

La Tierra Montessori School of Arts and Sciences

Charter Schools Division (CSD) Site Visit Report

May 19, 2023

La Tierra Montessori School of the Arts and Sciences (LTMAS) received notice from the Public Education Commission (PEC) of their revocation decision on May 9, 2023. When contacted shortly thereafter, school leadership at LTMAS informed the Charter Schools Division (CSD) that the board would meet on Tuesday, May 16, 2023 to decide whether or not to appeal the decision. The CSD Director contacted the Chair of the Governing Council to inquire about the meeting, when the notice and agenda were not found on the school's website that day. The Chair confirmed that the meeting was canceled and would be rescheduled with proper notice. The CSD Director requested a meeting to discuss the Charter School Closure Procedure, but no time was confirmed. On Wednesday, May 17, 2023 the CSD Director sent a draft Charter School Closure Procedure to three members of the Governing Board, as well as the Head Learner confirming it would be reviewed by the Public Education Commission (PEC) during their work session and approved at the May 18, 2023 meeting. Throughout this time, CSD staff made multiple phone calls to the school that were left unanswered.

Because of the lack of responsiveness from the school leadership, the CSD conducted an unannounced visit to the school on Friday, May 18, 2023. The site visit team sought to meet with the Head Learner and School Office Manager to review and confirm dates of key actions steps in the Draft School Closure Plan. During the visit, CSD staff was also able to review the closure plan, revise dates in the plan, and briefly assess the general condition and operation of the school. Several areas of concerns were identified related to school staffing as well as school health and safety.

Staffing

During the site visit, team members were unable to verify if sufficient adults were present to ensure consistent and appropriate staffing of the school for the entirety of the school day. The following specific concerns were noted:

- Administrative staff was not present in the school building at the time of the site visit team's arrival.
- CSD staff was not able to identify if an Administrative designee was present in the absence of administrative staff, as previously directed.
- Students were observed to be left unattended/unsupervised in classrooms and throughout the school building, for various reasons, for varied amounts of time.
- Students were observed to be left outside of the school, unattended by their teacher, in inclement weather, for up to 10-15 minutes.

Concerns that the Head Learner is required to complete school-related duties (e.g., student lunch pick-up) that take her away from the school building regularly persist, despite prior directives from the Charter Schools Director and the action by the Public Education Commission regarding administrative presence at the school.

School Health and Safety

Several concerns related to school health and safety that have been noted in past visits to the school currently persist. The following specific concerns noted during this visit.

Student Supervision

The Head Learner appears to be primarily responsible for the pick-up of student meals from the school's contracted meal provider, McCurdy Charter School. This duty represents an estimated 20- 40 minute round-trip commute, which completely removes the Head Learner from building-level duties and supervision. Students were observed to be left unattended/ unsupervised in classrooms and throughout the school building, for various reasons, for varied amounts of time. Students were observed to be left outside of the school, unattended, and forgotten by their teacher, in inclement weather, for 10-15 minutes.

Security of Building Entrances

As noted following prior visits to the school, security of the building entrances continues to be a concern. Upon arrival of the site visit team, in the absence of the Head Learner or an Administrative designee, a side door to the school adjacent to the cafeteria was observed to be left propped open.

Visitor Screening

Since prior visits to the school, steps appear to have been made by the school to improve to the visitor screening process, including new equipment, however upon arrival to the school, several concerns relative to visitor screening were noted:

- The front office was not staffed.
- The sign-in sheets present were not current.
- CSD staff were not directed to provide identification or to utilize the sign-in system upon arrival to the school.
- CSD staff was left unattended upon gaining access to the school, freely wandering about the school, including gaining access to classrooms, without being appropriately identified.

Attention to and Security of all Restricted Spaces

As already noted, access to all areas of the school were available in the absence of adult and administrative supervision at various points of the visit, including but not limited to the following:

- The school kitchen
- The school health room/ Nurse's Office
 - Staff First Aid Kit was observed to be open/ unlocked and potentially accessible by students
 - Health Cabinet (with potential health hazards inside) was unlocked and potentially accessible by students
 - File cabinets were also present
- S..T.E.M./ Agriculture classroom
 - Grow lights and various plants were present, and the classroom door remains broken and unsecured.