

Chippewa Valley Montessori Charter School Governance Board Newsletter

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CVMCS Gives Annual Presentation to Board

By Todd Johnson, Principal

Every year the two Eau Claire Area School District (ECASD) charter schools are asked to provide an update to the school board. I recently fulfilled this request on December 21, 2015. I was asked by the superintendent to focus on programs within our school that are new since the last time I presented. The people that were in the audience for this presentation included school board members, district administrators, various media members, and the general public. It was also televised on the Public Access TV network. This was my moment to inform people about our highly effective and wonderful school. I was given approximately 10 minutes to talk and 10 minutes to answer questions. Here are the projects and information that I covered.

The first item I presented was the work of the Identity Committee. They've been busy defining what makes our school unique when compared to the other elementary schools in the district. The committee defined specific foundations and methods that we embrace as a staff. This approach is based on the whole child mind set, which means we consider the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive parts of the child when making decisions.

Last year Ms. Pam went to the Innovative Zone conference. She listened to a presentation on a Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) program called Project Lead the Way (PLTW). She shared her information with a few peers and secured funds to take the PLTW training last summer. Ms. Jen, Ms. Jenny, and Ms. Pam attended the



A second grader examines light through a colored material during a Project Lead the Way activity.

training and they have been piloting PLTW in their classrooms. The purpose of the pilot program is to determine if PLTW is a good fit for our school. It has many of the components of the Identity Committee's foundations and methods. If we determine it to be a successful fit then we'll request the Governance Board to approve PLTW to be a part of the E1 and E2 curriculum.



Children enjoy pizza and cake made from vegetables harvested from the school garden at the Harvest Festival.

One of the exciting additions to our school program is our garden. The garden promotes collaboration between our parents and teachers. Volunteers work with our students to plant, care for, and harvest our vegetables. This is a highly effective approach for the children to see the relevance with learning math, reading, and science. This year our parents came up with the very clever idea of making pizzas from the items harvested out of our garden. They contacted Foster's Cheese House to see if they could bring their fire truck pizza oven to the school to make pizzas. They agreed and the children were thrilled with this activity.



This mural by Matt Philleo decorates the wall of the CVMCS library.

Our IMC recently received a small renovation. This included a beautiful mural that was painted by one of our former parents and a change to the physical layout. We also decided to change how we approach our library instructional time. In the past we've used a very traditional model where the students come to the library and receive a lesson by the librarian. There wasn't a connection between what the children were learning in the classroom and in the library. This year the librarians and teachers collaborate

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Committee Works to Define CVMCS's Identity

By Gail Scukanec, Governance Board Member and Identity Committee Chair

In 2014, it became clear through comments made by ECASD Board of Education members, CVMCS Governance Board members, and CVMCS staff that the school needed to better articulate its identity. In other words, what makes our school unique and how can we express that in a unified voice? That fall an outside facilitator was solicited by CVMCS to assist staff with defining the school's identity. A Governance Board committee was established, primarily consisting of teachers, to continue the discussion. The committee used the work of the facilitator, information received from St. Catherine University in Minneapolis, and information from the International Montessori Society and the American Montessori Society. After many meetings the committee presented a draft document to the entire CVMCS staff, received comments, and revised the document. The final document, as described below, was presented to staff in September 2015.

The identity of CVMCS is based on 10 foundational values and principles (referred to as Foundations) and 13 Methods, all intended for the fullest possible development of the whole child and based on the values and methods set forth by Maria Montessori. A graphic was developed and each of the Foundations and Methods described.

As an example, one of the 10 Foundations of CVMCS is Independence. In terms of our CVMCS Identity, "achieving independence is a major goal in a child's development. Maria Montessori believed that every child is born with a potential for independence. When children are able to do things for themselves, they gain confidence and self-esteem and learn how to think and problem solve."

One of the 13 Methods of CVMCS is Freedoms within Limits. In terms of our CVMCS Identity, "Working within parameters set by their guides, students experience freedom in three

primary areas: freedom of choice, freedom to repeat, and freedom of movement. Freedom of choice builds self-regulation, confidence and intrinsic motivation. Freedom to repeat fosters problem solving skills and concentration. Freedom of movement can facilitate development of coordination and can accommodate various learning styles. All three freedoms develop independence. Of course, these freedoms must also be carefully balanced with appropriate and consistent limitations." These two examples are for the purposes of illustration and are no more, or less, important than the other Foundations and Methods of the CVMCS identity.

The work of the Identity Committee helped the school frame new vision and mission statements and continues to meet. Our objectives for the year are to ensure that our Identity is kept alive in the school and is communicated to parents, the school board, and the broader community.

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once a month to connect the learning. The teachers are finding that this is really a much more effective approach that increases student engagement in their learning.



CVMCS students and Ms. Jen give a presentation about the film festival at a technology conference in Minneapolis.

Montessori held our first Film Festival at the end of last year. This was a tremendous success thanks to Jeremy Harrison and the rest of the staff. Children had the opportunity to write stories and turn them into films by using claymation, stop motion, etc. A committee of community members

reviewed the films and chose the top ones. Mr. Jeremy, Ms. Jen, and several students presented this project at an educational technology conference in Minneapolis. We discovered that many of our very reluctant learners excelled at this project.

Lastly, I talked about our ambitious outdoor environment project. I explained how this is connected with the neighborhood and parents. I showed the film clip of the school receiving the School Rules contest that will go to support our new playground equipment.

The school board was very receptive to my presentation. Their comments were all very positive. The final question I was asked pertained to our efforts to grow the diversity of our school's student population. I stated we are making positive gains but they're never as fast as we would like them to be. I followed up with the school board by sending them a report on our diversity data and objectives for this school year.

Board Meeting Highlights

At its January meeting the Governance Board:

- Heard from Mr. Todd regarding the Annual Report to the school board.
- Received a presentation on the CVMCS Film Festival by Mr. Jeremy.
- Discussed staffing of the building secretary position.
- Reviewed progress on strategic plan objectives.

The next meeting of the CVMCS Governance Board is Monday, **February 1, 2016 at 12:00 p.m.** in CVMCS library. It is an open meeting and the public is invited to attend. The agenda for the meeting will be available at the school in advance of the meeting.

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