

## 1.1 Executive Summary

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14 Del. C. §§ 512(1)-(3). And (5)-(6)

### 1. Mission and Vision Statements

The mission of the Sussex Montessori School (SMS) is to nurture the development of empathetic, collaborative, persistent and innovative global and community citizens in accordance with the time-tested philosophy of Maria Montessori.

The Vision of the Sussex Montessori School (SMS) is to use the Montessori Method to educate children through authentic personalized learning experiences, respectful relationships, opportunities to innovate, and a focus on global citizenship. We believe that the creation of a Montessori public school in Sussex County, DE will improve student learning, allow for greater choice for parents, and serve as a model for alternative approaches to education by providing a proven and innovative teaching and learning environment.

### 2. Educational Need and Target Population

#### a. Identify the target population, grade levels, and school district(s) that the .....

SMS will enroll students aged 5-12 years old (Kindergarten through Grade 6) who wish to participate in the Montessori approach. It is expected that the school will primarily draw students from the western side of Sussex County in the corridor bounded by Bridgeville to Laurel and west of Georgetown to Seaford. This corridor lacks educational options other than district schools, has no elementary charter schools, and has no Montessori educational opportunities. SMS will provide an option for families who seek a brain-based, child-centered, differentiated learning environment.

#### b. Explain how the proposed charter school, including the grade levels chosen, will .....

In Sussex County, there is a projected rapid population growth in children 0-9 years of age over the next 20 years combined with increasing rates of poverty. With over 35,000 school children between the ages of 0-14 years, there is an opportunity to sufficiently develop a Montessori school within the County. In addition, there are fewer educational opportunities in Sussex County than in the remainder of the state. This is particularly true for early childhood and elementary programming. Current state assessment data indicates that in Western Sussex districts 50% or less of the children in grades 3 through 6 meet state standards on state assessments. According to the Rodel Foundation assessment of public education in 2015, the area of greatest concern is the 36-point achievement gap among students with special needs, students with low income, and English Language Learners. Scores from African American and Hispanic students also demonstrate significant gaps from their white counterparts. It is clear that the traditional public schools are not working well for many children in Sussex County. The Montessori approach, which was scientifically developed to meet the natural development of all children as learners, offers a proven alternative to the traditional public model for children in Sussex County.

#### c. Identify how many families have indicated their intent to enroll in your school.

While no families have yet committed to enroll, SMS has received significant support from the Sussex Community. Please see Attachment 13 and 14 in Section 1.7 - Parent and Community Support.

### **3. Community Engagement**

#### **a. Describe how the applicant has assessed demand and solicited support for the school.**

Montessori Works has held over two dozen meetings with the community members, government leaders, and business leaders to promote the opening of SMS. Letters of support, listings of meetings, and survey responses are found in Attachment 13 and 14.

#### **b. Describe any relationships the applicant currently has or plans to build to ...**

Montessori Works, Inc has spent the past two years engaging in conversations with Sussex County community, business and education leaders. We have been supported financially by the Longwood Foundation, the Welfare Foundation and Discover Bank. Community partners include First State Community Action and the Delaware Community Foundation. In the fall of 2016 we held multiple community outreach events including presenting at local Rotary clubs, engaging in community dinners at First State Community Action, and hosting business leaders for an information session. Additionally, we have engaged parents and children in model Montessori lessons and discussions.

### **4. Educational Plan**

#### **a. Briefly describe the most important characteristics of the educational program...**

The Montessori Method is successfully used around the world and designed to educate the whole child, utilizing personalized learning, peer relationships and real-life skills to develop innovative thinkers and global citizens. The Montessori Method provides a unique choice for students: a holistic, personalized approach to learning for a diverse student population. As a result of their participation in a Montessori education, students are confident, intrinsically motivated, persistent, adaptable, collaborative, responsible, creative, and academically well-prepared. They emerge more-than-ready for whatever is next in their lives: college, the workforce, or community service.

#### **b. Briefly describe the learning environment and culture.**

The learning environment in a Montessori School is uniquely suited to support children's learning due to the cohesiveness created by the commitment to Montessori principles across the school community. Montessori Teachers are all specially trained in the philosophy and use of Montessori materials in the classroom.

The culture in Montessori classrooms is one of mutual respect between adults and students. The result is a classroom and school environment in which students are free to learn on a personalized level, working at their own pace in content that engages them. Montessori classrooms are "responsive classrooms" where prepared teachers allow students to engage, explore, test their assumptions and learn from their peers. A distinctive feature of a Montessori school is the celebration of cultural and global awareness. The immediate and extended families of Montessori students are an integral part of the school culture. Their expertise about

their personal culture and unique experiences provide breadth and depth to the curriculum resulting in the development of empathy and multicultural appreciation.

A Montessori classroom is staffed by two adults, at least one of whom is trained as a Montessori teacher. Students work with materials individually, or more often in pairs or small groups that provide opportunities for student-to-student discussions. Students have an increasing level of choice in scheduling which lessons to engage in at what times—although they are expected to complete specific lessons, they may choose to work on this lesson in the morning, that lesson in the afternoon, or as they get older, this lesson one day and that lesson the next. The opportunities to choose activities and discuss with peers foster skills for independent learning and time management.

**c. Briefly describe the plan to improve student learning for *all* students...**

Because the Montessori Method is often viewed by parents as an alternative to the traditional classroom (whether their child be gifted, have some exceptionalities, or are English Language Learners), we anticipate a diverse population of students. The Montessori method accommodates the varied needs of learners by providing a personalized learning approach allowing students to explore and achieve at their own pace and opportunities for students to test their learning through practical application. Students interact with peers in multi-age classrooms to gain different perspectives on problem solving and relationships. This approach is particularly effective for students who a) are learning-challenged and need additional time, resources and attention to problem-solving, and/or b) may benefit from opportunities to work with peers and teachers in a personal way. In this fluid environment, students who are gifted have opportunities to explore subjects more deeply, investigate areas of interest, and challenge themselves to constantly achieve their personal best. Students who require more time with materials or adaptations because of an identified learning need are easily accommodated. Teachers are trained to encourage an open and exploratory classroom yet to intervene and restructure the classroom environment to support each child as an individual.

**d. Briefly describe how the school will use assessment to improve student learning.**

SMS will hold to the Montessori philosophy of embedded, ongoing assessment in the classroom. Each student is frequently and regularly observed while working with the Montessori materials. Through observation and careful tracking of the student's work, the teacher can assess which skills a child has mastered and determine their readiness to advance in the curriculum. A student who cannot demonstrate mastery with the materials receives additional lessons or alternate approaches until mastery is achieved. In addition, teachers utilize a variety of classroom-based and summative assessment tools to confirm their observations and inform instructional decision making.

**5. Leadership and Governance**

**a. Briefly outline the role of the Board in regards to school governance ...**

The Board of Montessori Works, Inc. will serve as the Founding Board for the purpose of the application and planning process including representing the school from a legal, fiduciary and fundraising basis. Montessori Works, Inc., a school development non-profit organization, is NOT

a charter management organization and receives no management fee. Instead, Montessori Works, Inc. is a group of parents, educators and business leaders interested in the expansion of Montessori learning in the public arena who are dedicated to establishing SMS. They will provide time, resources and oversight to the new school during the planning and start up period including identifying potential school leaders and Montessori trained teachers.

Montessori Works, Inc. will create an operational board of directors comprised of Sussex County community leaders, parents, and educators. This board will include a portion of current Montessori Works, Inc. Board Members and newly identified Board participants reflective of the Sussex County community. Montessori Works, Inc. has been engaged in conversations with community leaders to develop the future operational board. It is expected that this operational board will provide management and oversight of the school beginning in January 2018. They will be responsible for the supervision and development of the school leader, academic accountability, financial activities, parent and community engagement, facility issues, legal issues and other contractual obligations. The School Leader will report directly to the Operations Board. The Board will consist of 7 directors.

**b. Highlight the strengths of the School Leadership team and the proposed Board.**

The Board of Montessori Works, Inc. (bios attached), includes leaders who bring diverse skills including district and charter school leadership, Montessori expertise, connections to higher education including teacher preparation and curriculum development, financial, legal, non-profit and human resource management. Montessori Works, Inc. has additional expertise in Montessori charter development, public school policy and curriculum from their Advisory Board. Additionally, Montessori Works, Inc. has developed strong relationships with the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector (NCMPS), The Trust for Learning, Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education, and regional Montessori schools both public and private. Montessori Works, Inc. has also maintained strong connections with local foundations and corporations: The Longwood Foundation, Welfare Foundation and Discover Bank join Montessori Works, Inc. in their commitment to the development of a Montessori school in Sussex County and have provided the necessary funding to begin this process.

The depth of expertise and the established relationships of the Montessori Works, Inc. board positions will support the initial stages of SMS, including the identification of an operational board and school leader who will assume leadership of the school beyond January 2018. It is expected that the Operational Board will be comprised of business leaders, educators, parents, legal and government officials who have a keen interest in Montessori as an elementary education option.

**c. Explain how the governance and management structures will provide for ...**

Montessori Works, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) organization. During the planning year, Montessori Works, Inc., will apply for the 501(c)(3) designation for SMS, develop board bylaws for the Operations Board, recruit Operations Board members, identify start-up funding sources, locate a facility, market the school and recruit parents and families for enrollment. The Operations Board and school leader will develop a set of policies and procedures to govern the operational

activities of the school ensuring that the school meets all necessary requirements, regulations and procedures from the Delaware Department of Education. The School Leader will report directly to the Operations Board of Directors. The Board will be responsible for monitoring all fiscal, operational and academic aspects of the school and will evaluate the School Leader on a semi-annual basis. During this period, any consultation provided to SMS by Montessori Works, Inc. beyond the planning year and the establishment of the Operations Board will be negotiated and formalized through a memorandum of understanding.

**d. Identify the critical qualifications, credentials and attributes you have identified ...**

The preferred candidate for the School Leader will need to have an understanding of the unique intersection of Montessori education in the context of public education. We will seek a leader who has Montessori certification either as a teacher or an administrator. In addition, he or she must also have a demonstrated ability for working with a board to develop strategic plans, monitor the financial needs of the school, and comply with the State of Delaware's policies and legislation as related to charter schools. In the event that a school leader with both of these strengths cannot be found, preference will be given to a school leader who has a strong understanding of running a public school and an appreciation for the Montessori philosophy.

**6. Business Plan**

**Provide a brief overview of the business plan that includes facilities,...**

**Fundraising and Prospective Partners:** Montessori Works, Inc. has received funding from the Longwood Foundation, the Welfare Foundation, and Discover Bank to initiate the charter application, initial school start-up costs, and to establish Montessori training in Delaware. We expect to continue to receive support from these funders and will build on this support to establish more funders with roots in Sussex County. It is expected that once a charter application is approved, these funders will support the capital needs of the school.

**Financial Management:** Section 1.10 and Attachment 16 depicts the financial needs for Sussex Montessori. We anticipate 260 students to be enrolled in Year 1 while growing to 455 students by Year 4. Except for federally funded programs, the school budgeted only state and local allocations for its operating budget in Years 1-5. The school will meet its 2% contingency requirement. Additional private funds will be sought; however, they will fund supplemental programming and facility choices. We have also provided a budget scenario for 80% of enrollment (208 students). The school will use private contractual services for its accounting, legal and audit services, and for its start-up operations.

**Facilities:** Sussex Montessori plans on purchasing 10 acres of land and construct 32,000 square feet of space within its targeted corridor between Bridgeville and Laurel, and west from Georgetown to Seaford. The cost of land and construction will be \$4.400,000, and will be financed through a third-party firm, the U.S.D.A Community Loan Program or through a local lending facility.