



Board of Directors  
Board Meeting Minutes  
October 14, 2020

Free Horizon Montessori PK – 8

Montessori for the 21st Century - a place to learn, a place to belong

1. Meeting called to order at: 7:05pm
  - a. Board Members Present: Alison Fuhr, Clark Frye, Doug Klof, Bekky Robbins, Leslie Arboleda, Diane Fox, John Frost
  - b. Board Members Absent (excused): None
  - c. Staff Members Present: Kresta Vuolo, Cyndi Vosburgh, Donnetta McDonald, Jennifer Levy, Kate Powell (Staff Liaisons)
  - d. Guests: Parents, community members, staff
  - e. CSN: None
  
2. Approval of Agenda for current meeting: motion to approve by Clark. Second by John. Alison: requests an update to the agenda, BOD Town Hall on agenda, that line item is a discussion in preparation for the upcoming Town Hall. Motion to approve the agenda as amended: John, Doug seconds.
  
3. Public Comment and Celebration
  - a. Nicole Steinbach (parent) – directly to voting members of the board. Based on personal experience and other experiences that have been shared. Really care about how many kids and families that we've lost. Accountability, governance, strategic direction, never experienced someone trying to direct the board's core responsibility. What I've witnessed, I'm really concerned. Principal is a non-voting member, but her voice is most active, most informative, strongest. On topics of policy and principal evaluation process. Concerned about the board being held accountable. Hope that accountability, strategic direction and governance will come from voting members.
  - b. Tony Scheiss (parent) – want to be respectful of the process. Only to say that I think there should be a dialogue. There's a need for dialogue and back and forth. I think that having a Town Hall would facilitate that in a meaningful and powerful way. Feel that it's very important to respect the board and the protocols that need to happen. Clearly pressing need to have back and forth between the community and the board.
  - c. April Couvillion – thank you to the board for everyone to donate time to speak to the issues as there was a lot of frustration, from an outsider's perspective, at the lack of dialogue. Really appreciate that it's being addressed in a timely manner, to have dialogue, feel open community interaction.
  - d. Alison Fuhr – Fall Break! Staff development day tomorrow!
  - e. Kresta – Ms. Margaret Ed Assistant for virtual classrooms. Looking forward to parent/teacher conferences. Get links out for sign-ups very soon, will be virtually, hopefully even easier for parents to access. Literacy leads at staff development tomorrow, excited for a long weekend for Fall Break.

#### 4. Update on Addressing Community Concerns Brought to the Board

a. Summary – BOD has received a number of emails expressing some concerns about FHM. Only time that we can have a conversation as a board is during these meetings. After we received the information, listening and hearing concerns, Matt Walsh and Kresta and Alison have reviewed. Two big things:

i. Concern that there has been policy violations. Things not happening within the school per established procedures.

1. Meet as a committee, look through each situation, including records on files. Make sure that children and adults were treated respectfully and policy was followed.

ii. Concern about the culture in school and how people are treated in our school. Good that it is coming to the surface, have been rumors, address it openly and honestly together as a community. Every single person that is present here, all here for the same mission and goals: a Montessori school that we send our children to that has supportive staff and children can grow socially, emotionally, and educationally. Fractures within the community compromise our ability to do this.

1. This is outside of BOD's expertise. We need help. We are a Jeffco Innovation school, turn to district resources. Options:

a. Can't know what our problem is without talking to the staff.

Culture within the staff where they don't feel comfortable speaking up for themselves and their job. Lack of safety for the staff. Not comfortable coming to the board. For several years, BOD has done principal evaluation, but the staff does not consider the BOD a safe place. Need to look somewhere else. Need to know from the people in the school. Will work in partnership with the district. Matt Walsh and colleagues will have opportunities for every staff member to discuss atmosphere, will have pointed questions and also open-ended questions. Partnership with district, will not get specific information, will get summary information, themes, etc. We are not the first school to go through this. District has done this before, BOD will look to their guidance. Many ways that this can go, need to first figure out concrete issues.

i. Volunteer basis, but will be extended to every employee. Prioritize getting it on the calendar as soon as we can.

ii. Doug: How is the district ensuring security for staff members? Matt will address the staff directly, neither the board nor the principal will be involved. We have a responsibility, we would get trending reports, would we get a chance to ask questions? Partnership between the BOD and the district. First, we need to gather

information, think the BOD needs to step back and let district gather information and is truly a third party gathering the data. What do we do with that information, that is when the BOD jumps back in. Can reach out to Matt about specifics on what we will get.

1. Clark – is there something that Matt might be able to share about what the approach will be to answer some of those questions about process, how are they getting the best information possible.
- iii. How do we heal issues with not feeling secure with the BOD? If we have an issue with security within the board, at the principal level, what can we do to ensure that's not a problem going forward?
- iv. We will not have input on questions that are asked. They are trained professional with experience.
- v. Doug – make sure that we are following-through with our responsibilities to the school. This is a culture issue, beyond any one issue. Thought we had a process in place to evaluate the health of the school each year, turns out that we don't have that. Comments from the community, there is not a lot of trust.
- vi. John – lack of trust of the board, or lack of understanding on BOD position on such matters, is there written policies or guidelines surrounding retaliation policies? Pass a resolution of sorts? Even as a volunteer BOD support them ourselves. Alison – policies do exist, want to make sure that people feel comfortable speaking candidly with the district. Give our assurances and prove that our words have value. Is there something we can do to publicly state our position as a board, respect anonymity of these comments, that's why we're going through the Board, want everyone to feel safe to bring concerns to the Board or admin via conflict resolution policy. Some public statement.
- vii. Kate – becoming liaison to the board has been eye opening - parent volunteers, really invested in FHM. Opportunity for the Board to not just write a resolution or letter of support, for the staff to understand what the landscape is. There are a lot of questions that are flying around, a lot of confusion. Jen and I do our best to pass along. Wonder if there's a chance for the board to preview the why of this process.

1. Alison – one of the things I thought in this process that brought security is that it was coming from district, staff would prefer to hear it from the board, in the flesh? Kate – yes. The district brings a different level of intensity, which may be appropriate in this case. Think the staff has questions, some have been reached out to directly, have been confused about that. Need something beyond or in addition to Jen and Kate sharing public take-aways. Previewing the why would be critical. Some avenue for in-person would be preferred. Acknowledgment of what the landscape is, and what are the steps being taken. Ask is that we are truly inviting you to be explicitly honest with the district. Should this be a back and forth? Larger all-staff meeting tomorrow, smaller groups. In-person transparency, direct request for partnership.
2. Tomorrow kicks off internal principal evaluation process.
3. Jen – staff don't feel comfortable coming to the board, missing a piece of this process. Escalating issue to district because information went over the board. Important that the staff see the board as humans, see who you are as a unit. The staff may know of us, but especially with communication challenges this year, put a face to the board, present it as invested parents that care. May not even be aware that they could go to the board with issues. Maybe a change in thinking – we are here and can help you solve problems.
4. Issues brought to the board, before board can address, affected parties have to try to resolve the issue on their own. We are here to ensure the mission of our school is being followed and that the school is healthy.
5. John – staff may be more confident in the board, with the board coming there in-person, explaining that the conflict resolution is overseen by bod, if first two steps are not successful, as long as they were given a good faith effort, there is another level of recourse,

bod is here to ensure accountability to the process so that they can feel safe pursuing it.

6. Kate – what is the guarantee to security. If they haven't pursued the conflict resolution, they may be reluctant to honestly give feedback.
7. District is coming to hear perspectives of the staff. Would be surprised if the question is, do you feel safe resolving problems.
8. Doug – we are recognizing there is a culture issue, district are expects, we wouldn't have the time/resources needed to interview all of the staff.
9. Can the BOD attend virtual PD tomorrow? Present out position to the staff, and then let them get on with their day?
10. Should we meet with the staff and introduce ourselves? Challenging this year, but would it make the staff members feel more secure in coming to us with problems.
11. Cyndi – want the board to keep in mind, tomorrow we will have to have a difficult conversation with the staff because of the lower October count this year (and thus, budget shortfalls).
12. If more than two members show up, considered a board meeting, can't do that if it's not noticed at least 24 hours in advance. Introduction at the front end.
13. Kate – acknowledgment, path forward, how you can participate. Working to support teachers in this and financially as well.
14. Right at 9am, lead-in. Alison will attend as President, John will attend as second member of the board. BOD support Alison to come up with summary statements.

b. Thoughts on process going forward

- i. Diane – Matt Walsh is very experienced, but we are the only Option School of Innovation. Have a lot of exemptions and special characteristics, including having BOD that has oversight over principal reviews. Re-applying for Innovation status, question is, does he have a plan for how this is going to look slightly different because he has to come back to the board instead of making district-level decisions. Not same level of involvement as with a neighborhood school or other optional schools. Alison - District would like to have a relationship with the board. Discussed how we bring district and board processes together. Has

an ability to support her growth, professional development. Alison will be part of policy review, and point of contact to determine what do we do with this feedback?

- ii. John – in a year when we are re-applying for innovation status, is there a need to be concerned about relying on district resources and if they may revoke exemptions? Alison – do not feel that district has that approach to this and respect for the responsibilities of the BOD.
- iii. Diane – just want to make us aware that we are applying. When we first applied, district was incredibly generous in granting us the exemptions that we requested. District gave us these waivers because we are a healthy, functioning, Montessori school. Value in providing this option to the county.
- iv. Alison – FHM has an opportunity to really grow here. All in our perspective and in our tone. Do have a problem that we need to dig into. Also Matt's perspective, wants to see us succeed.

#### 5. Board of Directors Expectations

- a. When we joined the board, we agreed to certain behaviors, agreed to policy manual, and mission and vision of respecting others. This situation that we are in has come about from a coordinated effort, a great thing, through this process, the BOD has not been through this process. Within board, we need trust and professional respect. Have been rumors about this coming together as a tool to get the principal fired. Need to know that everyone is coming with the same open and honest motivations and actions. As a BOD, need to talk about how we can keep our trust within the members. How we can keep our trust within the administration and how we can keep our trust with the families.
- b. John – firing anyone should never be the first thought. Should always strive to improve the situation, improve that individual. Cost of replacing employee is astronomical. Really good that concern was brought to our attention, should always enter these situations, want to improve internally if and whenever possible. If not possible, go down that road.
- c. Alison – can't fire anyone without hearing both sides. How do we want to act as a board? Former parent that went to the staff and recruited negatively against administration. If that is modeled on the board, it encourages it. Not a healthy way to solve that problem. How are we going to create a culture within ourselves that can be modeled to lead us to a healthier, better situation. Obligation to publicly support administration and confidentiality.
- d. Leslie – have no interest in firing Kresta. Interest that our community at large is whole, and it is fractured right now. Want to heal the fractures. Alison – over last week, felt a very us versus them, how do we create unity, how can we work together to move forward? Us vs. them is not helping move the school forward. Leslie – see no reason for us to not unify. Approached by a staff member, hope to be part of the change that facilitates growth.
- e. Clark – I wanted to make sure that my kids have the best place to go to school. I want to make sure that when they are there, they have as much support as they can. Attract, retain, develop talent. Want to support everyone who is there on the ground in doing

that. In my experience, I have learned that it's very difficult to attract, develop, retain talent. As we go through difficult discussions, will have to go back to the policy manual more than I have at any other time that I have had to since joining the board.

- f. Doug – this has been the worst time ever to have to do these video meetings. Tough issues to tackle on Zoom. Seeing faces is helpful for sure. Maybe one thing we can do is, urge us all to make sure our voices are heard in these topics. Interested in hearing different perspectives.
  - g. Leslie – I was called out about a rumor, not accurate, my true impetus in joining the BOD, is to help heal the fractures in this community that I have been told personally, have read now in an official capacity, felt energetically in our building for years and years.
  - h. Alison – only way to move forward is open and honest conversation. Take issues out of the shadows so that we can move forward together. Our board meetings are better when we have discussions and have differences of opinion.
6. BOD Town Hall Planning
- a. Town hall discussed previously, there is a need to dialogue with the BOD right now. Community is asking for it, we need to hear what has not already been said, lot of emotions. Our job as a board is to ensure that our community is communicating in a respectful, productive manner. How do we facilitate a Town Hall so that it is respectful and effective. Clark – based on district precedent?
  - b. Diane – Jeffco School Board, feels terribly unsatisfying when we can't address what's been said during the public comment period. I feel like the board room has always been a pretty safe place to have open and honest discussions and don't feel that currently. Don't want to force any member of the board to moderate this.
  - c. Alison – this is the board's relationship to the community. If we went to the board for help, would change that. Jeffco Board of Ed does not do Town Hall style meetings, it's not a safe space.
  - d. Doug – clear the community wants to say something. I think we're obligated to hear it. I also think something like assigned time frames and some basic rules of decency. Worried that it will be a different level of dissatisfaction. Worried that it still won't be level of back and forth that will be satisfying to the community. John – personally, if roles were reversed, would want a resolution and the board, in the context of a Town Hall, there will be no immediate resolution. If we had some basic guidelines, will probably be fine. Need to be brave enough to say, even though this may not be a safe space for us, want to make it a safe space for the community and hear what is not an ideal situation for us so that we can build back up that trust. Alison – part of our job is to model how we communicate. John - Trust the community to be civil and respectful.
  - e. Leslie – I don't share the same sense of lack of safety, wonder, would it provide a greater sense of safety, provide opportunity for people to send in their questions. Useful to acknowledge as a board that we want to come across as a unified front.
  - f. John – mixed feelings, good idea so we can come to the meeting prepared. Either need to read or quote exactly, or need to open it up to that individual.

- g. How do we balance trying to resolve issues by getting statements and questions in advance with the lack of trust in the board? This will be a board Town Hall, bound by process and policy. Explanations of why we're doing what we're doing in terms of policy.
- h. Parameters – having questions emailed in, can they bring it up in chat to a host, safety/security guidelines that everyone must agree to if we stop acting respectfully, microphones will be turned off (individuals).
- i. Which BOD will coordinate this? John will coordinate with communications, come up with parameters.

7. Assignments

- a. Alison will reach out to District/Matt Walsh to ask about the kinds of questions he will be asking the staff during interviews
  - i. Alison and John will attend Staff Professional Development tomorrow AM (10/15) to briefly discuss what to expect from the District in terms of response to culture issues.
- b. John will coordinate with FHM communications for Town Hall meeting.

8. Adjournment at 9:36pm

*In accordance with the Colorado Open Meetings Law, also known as the Sunshine Law, the Board must give notice to the public anytime they schedule a meeting of more than three (3) board members to discuss business concerning the school. The Colorado Sunshine law does allow for the meetings, or portions of the meetings, to be held privately when the subject matter being discussed must remain confidential so long as no formal action is taken during the private portion of the meeting, called the "executive session". The Sunshine Law strictly defines eight (8) criteria under which a private executive session can be held, personnel discussion being one of them. The law also states the community must be informed of the meeting and the criteria under which an executive session must be called.*

*Becky Robbins*