations has evolved.

## IV. FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

The Financial Performance Framework is a reporting tool that provides the Department of Education with the necessary data to assess the financial health and viability of charter schools in its portfolio for the purposes of an annual review. The framework summarizes a charter school’s financial health while taking into account the school’s financial trends over a period of three years.

### 4.1 FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK

#### SUMMARY AND OVERALL RATINGS

YEAR	Current Ratio (Working Capital Ratio)	Debt to Asset Ratio	Days Cash	Debt Service Payments / Loan Covenants	Aggregated Three-Year Total Margin	Cash Flow	Debt Service Coverage Ratio	Enrollment Variance	Student Retention	Financial Management & Oversight	OVERALL RATING
	1a	1b	1c	1d	2a	2b	2c	2d	3	4	
2023-24	M	M	M	M	M	AS	M	M	Not Rated	M	Meets

M: Meets Standard  
AS: Approaching Standard  
F: Far Below Standard

### 4.2 FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE EXPECTATIONS

#### PERFORMANCE AGREEMENT

**By September 30, 2028, our expectation is to achieve an overall rating of “Meets,” as measured by the Financial Performance Framework. Each year, we will be back on track to demonstrate performance aligned with those expectations. This progress will be monitored through our annual performance review.**

22. Using the results contained in the Financial Performance Framework, describe the school’s financial performance during school year 2023-24. (This section is for the school to address any overall rating where the school has not met standard. The school will be able to address individual metrics in the sections below).

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School Comments:

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23. Identify changes to financial practices that the school has implemented to improve the school's financial outcomes.

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School Comments:

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24. Address any measure(s) where the school did not meet the standard (if applicable).

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School Comments:

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25. Describe how the schools developed and implemented a corrective action plan in response to audit findings (if applicable).

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School Comments:

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## V. INNOVATIVE PRACTICES

26. Describe effective systems, structures, and/or processes that have led to significant school improvement that could be replicated at other schools. Please include the data that supports the success of these practices. Areas you may want to consider, as appropriate:

- Leadership
- Professional Learning
- Instructional Transformation
- Equity
- Culture and Climate Shift
- Collaboration/Partnerships

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School Comments:

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## VI. ANNUAL REPORT CERTIFICATION STATEMENT

<b>Name of School:</b>	
<b>Location:</b>	

I hereby certify that the information submitted in this annual report of a charter school is true to the best of my knowledge and belief; that this application has been approved by the school's Board of Directors.

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**Signature: Chairperson of Board of Directors (or designated signatory authority)**

**Date**

<b>Print/Type Name:</b>	
<b>Title (if designated):</b>	
<b>Date of approval by board of directors:</b>	