



LA TIERRA MONTESSORI SCHOOL OF THE ARTS AND SCIENCES

GOVERNING COUNCIL BOARD

P.O. Box 1399 Espanola, NM 87532
659 Roadrunner Rd., Ohkay Owingeh, NM 87566
phone 505-852-0200 **email** ltmas@montessorilatiera.org

Governing Council Board

Isaac Dakota Casados, President
Brenda Atencio, Vice President
Delisha Gordon-Brown, Secretary
Charlie Riddick, Member
Jacqueline Martinez-Vigil, Member

Rebekka Burt, Chair
Public Education Commission
300 Don Gaspar
Santa Fe, NM 87501-2486

December 12, 2022

RE: Response to your November 15, 2022 letter

Dear Chair Burt,

Thank you for your letter dated November 15, 2022. Our board and administrator have been working diligently with Charter School Division Director Corina Chavez to help address many of the ongoing challenges at La Tierra Montessori School of the Arts and Sciences.

Our President was unable to attend the last meeting due to a prior engagement. However, our interim head learner Mrs. Patricia Herrera, Maitai Lopez, and our Board Secretary were present.

Concerns within your letter

The Governing Council has worked diligently to address all areas of concern from the August 19, 2022 meeting. We will address each of these concerns independently:

“lack of evidence of implementation of school-specific goals; completion of a scoring protocol for those school-specific goals; and implementation of the educational program; and”

The Governing Council has worked with our new head learner and Director Chavez to address the two mission special goals: Our planes of development screening and testing and the educational training of Montessori-inspired methodology and techniques.

Background: This board was never provided an opportunity to review the charter renewal contract documentation prior to its introduction to the PEC. The special meeting, which was

held outside of the 72-hour time period as required by the Open Meeting Act, calls into question their validity. Isaac Dakota Casados (then Vice-President) and Brenda Atencio (Secretary) were not present at this meeting.

Mission Specific Goal #1

The board reworked goal one during a working session / retreat on December 10, 2022 to ensure that our teachers provide “**documentation to families and the administration supporting such mastery,**” verses just relying on observation techniques. We have provided an in-depth overview to Mrs. Chavez concerning our proposed changes to Mission Specific Goal #1.

We hope that with this must needed change in Mission Specific Goal #1, all staff will provide documented proof that our students are attaining their level of instructional understanding.

Mission Specific Goal #2

The board additionally reworked mission goal two during our work session / retreat on December 10, 2022. This goal focused on Montessori training. We have added “or local Montessori program(s) within three years of employment” to this goal and have reached out to the Indigenous Montessori Learning Center to discuss providing Montessori training to our educational staff.

Being that LTMAS resides on a Native American reservation and serves indigenous children, we believe this will be an invaluable opportunity for our school community and will offer local training to our staff. Our head learner will be holding more in-depth conversations in the coming weeks.

“any non-compliance with the expected outcomes and deadline”

As volunteers, our board has worked to address your prior concerns including: any issues with the Open Meetings Act; attending required fiscal trainings; working with the Business manager to ensure financial oversight (we are working to overcome a \$122,000 budget deficiency and submit numerous BARS to resolve issues with the past budget); completing our audit; and continued working with The Charter School Division to address any additional issues.

“Violations of the PEC contract and governing board member assurances to comply with laws and bylaws, having appropriate fiscal oversight and processes in place at all times, including the use of SEG funding and Pre-K program funding; and”

Our school and board have complied with all federal and state laws and adhered strictly to our bylaws and policies and procedures. The finance committee has had appropriate fiscal oversight and ensured processes are carried out in accordance of the law. In addition to our fiscal oversight, a internal financial review and forensic inventory are being conducted to ensure an additional layer of transparency and accountability.

LTMAS does not have a Pre-K program, as we shut down that program after the August 19, 2022 meeting.

Violations of the school’s bylaws, including governance of the school through a head administrator and governing board members through established protocols.

The board hired Mrs. Patricia Herrera and has followed strict bylaw protocols to ensure she is provided the support she needs as the leader of our school. We are thankful for her dedication to the students, staff and school community,.

“recent report of an altercation between a student and a staff member”

Due to FERPA, we can only state that law enforcement conducted an investigation (They were called prior to our head learner having an opportunity to respond to this issue). As a precaution, the head learner placed the accused staff member on leave.

A recently released police report states that the primary witness (another staff member) discounted that the assault ever occurred as they were present the accused staff member and child in question. Two other staff members (our former head learner and her daughter) were documented in the report as sharing second hand knowledge of the incident. The staff member is back at the school as the Sheriff’s office cannot corroborate the altercation.

We can assure you that our students are provided a safe and secure learning environment.

“Disputes between staff and board members continue to be discussed at the school”

The board has had no engagement with staff outside of our normal board meetings or town halls. Even then, teachers or staff have not commented in those public forums and board members do not speak directly to staff. Our head learner is in charge of all staff and their needs. Mrs. Herrera can verify.

“High staff turnover”

High staff turnover is a challenge throughout the entire state. This was a recent topic point addressed at the Legislative Education Study Committee and LTMAS is no stranger. We have had four individuals who either resigned and/or were terminated. Two of these individuals filed grievances (as well as two current staff members) against an employee— stating that this individual was why they resigned. The grievance process is ongoing.

Our head learner is actively rehiring new staff where our budget will allow.

“Board meetings minutes are not being posting in a timely manner.”

Board minutes have always been posted within the required 10-day time period. They are normally sent by our board Secretary Delisha Gordon-Brown within 24-hours of our meeting. In addition, the board posts all agendas, including board retreats or work session and town halls agendas for transparency.

On November 3, 2022, the Charter School Division site visit

This site visit occurred the day after a former teacher at LTMAS announced a “revolution” causing some staff associated with this person to call in sick. Our head learner was able to quickly respond and ensure appropriate staffing.

Our school specific goals have been addressed with Director Chavez and the educational mission and program of the school is functioning under the leadership of Mrs. Herrera.

The mission statement and school-specific goals were not approved by the governing board in an open and legal meeting pursuant to the Open Meetings Act and will need to be amended. The board has already reworked the mission statement and our goals to ensure clarity and compliance.

Conversely, the school is functioning in conformity with the contract on an educational level, fiscal level and organizational level. Student safety is a primary concern of this board and our head learner, and we have informed the Charter School Division immediately when issues arise.

As unpaid volunteers and civil servants, we are working to ensure the school is operating in the best interest of the students.