



## Minutes

**October 19, 2023**

**Catskill Montessori School, Catskill**

**School Tour at 3:30 p.m.**

**Meeting at 4:30 p.m.**

Meeting called to order at 4:31pm.

Attendees included: (in Person) Diane Lanci, Kat Walker, Diane Nickerson, Sheba Kapur, Lisanne Pinciotti, Gaura Tester, Roja Arabi, Barbara Altbrandt, Sherrie Clune, Amy Klein, Karen Kapoor, and Tom Muro; and (via Zoom) Sadiya Muniruddin, Denise Brazeau, KT Korngold, Jennifer Fuggini, and Anna Rita Pergolizzi-Wentworth.

President Diane Lanci welcomed the attendees for a hybrid meeting held at Catskill Montessori School. Secretary Diane Nickerson motioned for the approval of the minutes of the May 2023 Meeting, Diane Lanci seconded the motion, and the minutes were unanimously approved. Treasurer Sadiya Muniruddin gave the financial report (attached). The current account balance remains at \$10,136.32.

Diane L. and Sheba attended the Montessori for Public Policy Initiative (MPPI) for further training about developing advocacy policy and procedures for our state, including creating criteria and a process for verified schools in NY, i.e. group sizes, ratios, small pieces of materials (considered possible choking hazards), etc. They invited NYSMA members to join our Advocacy Committee to participate in this continued work. This year, NYSMA donated \$500 to the MPPI as part of a matching funds campaign. Sheba is a member of the MPPI board; MPPI was established 5 years ago and works to: Acknowledge and disrupt implicit and explicit bias in ourselves, our organization, and the Montessori community; Exemplify racially equitable practices, policies, and procedures; Examine who has power and redistributing it as we strategize and make decisions; and Work for policy change that clears obstacles to culturally responsive Montessori education and creates access to Montessori education for all children. MPPI represents forty-one states so far and employs a three-person team to provide support for policy change. Sheba shared that MPPI offers professional development for advocacy training and for establishing a “movement” in our state to influence desired changes, i.e. certification/licensing and recognizing Montessori credentials. Funding is available for NYSMA members to attend, including classroom teachers, the annual MPPI conference.

Diane L reported that there is progress in collaborative work OCFS and *QualityStarsNY*, and more Montessori early childhood programs can take advantage of the recognition and support offered by this statewide program.

Diane N reported about the NYSED newly implemented regulation for “Substantial Equivalency” having to do with the curricula, instruction, learning and assessments of students in religious and independent K-12 schools. This regulation does not have oversight of infant, toddler or early childhood programs, even if they include the kindergarten year, as long as those programs are licensed with OCFS (in Upstate NY) or with DOH (in NYC). Schools are required to register with the local public school district within which their school is geographically located and determine a pathway from a list of seven to show their school’s Substantial Equivalency to the standards, curriculum, instruction, learning and assessments of the public schools in New York State. The timeline is to register by October and to determine a pathway to report by December. An annual assessment of each school will take place in each subsequent December. Examples of pathways include: grade 3 – 8 standardized assessments, Regents exams, or accreditation. For our member schools, AMS Accreditation, qualifies a school as Substantially Equivalent. More information can be found under “Advocacy” at the NYSMA website.

As a result of Diane N’s work to investigate the details and implications of this regulation in consultation with the leaders of the NYS Coalition of Independent and Religious Schools (NYSCIRS), an organization of six school associations including the NYS Association of Independent Schools (NYSAIS), NYSMA was invited to have representation on the NYSED Commissioner’s Advisory Council (CAC) of Religious and Independent Schools to represent NYS Montessorians. Diane N was nominated to represent NYSMA at monthly virtual work groups of the CAC and quarterly in person meetings. The second quarterly meeting will take place at the annual Religious and Independent School Educators (RISE) Conference, which will be attended by Diane N and Diane L.

Lisanne shared that so many of our goals and committee work are intertwined. The PD becomes a benefit for members and the work toward our goals. There are eight new regional membership liaisons who will reach out to schools and identify local needs. This will create smaller communities with networks of support and collegiality within each region. Local quarterly meetings may occur in the near future, as will work towards an annual statewide conference. A process calendar will guide liaisons for annual membership objectives, and align their goals with the Advocacy Committee.

Kat W shared that a form will be distributed to join the Advocacy Committee as the work of this committee grows, to continue to speak as one unified voice.

**Presenter:** Gaura Tester, Head of School, Catskill Montessori School

**Topic:** Earth Stewards

Gaura presented the importance of providing opportunities for the child to connect with nature in concrete and consistent ways such that they develop a strong and dynamic relationship with the natural environment of flora, fauna and the Earth's soil and geology. The focus of practicing earth stewardship at Catskill Montessori is the relationship building between each child and their experience with nature.

Through explicit lesson presentation and through the guides' modeling, the children practice responsible use and protection of the natural environment through conservation and sustainable practices to enhance ecosystem resilience along side of human well-being. Some examples include spending many hours each day outside on their campus in outdoor nature play spaces, gardens, orchards, areas for domesticated animals (chickens, etc), the edge of the woods, and the forest where there's a creek. The children have access to feeding and tending to the animals and harvest plants; they have access to wood planing hand-powered machines for removing the bark and smoothing branches to create stool legs or gardenscape edges; and they are working on filling recycled plastic jugs with plastic wrappers and bags to then be used as bricks to build structures outside, mortared with mud and straw, for a goat barn for example.

Earth stewardship within the Montessori method incorporates forming the path of social and ecological change, beginning at the local level with intentions to reach a global scale. Childhood itself, over the first planes of development, is a sensitive period for being drawn to nature; and, Montessori guides have an opportunity to show children how they might have meaningfully impact and redefine the human relationship with our planet and reduce risks of detrimental global changes that could otherwise seriously degrade Earth's life supporting systems.

Meeting adjourned by consensus at 5:36pm.

**Next Meeting:**

Wednesday, January 24, 2024, 4 p.m., The Montessori Schools | SoHo, Manhattan