



**TO:** Members of the Board of Education

**FROM:** Jennifer Cheatham, Superintendent of Schools

**DATE:** January 26, 2017

**SUBJECT:** Isthmus Montessori Academy New Charter Proposal

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**Issue:**

On September 26, 2016 the Board of Education voted to invite Isthmus Montessori Academy (IMA) to submit their full proposal to become a charter school in MMSD starting in the 2017/18 school year. On January 23rd, the Board discussed the Isthmus Montessori proposal with action expected on January 30th.

**Background:**

In June 2016, MMSD launched a revised [charter school process](#) that requires any new charter school proposal to provide the Charter School Committee (Committee) with an initial application by August . If the Board approves the initial application, the applicant will be asked to prepare a full detailed school application by November 1 for review by an internal Charter Committee using the publically available [Original Proposal Application Reviewer's Guide](#). Under this new process, if any applicant should receive a “fails to meet expectations” the applicant would not be recommended for a new school charter in the upcoming school year. However, each applicant is given the opportunity to resolve any areas that do not meet expectations after the Charter Committee’s first review of the application. Ultimately, the Board then takes action on the full proposal by January 30.

On September 12, 2016, the Board discussed the IMA initial proposal. Although the Charter Review Committee did not recommend that the Board invite IMA to submit a full proposal, due to the results of the Committee review of the initial proposal, the Board did invite IMA to submit a full proposal in order to learn more about the model and the applicant’s plan.

**Analysis:**

On November 1, 2016, the Charter Review Committee reviewed the full proposal and rated a number of areas as did not meet expectations. IMA was provided approximately a week to revise their application to address the areas of growth in the application. IMA submitted the revised full proposal on November 21.

The strengths of the proposal include:

- The value we see in the Montessori approach to instruction
- Its approach to family engagement and partnership

- Its approach to behavior management
- The school's commitment to diversity and ensuring access to families that might not otherwise have access to a Montessori educational option

However, the application continues to have a few areas that did not meet expectations. Those areas are primarily:

- Lack of information on the number of students anticipated to be exempted from the lottery process
- Lack of clear rationale and methodology for calculating goals on academic growth and proficiency
- Lack of clear staffing model utilized to support the instructional model and the needs of the students in their demographic areas of focus such as English Language Learners (ELLs)
- Overall budget assumptions that are critical to the financial sustainability of the model were not supported, including student enrollment projections, staffing model, estimates regarding number of students from within and out of the district, transportation costs, and fundraising revenue

### **Recommendation**

In line with the [Original Proposal Application Reviewer's Guide](#), the MMSD Administration Team cannot recommend that the Board of Education approve the IMA application for school year 2017/18.

Should the Board choose to move forward with the IMA application, in concept, the Administration recommends that the Board of Education only consider approval for the school year 2018/19 contingent on the submission of an updated plan which addresses all areas of the rubric that do not meet expectations by May 31, 2017. Those areas of the application are:

- Student Body and Demographics
- School Data
- Curriculum Assessment & Instruction
- Financial Operations

MMSD subject matter experts will provide support, as requested, to ensure these plans meet expectations and have appropriate levels of implementation support.