



**Sussex Montessori School
Board of Directors
August 19, 2025, 6:30 p.m.**

Board of Directors Present: Linda Zankowsky, Trish Hermance, Taquil Foster-Lewis, Sean Steward & Kyle Morgan
Absent: Penny Short, Bob Wheatley & Mason Falligant

Others Present: Siza Mitimbiri (Head of School), Michelle Hastie (Finance), Debra Smullin

The meeting was called to order at 6:31 p.m.

Approval of Agenda-

A Motion to approve the agenda was made by Jessica Bradley and seconded by Linda Zankowsky. The Motion was approved unanimously with no objections and no abstentions.

Public Comment – No public comment

A Motion to approve the July 15, 2025, minutes was made by Jessica Bradley and seconded by Sean Steward. The Motion was approved unanimously with no objections and no abstentions.

Committee Reports-

Community Engagement/Enrollment- Jessica Bradley

- Enrollment Update:
 - Current enrollment stands at 416 students, an improvement over the previous year
- Events & Engagement:
 - Planning of calendar events ongoing, upcoming ice cream social
 - Focus on more structured event planning and volunteer coordination
 - Plan to solicit parent Ambassadors and broader volunteer database

Finance Committee-

- Audit Status :
 - School is currently undergoing a financial audit
 - Contractor originally considered for financial operations unable to start until January due to prior obligations. Interim Solution: Current contractor to support audit and high-level financial guidance, daily transactions to be managed internally until further notice
 - Committee is exploring additional options for financial services, will revisit at the next financial committee meeting
- Teacher Letters:
 - Priority to send salary letters to teachers by Friday
- Salary Bands and Financial Policies:
 - New Salary bands being established for admin team. Any exceptions to go through Finance committee and Board
 - Ongoing review and tightening of financial and operational policies

Financials – Michelle Hastie

A Motion to accept the June 30, 2025, financial report was made by Jessica Bradley and seconded by Sean Steward. The Motion passed unanimously with no objections and no abstentions.

- Michelle to formalize and present July 2025 actuals for approval in September

Development- Linda Zankowsky

- Recent productive meeting held with Chris Grunder (Welfare Foundation)
 - Positive perception of school performance
 - Elevator fundraising request considered appropriate
- Collaboration with Dan Helwig (Horizon) and Mike Rawl, optimistic about securing future grant funding
- Longwood Foundation grant received last year during leadership transition, confident in future application support
- Planning time for Dan Helwig to visit, meet school community, and facilitate introductions to donors
- Noted intent to provide board fundraising training and/or special session, possibly at October Board meeting.
- Ongoing effort to shift the schools fundraising approach for greater effectiveness
- Barn Project
 - Current \$500,000 funding gap for barn construction project
 - Prospects to close gap
 - Rochester's Office has selected SMS project for potential federal support
 - Local fundraising, led by Mike Rawl, should federal funding not materialize
- Meeting with Maria Stecker (Montessori Works, Longwood liaison) at end of August
 - Will communicate improvements in enrollment and school stability, addressing previous foundation concerns
 - Preparation underway to report on achievement data, discipline, and other goals as per Longwood grant requirements

Facilities- Bob Wheatley (Trish Hermance)

- Construction Projects:
 - Ongoing and on schedule
- Progress Meeting:
 - Scheduled for September 17, 2025 at 9am, On site
- Budget Update:
 - Budget has been reshuffled, now includes the remainder of the roofing work on the current phase

- Elevator Funding:
 - There is ambiguity regarding whether the elevator is included in the finalized \$ 500,000 budget. Clarification at tomorrow's meeting. If not included, the required amount would be \$350,000-\$400,000

Executive Committee- Trish Hermance

- Next Meeting: Tuesday, September 23, 2025
- Siza asked Sean and Trish to present, all Board members are invited
 - If attending constitutes a quorum, official public notification is necessary and will be posted by tomorrow as a public board event
- Conflict of interest forms are due by Friday, September 19, 2025
- Annual Trainings:
 - Kendall Massett sent reminders regarding regular and new board member trainings
 - New Special Education Training: Pending finalization, to be monitored and scheduled
 - Governance & Financial Training: Need to verify completion dates for all board members, aim to schedule now, in-depth governance training with law firm Sol Ewing. Members should expect emails regarding these sessions
- Reporting and Strategic Focus:
 - Thanks to Taquil for contributions toward refining board reports.
 - Plan to use and update the Board's annual reporting calendar to improve strategic discussions and ensure timely flow of information from site teams to the board.
 - Poll sent out to finalize a meeting to discuss these reporting refinements and share a draft prior to the next board meeting.

HOS Report- Siza Mtimbiri

- Current Enrollment:
 - 416 students:
 - 9 pending withdrawals (actual number may fluctuate as withdrawals and new enrollments are finalized)
 - Retention:

- Significant improvement over last year. Most withdrawals are due to family relocations, not dissatisfaction
 - Second grade has highest current headcount (73)
 - KN headcount is improving. (at 58, target 65)
 - Sixth grade will be manageable due to recent teacher hire
 - Long term goal remains to achieve a waiting list for next year
- Staffing:
 - Jessica Bennett and Michelle Hastie are temporarily assisting with the finance work
 - Due to personnel changes, communication has been made with staff that the letters are forthcoming.
- Financial Literacy:
 - Dave Nichols will take over technology and upper El financial literacy
 - Exploring potential partnerships with local banks to support financial literacy curriculum
 - Curriculum planning involved mapping out economic/financial concepts school-wide for multi-year cycles
- Performing Arts:
 - Remains an area of personal and instructional focus
- Special Education:
 - New Special Education Coordinator, Courtney White, brings experience, vision, and passion
 - Courtney has proactively engaged in curriculum planning and is well-integrated with the team
 - Brandy Walker, will focus solely on students within her area of expertise, offering staff training and professional development as needed
- Transportation:
 - New Team for transportation:
 - Kaneisha
 - Brandon
 - Siza
 - Brandon's prior experience in Transportation seen as an asset
- School Year vision & Staff Preparation:
 - Vision for the year and priorities to be laid out during initial meetings
 - Focus on standardized testing and its importance
 - Sessions on MTSS (Multi-Tiered System of Supports) and special education, with Courtney

A Motion to move to Executive session was made by Linda Zankowsky and seconded by Jessica Bradley. The Motion passed unanimously with no objections and no abstentions at 7:35 p.m.

A Motion to leave Executive session was made by Kyle Morgan and seconded by Sean Steward. The Motion passed unanimously with no objections and no abstentions at 8:30 p.m.

A Motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Jessica Bradley and seconded by Taquil Foster. The Motion passed unanimously at 8:32 p.m.