



LA TIERRA MONTESSORI SCHOOL OF THE ARTS AND SCIENCES

GOVERNING COUNCIL BOARD

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Governing Council Board

Isaac Dakota Casados, President

Brenda Atencio, Vice President

Delisha Gordon-Brown, Secretary

Charlie Riddick, Member

Willie Williams, Member

Head Learner

Clifford Tompson

clifford.tompson@montessorilatierra.org

August 10, 2022

Rebecca Burt, Chair
Public Education Commission
300 Don Gaspar
Santa Fe, New Mexico

c/o Corrina Chavez, Director
Corina.Chavez2@state.nm.us

Rebekka Burt, Chair
PEC.DistrictFour@state.nm.us

Dear Chair Burt and members of the Public Education Commission,

Thank you for providing La Tierra Montessori School an opportunity to come before the commission on July 22, 2022. The LTMAS board immediately went to work to address and rectify many of the concerns of the commission. We will break apart each of your concern and provide insight as to how we have addressed these issues:

Possible violations of the contract with the Public Education Commission and governing board member assurances to comply with laws and bylaws, including ensuring that there are the minimum board members on the board;

The LTMAS board has worked diligently to ensure our board is not only comprised of five (5) members, but five members with diverse backgrounds and ethnicities.

LTMAS only saw a dip below our required membership in early 2021 and it was quickly remedied by the addition of Mrs. Delisha Gordon Brown and Mr. Charlie Riddick to the governing board— which now has five members.

We are happy to report that we are working to on-board another board member who comes with vast knowledge in CYFD, which will now add to the backgrounds of finance, state and federal government, law, and social work our other board members encompass. We are diligently working to reestablish our board recruitment committee.

Possible violations of the school's bylaws, including governance of the school through a head administrator, election of officers, and conducting of business through established meeting protocols;

On July 15, 2022, LTMAS hired Mr. Clifford Tompson, a former principal within the Espanola Public Schools, to become the new head learner. While we were without a head learner for less than two weeks, our business manager and office manager were able to provide guidance to the board on essential items needing board approval or signatures.

Mr. Steve Lang, in his role as Asst. Administrator, provided support during this time period—ensuring that normal everyday functions remained. Once Mr. Tompson was hired, contracts were ratified or positions were filled, the DASH plan was reviewed with staff and we opened our doors to our first students on August 10, 2022: eighteen (18) 7th and 8th graders.

Our election of new officers was followed through our established bylaws and Governing Council policies, which calls for an annual election of officers in July. Our meeting was conducted on July 12, 2022 with the installation of Isaac Dakota Casados as President, Brenda Atencio as Vice President and Delisha Gordon Brown as Secretary.

Possible violation of requirements related to appropriate fiscal oversight, processes and appropriate approval of budgets by the Board in place at all times;

As discussed, the LTMAS board or finance committee was not involved in the preparation of the FY22-23 budget and was only given such documentation by the former head learner three-hours prior to our meeting—which required a vote that evening as it was due to the PED the next day.

After our PEC meeting on July 22, 2022, President Casados immediately called the Finance committee into a meeting with Mr. Mike Vigil of the Vigil Group at 2 PM. During that meeting, we discussed our concerns and remedies to ensure our budget had public input, involvement of the board and involvement from our new head learner.

On August 9, 2022, the Finance Committee met again to address the budget and what BARS may need to be voted on and how best to balance a \$122,410 reduction in our budget from a PED miscalculation.

The board will hold a special meeting on August 17, 2022 to discuss any modifications to the budget and potential BARS.

On August 22, 2022, the board will additionally hold discussions and vote on the modified BARS to the budget. This will provide ample time for public input and a thorough review by the board.

Statement from Mr. Mike Vigil:

The Vigil Group (TVG) worked with school administration at La Tierra Montessori School for the development of the FY22-23 budget which was subsequently approved by the school's Governing Council (GC). The budget was then submitted to the Public Education Department and deemed to have met all legislative standards for final approval.

However, the finance committee of the school did indicate that it did not feel that ample time was given to the Governing Council for a thorough review of the budget nor was enough public input solicited. A

change in administration has provided for the opportunity to work more closely with the finance committee in adjusting the budget via Budget Adjustment Request(s) (BARs) that will be agreed upon with the committee for presentation to the GC and, upon approval, submission to the PED. BARs are a normal process utilized by each TVG client and it is our opinion that this will allow for more transparency for all stakeholders while providing the new administration with a clear budget availability to achieve the school's mission for FY22-23. Going forward, the intent is to utilize the finance committee, in conjunction with TVG, to develop the budget well before the deadline to submit to the PED to allow for quality review by the administration, finance committee and GC as well as to provide the public with the opportunity to review and comment on budget initiatives as well.

Possible violation of the contract to provide information, notifications and reports to CSD in a responsive manner; and

All required documentation has been submitted to Dylan Wilson at the PED concerning new board member documentation. We did have one board member who was waiting on their new state license as she moved from California— before a notary would provide a stamp. All those documents, including those for Mr. Tompson have been provided to Dylan at the PED.

Possible violations of the Open Meetings Act.

The LTMAS board takes any violation of the Open Meetings Act very seriously. All required documentation concerning the postings of all special and general meeting notices and minutes have complied with the act have been made within the last 60-days and prior. At no time does the board meet without following these established rules. At no time does our board allow for rolling quorums or board members to discuss items outside of our regular scheduled or special meetings via email, in person or phone.

The President of the board does provide individual updates to members as to the school and the work being conducted by our new head learner and his team.

To ensure a deeper clarity on the Open Meetings Act, we working to schedule another board retreat where we will concentrate a portion of that retreat to the Open Meetings Act. We have begun reaching out to both private and public organizations that can provide us with trainers for this upcoming retreat.

In addition, at the recommendation of PED staff, we have also added a quorum statement to our website: *There are times when a quorum of board members may be present at school functions, community events, training, board retreats and other activities. These times are not board meetings, no actions will be discussed or taken.*

confirmation that the school is in compliance with Montessori licensure to be a Montessori school with staff presently hired at the school;

The school has hired the former Montessori head learner Mrs. Angela Feathers as the pre-K / Kindergarten teacher for the FY22-23 year. She will continue to provide vast Montessori instruction and knowledge to our students and staff.

Statement from Mr. Clifford Tompson, Head Learner:

We can certainly confirm that the school is in compliance to function as a Montessori school. All teachers from last year have returned and are teaching this year. Last year's head learner is now teaching PreK and K. All of our practices and customs are in accordance with AMI procedures.

confirmation of compliance with the Open Meetings Act in the past 60 days;

The LTMAS board has been compliant with the Open Meetings Act in the past 60 days and prior. All agendas and minutes can be found at: <https://montessorilatierra.org/about-la-tierra/govern-ing-council/meeting-agenda-and-minutes/>

confirmation that appropriate fiscal processes are in place and were followed; budget, financial reports and educational plans were appropriately created; and approval of the appropriate documents by the board took place; and

Please see the above answer and statement from Mr. Mike Vigil.

confirm that documents governing the school are consistent.

Our governing documentation has been consistent.

In order to provide more transparency, our board is looking at areas where we can increase stakeholder participation and also provide more documentation for our parents and community. We will begin providing a newsletter to our school community in order to provide clarity on the work we are working on collectively as a board. Our next retreat will also provide the board an opportunity to rework our bylaws and policies and procedures to have less ambiguity and more clarity.

Thank you for providing our school an opportunity to provide insight on the areas we are diligently working to address. We look forward to answering any additional questions on August 19, 2022.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any additional questions. Thank you.

Best Regards,



Isaac Dakota Casados, President
LTMAS Governing Board