

SITE EVALUATION REPORT

Campus Name: Silver Sands Montessori
Grade Levels: K-8
School Leader: Marlo Tsuchiyama
Purpose of Evaluation: This evaluation is focused on academic performance and organizational effectiveness components of the school. It includes classroom observations, focus group results, and detailed data analysis of student achievement.
Conducted Date: December 11, 2019
Conducted By: Karen Gordon, Mark Modrcin

SUMMARY OF SITE EVALUATION

The mission of Silver Sands Montessori is to provide quality Montessori education in an environment that encourages a child's love of learning and respect for self, others, community and the world. The school's vision is built around the concepts of self-directed learning, multi-aged classrooms, collaboration, creativity and social responsibility. It is based on the child's developmental needs for freedom within limits, in a carefully prepared environment of learning through tangible lessons, sensory appealing materials and guided experiences. The Montessori method of instruction or pedagogy teaches the whole child, to help cultivate independence, love of learning, understanding of cultural differences, respect for self and others, above and beyond their academic learning. Students learn how they can contribute to their classroom, their community, and the environment around them

Site Evaluation team members observed kindergarten, lower and upper elementary, as well as middle school classrooms. There was evidence of the mission taking place at the school in terms of students being engaged, comfortable, and respecting one another. A high level of respect from student to student was clear in the form of students working in groups, or pairs to complete learning assignments. Students were calm, focused, and comfortable within all classrooms. The environment provided by the school was enhanced by dedicated staff that show tremendous respect for students and developing their love of learning.

I. CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

Classroom Environment	Evidence Observed	School-wide Rating
Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport	Student/Teacher interactions were warm and positive in the majority of classrooms. In multiple classrooms, teachers were observed providing one-on-one support to individual students, and did so in a respectful manner. There was one classroom in which the team overheard a teacher become frustrated and said, “you can all thank this student for having to stop working for two minutes.” But this was an isolated case and NOT representative of most of the classrooms at the school.	Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory Not Observed
Establishing a Culture for Learning	In many classrooms the students assumed much of the responsibility for learning and appeared to take great pride in their work. The classrooms were an environment where student achievement and self-directed learning are prioritized and valued.	Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory Not Observed
Managing Classroom Procedures	Classroom procedures were well-managed in all classrooms and students knew how to ask for assistance, help others, obtain materials, and transition to new learning.	Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory Not Observed
Managing Student Behavior	Students were respectful to both the teacher and to each other in most of classrooms. There were instances when a student was presenting information to others and students were quiet and listened intently. In other classrooms there was a cooperative group project learning taking place and a natural academic conversation about the learning topic took place within the groups. In some classrooms students were able to work independently while others worked in pairs and still others worked in a small group setting with the teacher. This could not happen without a strong foundational set of student behavior management. No student misbehaviors were observed during the evaluation.	Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory Not Observed

II. INSTRUCTIONAL OBSERVATION

Instructional Observation	Evidence Observed	School-wide Rating
Communicating with Students	Students use agendas and weekly goal sheets to both help them understand content throughout lessons as well as hold themselves accountable for learning. Agendas and weekly goal sheets foster communication home and help students maintain their focus. Teachers provide some whole group direct instruction as well as small group and then one to one communication with students.	Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory Not Observed
Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques	Teachers encourage discussion in the form of student to student discussion of content, sharing whole group, and one to one between teacher and student.	Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory Not Observed
Engaging Students in Learning	Student engagement levels were between 90% to 100%. Most students were observed to be self-directed and highly engaged in learning tasks. This involved independent work, group inquiry, and students working in pairs. This worked well because in several of the multi-age classrooms, students in lower grades routinely ask students in upper grades for assistance when a barrier to their learning occurs. This results in those within lower grades receiving instant support and those in upper grades reviewing known content from time to time. There are also strong bonds between students with a clear emphasis on learning and growth.	Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory Not Observed
Using Assessment in Instruction	The team did not observe formal assessment of learning; however, an on-going self-assessment and fulfillment of weekly goals was observed multiple times. Students select weekly goals and work to fulfill their own pre-set goals continuously.	Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory Not Observed

III. ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Observations	Evidence Observed	School-wide Rating
Mission driven operations	A clear alignment between the operations, systems, and school-wide procedures by the staff was observed to be implemented to a high degree within classrooms, on the playground, and from the perspective of multiple stakeholders. A true love of learning as well as respect between all students was observed multiple times on the day of the evaluation.	Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory Not Observed

Managing Schoolwide Procedures	There are several school-wide procedures in place at the school. These procedures were found to function smoothly and include student drop off, entering and exiting the classrooms, and middle school passing periods. For the most part, the students understand classroom and schoolwide procedures and expectations.	Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory Not Observed
Maintaining a Safe Environment	The SPCSA team observed no incidents of unsafe behavior. Classrooms and common areas are maintained in an orderly and safe manner.	Distinguished Proficient Basic Unsatisfactory Not Observed

IV. FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY

Group	No. of Participants	Duration of Focus Group
Governing Board¹	3	45
Parents/Families	6	45
Students	8	35
School Leadership	4	35
Staff	6	45

Governing Board:

- The board reported that Silver Sand’s academic information is generally positive although test results have fluctuated over time. Information about parent participation and test results are reported to the board on a regular basis. The board is appraised of the high and low points of testing results and a plan to address each is shared by school leaders.
- A member of the board shared that at Silver Sands the Montessori method is the primary focus however the board understands that it must also monitor testing results. A board member said that the board looks at testing results and they are currently below where we would like them to be and would like to see them improve.
- The board is aware of the strategies the school has in place to improve the academic performance at the school. One board member commented, “Over time I’ve been involved in other schools and we review results and activities to support positive testing results.” He went on to say that activities such as wake up your brain on test day, and a focus on diet and sleep are incorporated during the week of testing to help students focus on the content of the test. In addition, the familiarity of the testing techniques such as technology and ability to communicate information using a keyboard and mouse for example can cause anxiety. Therefore, the school has

¹ Three members of the five-member board participated. Quorum was not met, and Open Meeting Law was not violated.

made efforts to support students with being familiar so that they can focus on sharing what they know about the content on test day.

- The Board convenes about 6-8 times per year. Meeting agendas are structured through a process where the board secretary queries board members about what to include on the agenda and then creates draft. The executive team provides regular updates on the topics of school operations, and special education items on a routine basis.
- The board has experienced great stability, which was identified as a strength during the focus group. One person shared: “We have members of the community interested in joining the board and have great continuity. Typically, when a board member must leave, it is because they are moving, but in general we have a good mix of educators, community members, accountants, finance experts and those with legal backgrounds. We don’t struggle to maintain membership and 80% of the board is quite actively engaged.”
- The board makes a point of staying up to date with NRS and open meeting laws. Additionally, the Silver Sands Board has an annual retreat with the objective to review open meeting law. Board members have attended trainings offered by the state to keep up with other changes.
- Each of the board members was highly supportive of the school. One board member had their kids attend the school K-5 and has found it to be a welcoming and warm environment. The Board member went on to say that he coached the basketball team on a small scale, and it grew and remains in place to this day. Another member shared that he is a big fan of the school, a cheerleader for them as it is a great environment which fosters student success.
- A board member shared that they were involved with charters a few years back and it is interesting to find out about concerns and watch the school evolve. The culture, operations, and policies have been very open and progressive for the community.
- All board members agreed that the administrators have a real interest and love for each student and follow through on policies. Ultimately, board members recognize that administrators have a strong desire to see kids excel and be happy.

Parents/Families:

- There were a variety of reasons that families chose Silver Sands Montessori for their students, including: geographic location, having attended a Montessori school themselves, having taught at a Montessori school, and a desire to find something more substantial and explorative for their children.
- Parents reported that they see themselves in a supportive role to their child’s education. They added that Montessori is based on the child learning and

challenging themselves based on their own choice. Because of this, some students surpass the grade level and automatically get moved up while others receive extra support when needed. One parent commented that, “the teachers are very involved, and some students challenge themselves while others may need to feel more confident before experiencing a new challenge.”

- Both parents and students know how the learning is progressing through report cards, parent-teacher conferences, goal sheets and infinite campus. Each Friday, the school offers a time for students to “ketchup or relish” and parents reported students are given time to “catch-up” on assignments or “relish” some free time. One parent commented that, “you’d be surprised how hard my daughter works all week long to get those extra minutes of free time.”
- Families reported feeling very involved in the school community and said that there are ample opportunities to volunteer if you want to but there is no pressure or requirement.
- Families suggested that the school consider adding some arts, drama outside of the school day.
- One of the favorite things mentioned by parents and guardians was the close community offered by the school. Specifically, parents pointed to the fact that they know teachers, students, other parents, and school leaders on a first name basis and a true family atmosphere. A parent said, “my daughter can be who she is and doesn’t have to try to fit in she is accepted by others for just being herself.”

Students:

- Students said that they like Silver Sands Montessori because they can learn about different things. One student said, “You get a great education here.” Another student shared that she loves the smallness of the school and because of the size, you get to know everyone. Finally, the student indicated that all students get along and there is no bullying.
- When asked if the school is challenging, students said that some things are, and some are not. Another student added that last year in history, we did a skit on one of the people in the war, and this was both challenging and fun. Another student, taking neuro science as an elective said that a group of students worked really hard on a case and the group really wanted to win. This was another example of a challenging and fun classroom activity.
- Students said that if they had a problem on campus they would talk to a teacher or bring it up with the principal. A student commented, “we are so close its easy to talk to people here and if another student feels too shy to talk to an adult at the school, their friends will encourage them to communicate with school staff.” All of the students agreed that the school is a home to them and the people at the school are their family.

- Students use goal sheets to keep track of assignments and progress. In the Middle School there is a math group lesson and if a student needs additional help they are encouraged to ask other peers in the class. A student said, “sometimes you understand better if a friend explains it to you, your friends put it in a way you can understand.” If the assignment is not clear after that, the students ask the teacher for assistance.
- Students had suggestions for improving their experience at Silver Sands and these included, providing more space for a gym and lunchroom, as well as a field to play sports. Overall, however, students unanimously agreed that they would recommend the school to others.

School Leadership:

- According to school leadership, one of the biggest challenges that the school has faced over the past few years is adjusting their programming appropriately to setup students for success on the end-of-year assessments. Leadership spoke to intentional efforts to enhance instruction in the areas of literature, specifically incorporating non-fiction texts, and geometry as these were identified as performance gaps areas. The school has also incorporated a math elective for enrichment to help the school improve their overall math scores. Finally, the leadership team also spoke to efforts the school has undertaken to ensure that the testing environment is conducive for students.
- Because the Montessori model requires additional training, and specific endorsements at the middle school level, the leadership team spoke to the importance of hiring the right personnel that are committed to this unique model. During the interview process, the leadership team noted that they ask about a prospective staff member’s willingness to pursue Montessori certification, which can take multiple years to attain.
- The leadership team emphasized that data is frequently used in classrooms, but in a manner that is different than a traditional school. One member of the administration team described this in detail, commenting: “In order to work independently with Montessori materials, students must receive a lesson/direct instruction from a teacher. They have to learn the content and demonstrate some level of mastery before they can work on their own. Then they come back for an assessment, but the pace varies from student to student.”
- The school leadership team attributed strong relationships and the tightknit community feel of the school to relationships that are built between students and teachers. Because students stay in classes for multiple years with the same peers, this Montessori principle develops the confidence of students as well as relationships between students that are multi-aged.

School Staff:

- School staff uses the RTI (Response to Intervention) process to track and provide interventions to students. When teachers notice that a student needs academic or behavioral help, they meet and think about ways to provide additional supports.
- Using MAP testing, which the school conducts three times per year, teachers track student academic growth in the areas of reading and math. Teachers form small group instruction based on assessment data and their own observations.
- The staff commented that they interact with students and families outside of their normal hours. For example, the school offers robotics, school wide events and family gatherings for which the staff chooses to attend.
- The parking lot is used for physical education classes and one staff member commented, “What these kids do with a parking lot is just amazing. We do go and rent gyms for certain events as well.”
- The staff said that the combination of teachers who care, and students who are comfortable and relaxed with one another, is what has led to this amazing school environment. Multiple staff members were cited by school staff as strong role models that encourage and inspire the best from all students.

V. OVERALL STRENGTHS OF PROGRAM

1. The mission of the school is lived out every day in the classrooms in the form of student self-directed motivation, respect for others, and love of learning. School administrators, teachers, students, parents, and school-board unanimously believe in the mission, can explain it, and see that it is implemented daily. A love of learning and respect for others was one of the highlights of the evaluation because it was always evident in a consistent manner throughout the school and during the day.
2. It is evident that there is a strong sense of a learning community at Silver Sands. Students reported having strong friendships and bonds between families. They support each other and the grouping of grades 1-3, 4-5, and 6-8 allows students to form strong trusting relationships with peers, and their teacher over time. This is an important principle of the Montessori model, and the school places value in staying true to this principle throughout the elementary school grades. Moreover, it is likely that this principle fosters students to engage for long periods of time on a specific content or subject area. SPCSA staff observed high levels of engagement and rarely saw any examples of misbehavior or students that were off-task.
3. Students are responsible for their learning and highly engaged throughout the day. The structure and pacing of the learning allow for both the self-directed concept of Montessori and the high expectations of the Nevada Academic Content Standards to exist cohesively. Staff implement the Montessori philosophy yet accept and weave the Nevada Academic Content Standards (NVACS) into Montessori curriculum. One

example of this is found in student goal cards. These provide a love of learning, choice and yet are aligned to NVACS and are a system used to set learning targets/goals throughout the school. Curriculum designers, administrators, teachers, parents, and most importantly students understand their purpose.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Consider modifying the student enrollment and lottery process. Currently, the student application form requests information that is not necessary for the school to compile prior to the lottery. Examples include emergency contact information, parent survey, and questions regarding previous school experience. While SPCSA staff does not believe that any of these are onerous or impermissible to ask, requesting this information of only those students that are selected through the lottery would be less burdensome on prospective families and removes some small barriers. In short, a two-step process would likely simplify the work for both the school and families.
2. The team did not observe instructors making strong conclusions at the end lessons to assist students in thinking about what they should have mastered at the end of that portion of instruction. SPCSA staff understands that this is not necessarily a point of emphasis in the Montessori system of education but believes that teachers can make a stronger effort to pursue closure of individual lessons when this type of direct learning is taking place.
3. Continue to make sure the Special Education policies are reviewed annually and update them based upon students or changes to the law. The Special Education materials provided by the school during the document review were dated. It was beneficial to understand that there is a staff-lead for Special education, and that there is professional development offered to staff regarding additional student services. SPCSA staff recommends that both the staff and the Board review the Special Education policies at least annually to ensure compliance and that they are refined for current student needs.
4. Continue monitoring the achievement levels of all students in order to have a positive trending trajectory of student achievement as measured by the Nevada Report Card system in terms of elements which make up the star ratings. SPCSA staff was encouraged by the steps the school has taken to address performance gaps in the past, and the school is being reflective in both instructional strategies as well as how to best adapt to state requirements for testing. SPCSA staff believes this will remain a key lever for the school to maintain sustained growth, and the leadership team should continue to facilitate these conversations amongst both the staff and the school's Board.

VII. DEFICIENCIES

There were no deficiencies identified for Silver Sands Montessori during the evaluation.



PUPIL ACHIEVEMENT AND SCHOOL PERFORMANCE²

Name of School: **Silver Sands Montessori**

School Year **2018-2019** Nevada School Performance Framework Rating(s) (NSPF)

Elementary: 3 of 5 stars
 Middle School: 5 of 5 stars

ELA Proficiency (CRT New NV Standards)		Math Proficiency (CRT New NV Standards)	
Elementary	Middle	Elementary	Middle
49.3%	67.5%	44.2%	50.7%

High School Data

Graduation Rate: N/A	Average ACT Composite: N/A
-------------------------	-------------------------------