



State Public Charter School Commission 2013 Recommendation Report

Charter Application for
Montessori of O'ahu Public Charter School

Submitted by
Montessori of O'ahu Foundation

Evaluation Team
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Introduction

In 2012, the Hawaii State Legislature passed Act 130, replacing the state’s previous charter school law, Hawaii Revised Statutes (“HRS”) Chapter 302B, with our new law, codified as HRS Chapter 302D. Act 130 instituted a rigorous, transparent accountability system that at the same time honors the autonomy and local decision-making of Hawaii’s charter schools. The law created the State Public Charter School Commission (“Commission”), assigned it statewide chartering jurisdiction and authority, and directed it to enter into State Public Charter School Contracts (“Charter Contract”) with every existing charter school and every newly approved charter school applicant.

The 2013 Request for Applications and the resulting evaluation process are rigorous, thorough, transparent, and demanding. The process is meant to ensure that charter school operators possess the capacity to implement sound strategies, practices, and methodologies. Successful applicants will clearly demonstrate high levels of expertise in the areas of education, school finance, administration, and management as well as high expectations for excellence in professional standards and student achievement.

Evaluation Process

The Commission has worked with the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (“NACSA”) to develop the new charter school application evaluation process. NACSA provided its advice and expertise in creating standardized evaluation forms, providing evaluator training, and assisting with the assembly of the evaluation teams to help ensure that the Commission implements the national best practices, policies, and standards needed to authorize high-performing charter schools. The highlights of the process are as follows:

Proposal Evaluation. The evaluation teams conducted individual and group assessments of completed applications. The Commission’s Operations staff conducted a completeness check to ensure evaluation teams only reviewed complete submissions.

Request for Clarification. After the initial review, the evaluation teams identified any areas of the application that required clarification. Applicants had the opportunity to respond to the evaluation teams’ Request for Clarification in writing to address these issues.

External Financial Review. An external review by Charter School Business Management Inc. was conducted to answer several critical questions relating to the financial information submitted by applicants. Evaluation teams could consider these reviews when drafting their evaluation.

Capacity Interview. After reviewing each response to the Request for Clarification, the evaluation teams conducted an in-person or virtual assessment of the applicant’s capacity.

Consensus Judgment. The evaluation teams came to consensus regarding whether to recommend the application for approval or denial.

The duty of the evaluation teams is to recommend approval or denial of each application based on its merits. The Commission’s Operations staff is charged with reviewing this recommendation report, the testimony at public hearings, and other information obtained during the application process in making their final recommendation to the Commission. The authority and responsibility to decide whether to approve or deny each application rests with the Commissioners.

Report Contents

This Recommendation Report includes the following:

Proposal Overview

Basic information about the proposed school as presented in the application.

Recommendation

An overall judgment regarding whether the proposal meets the criteria for approval.

Evaluation

Analysis of the proposal based on four primary areas of plan development and the capacity of the applicant to execute the plan as presented:

1. Academic Plan
2. Organizational Plan
3. Financial Plan
4. Evidence of Capacity

Rating Characteristics

Rating	Characteristics
Meets the Standard	The response reflects a thorough understanding of key issues. It addresses the topic with specific and accurate information that shows thorough preparation; presents a clear, realistic picture of how the school expects to operate; and inspires confidence in the applicant's capacity to carry out the plan effectively.
Does Not Meet the Standard	The response meets the criteria in some respects but has substantial gaps, lacks detail and/or requires additional information in one or more areas.
Falls Far Below the Standard	The response is wholly undeveloped or significantly incomplete; demonstrates lack of preparation; or otherwise raises substantial concerns about the viability of the plan or the applicant's ability to carry it out.

Proposal Overview

Proposed School Name

Montessori of O’ahu Public Charter School

Applicant Name

Montessori of O’ahu Foundation

Mission and Vision

Mission: Montessori of O’ahu Public Charter School (“Mo’O PCS”) is committed to creating a high-quality school publicly accessible to families of Oahu which is consistent with the standards set forth by the Association Montessori Internationale (“AMI”). Our school will be a structured, nurturing environment grounded in the cultures of Hawaii where children can grow into happy, healthy and productive citizens of their communities.

Vision: We envision Mo’O PCS becoming the first publicly funded and accessible Montessori school in Hawaii. We believe that the wisdom of the Montessori approach to pedagogy, as first articulated by Dr. Maria Montessori more than 100 years ago, with its deep respect for the inherent human tendencies of children, provides us with a strong foundation from which to implement a successful school. It is an approach to teaching, learning and preparing a classroom that has proven effective in many corners of the world with many different types of children. We propose Montessori as an alternative voice within the education landscape on Oahu and throughout Hawaii. As parents, we know that the Montessori method works with any child, having witnessed its positive effects on our own children.

Geographical Area

East Oahu, from Kalihi to Kakaako to Aina Haina

Enrollment Summary

Grade Level	Number of Students					
	Year 1 2015	Year 2 2016	Year 3 2017	Year 4 2018	Year 5 2019	Capacity 2020
K	8	10	20	32	40	40
1	30	30	30	48	58	120
2						
3						
4	15	25	30	32	49	120
5						
6						
7	-	-	-	-	-	-
8	-	-	-	-	-	-
9	-	-	-	-	-	-
10	-	-	-	-	-	-
11	-	-	-	-	-	-
12	-	-	-	-	-	-
Totals	53	65	80	112	147	280

Executive Summary

Montessori of O’ahu Public Charter School

Recommendation

Deny

Summary Analysis

The Evaluation Team recommends that the application be denied.

The applicant failed to provide enough information about private programs planned to be run by the affiliated nonprofit organization. The significant overlap between the existing nonprofit’s board and the proposed governing board of the charter school raises potential conflicts of interest that potentially violate the Hawaii Code of Ethics.

The nonprofit organization plans to operate a private preschool program and will serve as a pass-through for tuition collected for that program. The Evaluation Team is g concerned about whether the public school would subsidize the private program. The two schools would share some resources, including a facility and a teacher who would work in a classroom serving both public and private students.

Additionally, the application included an enrollment policy that gave preferences to children of staff and founding families and to children with previous Montessori experience. These policies could effectively hinder socioeconomic and/or demographic diversity in the proposed charter school.

Finally, although members of the applicant group have education experience, most of the experience is in a private setting. The Evaluation Team is concerned about the applicant’s ability to effectively serve all students, including English Language Learners and those with special needs.

The applicant demonstrated strength in curriculum and instruction and is passionate about creating Hawaii’s first public Montessori school. The applicant group is talented and possesses many of the skills and experience needed to open a school. But, they fail to demonstrate capacity for adapting a private school to the public environment.

Summary of Section Ratings

Opening and maintaining a successful, high-performing charter school depends on having a complete, coherent plan and identifying highly capable individuals to execute that plan. It is not an endeavor for which strengths in some areas can compensate for material weakness in others.

Therefore, in order to receive a recommendation for approval, the application must Meet the Standard in all areas.

Academic Plan

Does Not Meet the Standard

Financial Plan

Does Not Meet the Standard

Organizational Plan

Does Not Meet the Standard

Evidence of Capacity

Does Not Meet the Standard

Academic Plan

Montessori of O'ahu Public Charter School

Rating

Does Not Meet the Standard

Plan Summary

The proposed school plans to provide a public Montessori program in Oahu. The academic pedagogy will follow the educational philosophy of Dr. Maria Montessori, as implemented through teacher training programs offered by the AMI.

The USA branch of AMI is in the process of mapping and aligning the curriculum to Common Core. The school will serve children in multi-age groups. Due to the current lack of funding available for students aged 3-5, the applicant plans to offer a private program through an affiliated nonprofit organization, which would be funded on a fee-for-service basis. The applicant also plans to fundraise to support the work of the school and eventually may coordinate an AMI Teacher Training Initiative.

The admissions policy provides preferences for children of staff and founding families (which include those on the initial governing board, advisory boards, committees, and working groups). There is also a sibling preference and a preference for students four and older who have attended a Montessori program for one year.

Analysis

The academic plan does not meet the standard for approval. The applicant demonstrated knowledge of curriculum and effective instructional practices, but there is no final timeline for completion of aligning the AMI curriculum to Common Core. There are other concerns about student recruitment, admissions, and enrollment; special needs and at-risk populations; and the relationship between the private foundation and proposed charter school.

The application includes an admissions policy that gives preference both to founding members' children and students with Montessori experience. Because there are currently only private Montessori options in Hawaii, these preferences could effectively hinder socioeconomic and/or demographic diversity in the proposed charter school. Its recruitment is primarily focused on students already in Montessori programs, and enrollment projections for the first year of operation directly correlate with the number of students from the applicant group's peer-to-peer network. During the interview, the applicant seemed willing to change the recruitment and admissions strategies and policies, but still failed to explain how the school would enroll and attract a diverse student body.

The applicant lacks experience in modifying curriculum and instruction for at-risk and special needs students; it could not prove a track record of success in serving these students. During the interview, the applicant demonstrated the curriculum's flexibility to meet the needs of individual students. But, when asked for evidence of success, the applicant stated that rigorous research is lacking and provided only one anecdotal example. Additionally, the applicant did not demonstrate a clear plan to monitor the English proficiency progress of English Language Learner students.

Finally, there are numerous unanswered questions about the complicated relationship between the affiliated nonprofit organization and proposed charter school. In some ways, the nonprofit seems like an education service provider/charter management organization; it will run a teacher training institute and a private Montessori program that shares staff and resources with the proposed school. But, the applicant was not forthcoming in explaining the relationship. Important information regarding the nonprofit's organizational structure and its legal relationship to the school was omitted. Also, many members of the proposed charter school's governing board currently work together at a private Montessori school, but the applicant did not provide information about that school's academic performance.

Organizational Plan

Montessori of O’ahu Public Charter School

Rating

Does Not Meet the Standard

Plan Summary

The proposed school’s governing board will have between 9 and 17 members and meet at least quarterly. At the time of the interview, there were fifteen members on the board. The application states the proposed board “represents the target population and key stakeholder and truly reflects the spirit and intent of the proposed charter school.”

The affiliated nonprofit organization has a board of directors comprised of members of the proposed school’s governing board. The applicant acknowledges the overlap between the boards and intends to recruit additional members for both groups. According to the application, the nonprofit will support the charter school and serve as an advisory board to the governing board. It will also run a private preschool program that shares staff and resources with the proposed school, and it plans to coordinate an AMI Teacher Training Initiative.

There will also be a standing facilities committee and a parent faculty association, which will both serve in an advisory capacity to the proposed school’s board. The applicant plans to have an 8-hour work day and to pay teachers above contractual rates. If it is unable to negotiate a supplemental agreement, it will modify the instructional strategy or teaching hours.

All lead teachers will be required to possess or obtain AMI certification and to maintain membership with a professional Montessori organization. The affiliated nonprofit will support the professional development of the school through the AMI Teacher Training Initiative.

Analysis

The organizational plan does not meet the standard for approval. The primary concerns are with governance, professional development, and performance management.

The governing board possesses academic, financial, management, and legal knowledge. But, significant overlap between the boards of the proposed school and the affiliated nonprofit organization raises serious ethical concerns. Moreover, the Evaluation Team learned through independent research that the nonprofit is opening a private school serving ages 3-12 this year; this information was not explicitly stated in the application.

Of the school’s 15 governing board members, three would likely become employed by the school and resign from the board. Of the remaining 12, seven indicated that they currently serve on the board of the nonprofit. Most, if not all, governing board members have children currently attending Montessori programs.

Under Hawaii’s Code of Ethics, governing board members are employees of the State and cannot take any official action that would directly affect “a business[, including nonprofit organizations,] or other undertaking” where they have a significant financial interest. Consequently, more than half of the nonprofit’s board might be prohibited from taking official action for the nonprofit board, according to the State Ethics Commission. The applicant intends to recruit more governing board members, but the applicant did not provide a sound plan for transforming the board, nor did it address real or perceived conflicts of interest between the two boards.

Also, the proposed school's governing board bylaws include a nondiscrimination policy that specifically omits language from Hawaii Revised Statutes §302D-34 prohibiting admissions based on academic ability. Thus, concerns with the admissions policy addressed in the academic plan resurface in the organizational plan.

There are also concerns with the professional development plans. Teachers would be required to possess or obtain AMI certification and maintain membership with a professional Montessori organization. Professional development would be supported by the nonprofit through its AMI Teacher Training Initiative. The Evaluation Team has concerns regarding these requirements and the connection to the nonprofit's fee-for-service training institute. Additionally, these requirements might be prohibited by the teacher's union without a supplemental collective bargaining agreement.

Financial Plan

Montessori of O'ahu Public Charter School

Rating

Does Not Meet the Standard

Plan Summary

Budgeted revenues and expenses for year one are \$529,486 and \$497,279, respectively.

Budgeted revenues and expenses for year three are \$1,067,517 and \$1,037,701, respectively.

The fund balance at end of year one is estimated to be \$80,706. The fund balance at end of year three is estimated to be \$157,808.

The applicant has conservatively estimated minimal fundraising revenues in years one through three. However, included in revenues is tuition from the associated nonprofit organization's private preschool for 3 and 4 year olds in the amounts of \$183,932, \$315,724, and \$528,607 in years one through three, respectively.

Analysis

The financial plan does not meet the standard for approval. Although the applicant has a thorough understanding of financial policy and procedures, there are other items of concern.

The budget projections and accompanying narrative lack specificity in many areas. For instance, budget assumptions are not detailed for key revenue items, including funding for special education, federal nutrition program, and program fees. Additionally, several expense items fluctuate significantly from year to year without explanation (e.g., clerical salaries, per pupil textbook costs, etc.). Furthermore, there is a lack of clarity regarding the relationship between the private preschool operated by the associated nonprofit organization and the proposed school. In the Request for Clarification response, the applicant states that the nonprofit will serve as a pass-through for the tuition collected from the private preschool and that the proposed school will receive whatever tuition is paid on behalf of those students. This raises the concern that a public charter school would be providing, or subsidizing, services to private school students. This concern is highlighted by the multiage primary environment. There will be classroom integration of the private preschoolers (ages 3 and 4) and public kindergarteners, and resources, including staff and facilities, would be shared. However, the two programs do not operate under separate budgets. The evaluation team is concerned that the applicant envisions a structure in which public charter school effectively collects tuition. State law prevents charter schools from collecting tuition.

Evidence of Capacity

Montessori of O’ahu Public Charter School

Rating

Does Not Meet the Standard

Plan Summary

The applicant listed 14 governing board members. Another was added by the time of the interview. Key members of the applicant team include Michael Lawrence Gallagher, Mary “Mamie” Lawrence Gallagher, Miniver “Minnie” Wales, and Martha “Molly” Jenkins.

Mr. Lawrence Gallagher, governing board chair, is currently a senior business analyst at First Hawaiian Bank. He also has experience in software development, business analysis, and financial forecasting, planning, and reporting.

Ms. Lawrence Gallagher has experience in operations and education. She is currently director of operations at Hoaloha o ke kai Montessori School. She is currently pursuing a Masters of Elementary Education with a concentration on Montessori at the University of Hartford.

Ms. Wales has over a decade of experience in private Montessori education. She is certified for Primary and Elementary education from AMI and is currently director of education at Hoaloha o ke kai Montessori School, which she helped found.

Ms. Jenkins is certified in Primary Teaching from AMI and has served since August 2011 as a lead primary guide at Hoaloha o ke Kai Montessori School. Prior to that experience, she was a sociology instructor and a teaching assistant at the University of Washington.

Analysis

The capacity of the applicant does not meet the standard for approval. Overall, the applicant group demonstrated some academic, organizational, and financial capacity to design, develop, and operate the proposed school. However, the applicant group’s experience is primarily within private domains, and there are significant concerns in the team’s ability to successfully adapt to the realm of public education.

These concerns are most evident in the organizational plan, as explained in the corresponding analysis of that section by the Evaluation Team.

Of the four members of the applicant group described in the summary, only one has employment experience in a public school: During the 2001-02 school year, Mr. Gallagher taught high school physics at a public school in Massachusetts. Regarding academic capacity, the application materials identified some weaknesses regarding the applicant’s ability to effectively serve the needs of students with special needs and English Language Learners, as described in the academic plan analysis of this report. Additionally, the applicant did not demonstrate an understanding of the expectations the school would have through a contract with the Commission. The applicant group indicated on their questionnaires that success of the school would be measured by factors such as student happiness, attendance, re-enrollment, and adherence to AMI Montessori pedagogy and curriculum. These responses indicate a primary commitment to stakeholder satisfaction and suggest either an ignorance of or an indifference to state accountability requirements and their implications for effective performance management of a public charter school.

Evaluator Biographies

Stephanie Klupinski

Ms. Klupinski is the Commission's Organizational Performance Manager. She previously worked for the Ohio Alliance for Public Charter Schools as Vice President of Legal and Legislative Affairs. She is an accomplished author with numerous education policy publications and has been a speaker at several conferences on charter schools and charter school law. She is also a Teach for America alumnus and holds a Juris Doctorate and a Master of Public Policy.

Kathy Olsen

Ms. Olsen is currently a charter school facilities financing consultant for clients such as KIPP and the Walton Family Foundation. She has extensive experience in charter school facilities financing, including her prior position as the Director of the Educational Facilities Financing Center where she oversaw the origination of \$100 million in facilities financing for 40 charter schools. She has co-authored and edited several publications on charter school financing and was a founding member and is vice chair of the Coney Island Preparatory Public Charter School. She holds a Master of Government Administration from the University of Pennsylvania, Fels Center of Government.

Jeff Poentis

Mr. Poentis is the Commission's Financial Performance Specialist. He has extensive accounting experience and is a Certified Public Accountant with over 18 years of experience in both the private and public sectors. He holds a Bachelor of Business Administration from the University of Hawaii at Manoa.

Kirsten Rogers

Ms. Rogers is the Commission's Academic Performance Specialist. She has experience as a middle school teacher at both a charter school in Tennessee and at Wheeler Intermediate, a DOE school in Hawaii. She is a Teach for America alumnus, a former corps member advisor, and former content community leader for the organization. She also holds a Master of Education in Teaching from the University of Hawaii at Manoa.

Stephanie Shipton

Ms. Shipton is currently an Institutional Analyst at the Hawaii Department of Education in the Office of Strategic Reform. She co-authored Hawaii's ESEA Flexibility application and is currently working on a number of projects, including the Comprehensive Student Support System, implementation of Common Core State Standards, and STEM education. She has worked as a policy analyst with the National Governors Association where she worked on education policy relating to subjects like state strategies to support high quality charter schools and supporting learning outside of the school day. She has researched and written a number of education policy publications, case studies, and governor's guides and holds a Master of Political Science degree.

Charter School Business Management Inc. (External Financial Review)

CSBM is a firm experienced and focused on financial and organizational consultancy for charter schools. It is based in New York and has extensive nationwide charter school experience.