



Charter Schools APPLICATION

for

Soldotna Montessori Charter School
Kenai Peninsula Borough School District
Reapplication

FY 06 - 07

Alaska Department of Education & Early Development
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Charter Schools Application

Name of Charter School: Soldotna Montessori Charter School

Date of Application: September 22, 2006

District: Kenai Peninsula Borough School District

School Contact: Mo Sanders, principal

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1. ACADEMIC POLICY COMMITTEE

- (a) Has the school’s independent academic policy committee operated at an acceptable level?
- (b) Is there an independent academic policy on file?

(a) Soldotna Montessori Charter School has had an active academic policy committee since opening the school just over four years ago. The current academic policy committee consists of six parents or guardians of currently enrolled students, elected at large; one school administrator, or staff designee in administrator’s absence; and two teacher members, selected by the teaching staff. The list of current 206 – 2007 academic policy members are:

Brown, Teresa	Parent Member
Carter, Lynne	Parent Member
Edwards-Smith, Dawn	Parent Member
Holt, Kathy	Teacher Member
Johnson, Brenda	Parent Member
Mitchell, Kristin	Parent Member
Romatz, Cheryl	Teacher Member
Sanders, Mo	Staff Member/Administrator
Triana, Carmen	Parent Member

The academic policy committee bylaws require at least six meetings per year. However, in actual practice the academic policy conducts monthly meetings, with the exception of December. Minutes from the academic policy committee meetings for 2005 – 06 are included in this section.

(b) The academic policy for Soldotna Montessori Charter School follows the Montessori curriculum in practice and in policy. The academic policy for the school also includes the integration of the State of Alaska Grade Level Expectations, the Content and Performance Standards for Alaska Students. The academic policy committee operates under a set of committee bylaws found in Section 2 of this proposal.

2. LAW PROVISIONS

- (a)** To be valid, the application must include a separate, signed, charter school contract with the district, addressing the fourteen provisions as listed under AS 14.03.255(c)(1 – 14).
- (b)** Have the responsibilities of the academic policy committee regarding provisions of the law been fully addressed?
- (c)** Is the charter school within the bounds of the most current applicable statutory and regulatory requirements?

(a) A copy of the signed charter school contract with the district is included on pages 3-5 of this proposal document.

(b) The roles and responsibility of the academic policy committee and its members are clearly laid out in the committee bylaws. The academic policy committee reviews current curriculum and new curriculum options as well as supports and requires training for Montessori specific curriculum. The academic policy committee hires the school administrator and conducts annual administrator performance evaluations. The responsibilities of the academic policy committee regarding provisions of the law are fully addressed in the academic policy committee bylaws under “Specific Duties of the APC”. That section reads:

“Specific duties of the APC:

Review and approve curricula, co-curricular activities and related topics and procedures in accordance with the following Alaska Statutes:

1. AS 14.03.250 - 14.03.290

(1) "academic policy committee" means the group designated to supervise the academic operation of a charter school and to ensure the fulfillment of the mission of a charter school;

2. Sec. 14.03.250.

c); the principal of the charter school shall be selected by the academic policy committee and shall select, appoint, or otherwise supervise employees of the charter school.”

The complete Bylaws for the Soldotna Montessori Charter School are included in this section together with academic policy committee minutes indicating approval of bylaw revisions.

3. EDUCATION PROGRAMS

- (a) Has the school made reasonable progress in meeting its academic goals?
- (b) Has the school demonstrated progress, where applicable, on the statewide assessment?
- (c) Has the school demonstrated progress, where applicable, on other assessments?
- (d) Does the school use its assessment data to drive decision-making in curriculum and instruction?
- (e) Where performance-based assessments are used, does the school have clear criteria?

(a) Soldotna Montessori Charter School has made progress in developing its instructional program and in producing learning outcomes that meet or exceed program goals. All teachers incorporate the State Grade Level Expectations for grades K – 6 in the context of their Montessori instruction.

(b) Soldotna Montessori Charter School has achieved Adequate Yearly Progress status since participating in the statewide Standards Based Assessment over the past three years. Evidence that the school meets and exceeds state proficiency levels is included in the color chart included at the end of this section.

(c) In addition to the statewide assessment, Soldotna Montessori Charter School participates in all other state and district assessment programs relevant to our grade range. Those assessments include DIBELS (Dynamic Indicator of Basic Early Literacy) and CBM (Curriculum Based Measurement). DIBELS and CBM scores improved overall by 17% last year.

(d) Soldotna Montessori Charter School uses its assessment data to drive decision making in curriculum and instruction. We are striving to reach Advanced Levels in all SBA categories. We follow this process when reviewing standardized or formative assessment data:

Before looking at any new data staff members are asked to consider

1. Assumptions they may have about the data.
2. Predictions they believe they can make about the student performance as it will be reported.
3. Questions they may have about student performance you as it will be reported.
4. New possibilities for learning about our school that may be presented by the data.

After looking at the data staff members are asked to determine:

1. What important points regarding the data seem immediately apparent?
2. Are there any patterns, trends or categories that seem to emerge?
3. What seems surprising or unexpected?
4. What have we not asked or explored about the data?

Final steps:

1. What inferences, conclusions, or explanations might we draw about our student data?
2. What additional data sources might we explore to verify our explorations?
3. What are some solutions we can explore?
4. What further data will we need?
5. What resources have we not yet considered?
6. What instructional strategies may need to be re-evaluated or refined for effectiveness?

As a result of examining summative and formative data staff development activities are planned and scheduled. These activities emphasize instructional philosophy and strategies that will enhance student learning in the targeted areas.

4. PROGRAM ACHIEVEMENT

- (a)** Is the school implementing a well-conceived plan to ensure equal and bias-free access for all students, for all facilities, courses, programs, activities, and services?
- (b)** Is the school systematically addressing the needs of students who do not perform at acceptable levels of proficiency in the statewide assessment program?
- (c)** Is the school systematically informing parents of their child's performance and progress?
- (d)** Did the charter school provide student assessment participation rates?
- (e)** Has the charter school made a comparison between their assessment scores and the district's assessment data?
- (f)** Has the charter school made a comparison between their assessment scores and the state's assessment data?
- (g)** Has the charter school shown disaggregated scores across all categories?
- (h)** Does the school provide professional development that is goal-based and driven, in large part, by the student assessment data?
- (i)** Is the school implementing a well-conceived plan to demonstrate progress over time?

- (a)** Soldotna Montessori Charter School ensures equal and bias-free access for all students, facilities, courses, programs, activities and services. The school lottery guidelines ensure non-discrimination policies with regard to race, gender, national origin, color, disability, or age. Age appropriate curriculum, programs and activities are available to all students. All students have access to Special Education services, including Gifted and Talented programs. A copy of the school Lottery Guidelines is included at the end of this section.
- (b)** Students achieving below proficiency levels participate in a variety of programs and activities designed to meet their specific needs. In order to maximize individual student potential, any child working at lower Proficient or Below Proficient levels is referred to the school Intervention Team. The Intervention Team process may result in targeted assistance by reading or other academic specialists on staff, specific classroom accommodations, specific skill building activities, enrichment programs, or placement in Special Education programs. Intervention team meetings occur weekly. Intensive consideration of student progress and teacher review of current formative and summative data for all students performing at lower Proficient or Below Proficient students occurs on a monthly basis. District policy on Intervention and Special Education practices are included in this section.
- (c)** Parents are systematically informed of their child's performance and progress. State assessment results are mailed to each parent. Parents meet with classroom teachers a minimum of two times per year to review assessment data and student progress in a formalized Parent-Teacher Conference setting. Parents are invited to question teachers at any time regarding their child's progress. This invitation is made in writing in a letter from the school administrator, in writing by each classroom teacher and on many informal face-to-face occasions. Our annual Parent Survey reflects the fact that parents feel welcome to initiate communication and are aware of their many opportunities to speak to school staff regarding student progress or any other issue of importance to them.
- (d)** Our charter school student assessment participation rates were 100% in all categories. That document is included in this section.

- (e) The charter school made a comparison between their assessment scores and the district's assessment data. A document providing those comparisons was prepared by the state and a version of that document was then prepared for parents using color with an explanation of proficiency levels. The parent document is prepared annually and is included in the section prior to this section.
- (f) The charter school made a comparison between their assessment scores and the state's assessment data. That document was provided by the state and is included in this section.
- (g) The charter school has shown disaggregated scores across all categories. That document is included in this section.
- (h) The school provides professional development that is goal-based and driven by student assessment data. Professional development is directly related to the academic needs of the students and the instructional improvement needs of the staff in relation to gaps in student achievement.
- (i) The school implements a specific plan to demonstrate progress over time. Teachers meet in teams twice weekly. Intervention team meetings occur weekly with a specific monthly review of all students with near below or below proficiency scale scores or benchmark scores. Teachers conduct regular formative assessments in the classroom on a daily, weekly and quarterly basis. Teachers are trained in a Montessori-specific technique for observing students for specific performance on academic and social tasks. Professional development is an integral part of this plan.
- (j) The school special education schedule regarding enrollment & services provided to special needs students in our school, grade level records of statewide assessment performance, student progress reports & description of staff development activities are included in this section. Soldotna Montessori Charter School complies with all School District policies regarding Special Education, 504 Student Accommodations and LEP programs. Copies of the district policies are also included in this section.

5. ADMISSION PROCEDURES

- (a)** Does the school have admission procedure criteria?
- (b)** Are eligible students specifically defined?
- (c)** What are the provisions for accommodating additional students, if necessary?
- (d)** Is there a lottery or other type of provision for random drawing for enrollment when applicants exceed the school's capacity?

- (a)** The school has very specific admission procedure criteria. All applicants for the lottery or the wait list (activated after the spring lottery each year) receive a tracking slip with a copy kept in the school office so that all applicants can verify their enrollment in the lottery. The lottery itself is conducted by a local Certified Public Accounting group. The lottery drawing is open to the public. The procedure is posted on our school web site, available in print from the school and is described in Section 4 of this application.
- (b)** All students are eligible to apply at Soldotna Montessori Charter School. The school requires no admission tests or specific student performance levels. Admission procedures are the same for any applicant and are outlined in the Lottery Process as described in Section 4a of this document. The school advertises two orientation sessions prior to the lottery drawing and also advertises that individual orientation sessions or school tours are available upon request.
- (c)** Soldotna Montessori Charter School currently has 161 students and is at maximum capacity for the space we currently occupy in the 400 wing of Soldotna Elementary School. If space becomes available in a district building or in an affordable community location, we will accommodate additional students through grade 8. If, within the life of our charter renewal, the state and/ or district create a statute or policy funding 3 and 4 year olds in a kindergarten multi-graded classroom we would also accommodate those additional students in order to uphold the Montessori philosophy of age-related planes of development working together in the same classroom.
- (d)** If there are more applicants for the lottery than the school can accommodate, students are automatically registered on the official school wait list. When an opening becomes available for a specific grade, the family of the first child on the wait list is notified and invited to register for school. Families always have the option to decline admittance when they are selected by lottery or when their student is eligible to be enrolled due to wait list activation. A copy of the school wait list is included in this section. The school has very little turn over. Students usually leave the school only because their family moves out of the area. The school has had very little loss of enrollment in 4 years. We have an adequate wait list, including students for all grade levels.

6. ALTERNATIVE OPTION

- (a) Is there a provision in place for students who do not wish to attend the charter school, even though it's the only option?

(a) Soldotna Montessori Charter School is located in the attendance area of Soldotna Elementary School, and, in fact is located in a wing of the Soldotna Elementary School building. Students enroll in this school from other local district schools, from local private schools and from home-schooling programs. There are many viable public and private options for K-6 students in the immediate area. In some cases, one sibling attends the charter school and other siblings attend other local schools. Parents are able to make the schooling choices that they feel best serve the social and academic needs of each of their children.

7. ADMINISTRATIVE POLICIES

- (a)** Is there an administrative policy that follows charter school law?
- (b)** Does the school present evidence that there is a full and abiding understanding of the obligations of the administration in providing for the control and supervision of the charter school?
- (c)** Is there compelling evidence that the school's leadership is strong?
- (d)** Is there compelling evidence that the school has handled organizational challenges effectively and competently?
- (e)** Are the mechanisms in place;(e.g. an advisory grievance committee) to respond to, and, where indicated, resolve complaints?

- (a)** Soldotna Montessori Charter School adheres to the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District Charter School Policy. In addition the academic policy committee bylaws address and comply with State charter school law. Soldotna Montessori Charter School adheres to all of the policies included in the KPBSD policy manual. That manual is online at the KPBSD website (<http://www.kpbsd.k12.ak.us/>) and is not included in this document. The district Charter School Policy is included at the end of this section.
- (b)** The contract between the charter school and the School District expressly delineates the obligations of the administration in providing for the control and supervision of the charter school. The charter school administrator complies with the school district administrative policy manual for all district administrators, regardless of charter school status.
- (c)** District support of the current charter school administration is strong. Feedback on the annual charter school survey reflects strong confidence in the current leadership of the charter school. The 2005 – 2006 survey results are included at the end of this section. The staff at Soldotna Montessori Charter School is stable. The administration has not changed since the second year of the charter, when it was determined that the growing school needed a principal. The academic policy committee has regular elections. Committee members serve their full terms and some elect to run again for committee membership.
- (d)** There have been organizational challenges in the initial years of our charter. Communicating clearly and consistently with parents and academic policy committee members is important in any school but it is of extreme importance in a charter school. Academic policy committee members must be informed about school philosophy and instructional policies and practice in order to make informed curriculum decisions. The academic policy committee also needs information that allows them to communicate in an informed and professional manner with parents and community. The general parent population needs to be informed and be treated as an integral part of the school team. As parents of a charter school the general parent population is well aware of the fact that there are many school choices. Without clear information and a welcoming environment these parents may elect another school option.
Another challenge facing our charter school stems from sharing a public school building with another public school program. Clear, professional communication between administrators is essential. The district Charter School Study Team worked during 2005 – 2006 to create a policy that clarifies roles and responsibilities when charter schools share public school buildings with other programs. While this work was challenging it was also rewarding.
- (e)** In the event that a complaint or concern occurs the procedure described in section 1b of this document is followed. The procedure is described in the academic policy committee

bylaws and is shared with all families in writing at the beginning of each year. In addition, the procedure is posted in the school office.

8. FUNDING ALLOCATION

- (a)** Is a charter school budget summary in place that designates the funding allocation from the local school board in addition to a summary of the charter school budget?
- (b)** Is the school district going to implement indirect costs? If so, what services are provided to the charter school for this indirect fee?
- (c)** Will the charter school be eligible for the additional local revenue over the 4-mills required in the foundation program?
- (d)** Has the charter school met the requirement to achieve a positive or zero ending fund balance?

- (a)** A charter school budget summary that designates the funding allocation from the local school board in addition to a summary of the charter school budget is included in this section.
- (b)** The school district implements indirect costs at the State approved rate. Services provided to the charter school for this indirect fee include all district services including Data Processing, Human Resources, Accounting, Purchasing, Planning and Operations, Assessment, Staff Development, Pupil Services, Federal Programs, District Media Center, Nursing, Food Services, Warehouse and Delivery Services, Student Transportation.
- (c)** Charter schools in our district are not eligible for the additional local revenue over the 4-mills required in the foundation program.
- (d)** Soldotna Montessori Charter School has met the requirement to achieve a positive or zero ending fund balance each year.

9. FISCAL SOLVENCY

- (a) Has the charter school, over the course of the initial charter, implemented a well-conceived financial plan to ensure the fiscal solvency of the charter school?
- (b) Do the audit reports to date indicate that the school has met its obligation to ensure the fiscal integrity of the school's financial operation?
- (c) Has the school achieved efficiencies in its operation?

- (a) The charter school follows all KPBSD budgetary procedures and requirements. The budget is audited annually during the district audit.
- (b) Independent audits of KPBSD accounting procedures indicated that the school has met its obligation to ensure fiscal integrity.
- (c) The school has a positive fund balance and an enrollment that allows the school to maintain efficient school operations.

10. FACILITY PLANS

(a) Does the school present a clear and detailed plan for maintaining the present site or, if indicated, acquiring a suitable and adequate education facility?

(a) Soldotna Montessori Charter School is located in the 400 wing of Soldotna Elementary School in Soldotna, Alaska. This public school building is an elementary site in the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District and meets all codes and requirements for public school buildings.

Soldotna Montessori Charter School has a waiting list of students for all grades. However, enrollment at the school is projected to remain between 160 – 161 students as long as the school remains in the current location. If space becomes available in a district building or in an affordable community location and a change of location is approved by the School Board, the school will request to implement a plan for accommodating students through grade 8.

If, within the life of the school's charter renewal, the state creates a statute or policy allowing for and funding of 3, 4 and 5 year olds in a public school multi-graded pre-school classroom, the school would accommodate 3 and 4 year olds. This plan would be implemented in order to uphold the Montessori philosophy of multi-age groups of children within the same plane of development working together in the same classroom.

11. TEACHER TO STUDENT RATIO

- (a)** Is there a plan which adequately addresses teacher-to-student ratio?
- (b)** Is the plan reasonably based on projected enrollment figures?

(a) The class size for each classroom at Soldotna Montessori Charter School is limited to 23 students. Academic policy committee minutes documenting this policy are included in this section.

Each classroom in grades kindergarten through grade three has a full time instructional assistant. Each classroom in grades four through six has a half-time instructional assistant. In addition, the school has a Spanish Language tutor, a full time physical education teacher, a full time reading specialist, and a part time music instructor on staff. Therefore, the teacher-to-student ratio at Soldotna Montessori Charter School ranges from 1:4 to 1:13 depending on time of day. For example, the teacher-to-pupil ratio is reduced during the day when the students are working with an instructional assistant, when the Spanish tutor is in a classroom, when the reading specialist is in the classroom or working with individuals and small groups of students, and when small groups of students leave the classroom for physical education or additional movement activity.

(b) The school's plan for increasing enrollment to 160 students has been implemented. Class size will remain at no greater than 23 with teacher-to-student ratios implemented as described in **part (a)** of this section.

12. ENROLLMENT

- (a)** Has the student enrollment been stable?
- (b)** Has the school's enrollment been at a maximum?

- (a)** The student enrollment has increased at the annual projected rate, increasing evenly each year of the charter until reaching maximum capacity in 2006. The school has a history of stable registration. Once enrolled, students rarely leave the school.
- (b)** The charter school is currently operating at maximum capacity for the current location.

Students will continue to be admitted in the coming years via the lottery process.

The lottery procedure and public orientations to the school are announced to enrolled families and advertised in the local newspaper each spring.

Kindergarten will be the only class with 23 open student lottery slots available for the coming school year. Enrollment via lottery slots or wait list in other grades will be available only if individual students in those classrooms leave the school to attend school elsewhere.

The school continues to successfully deliver a quality Montessori program. On-going monitoring of student performance data, high quality staff development and family-friendly practices are all utilized to maintain enrollment.

13. TEACHING METHOD/CURRICULUM

- (a) Does the school have a plan that addresses explicit teaching methods that will benefit an age group, grade level, or specific type of student?
- (b) Does the school have a systematic plan in place to monitor curriculum implementation and curriculum quality?
- (c) Has the school undertaken curriculum review and revision?
- (d) Is there evidence to support effective intervention with students who are “at risk?”
- (e) Is the school addressing the needs of students with educational disabilities?
- (f) Where applicable, does the school address the needs of students with limited English proficiency?

- (a) The academic program at the school includes a rigorous academic curriculum. The topics in the Montessori curriculum provide multiple pathways to success on state academic and performance standards as well as state and district grade level expectations. A listing of curricular topics is provided at the end of this section. Modern educational research strongly supports Montessori’s theory that children learn through their real-life interactions with the objects and the people in their environment. The choice of classroom materials and cooperative activities at Soldotna Montessori reflect this learning concept. Experiences of the student are developmentally appropriate and form the foundation for critical thinking skills and for understanding abstract ideas. The curriculum also includes music and physical education, Spanish, peace studies and global awareness, social responsibility and practical life skills. Cooperative experiences in cross-age groupings are a natural part of the Montessori classroom environment. Dr. Montessori’s belief that a mixed age group enhances the child’s learning experience finds increasing support in current research. Studies show that younger children in the group gain through their observations of and interactions with the older children’s advanced skills. Additionally, the older children restructure and solidify their acquired understanding as they participate with the younger ones. Students at Soldotna Montessori Charter School are grouped in multi-age classrooms with the exception of Kindergarten. The Montessori curriculum allows children to widen their horizons through an expanding curriculum. Abundant materials foster optimum development of reading, spelling and writing skills. Math operations emphasize the understanding of process as well as accuracy in computations by using a wide array of manipulative materials. An interactive learner-centered environment provides small and whole group cooperative activities in addition to individualized instruction.
- (b) The school monitors the effectiveness of the curriculum content by evaluating student performance on all state and local assessments. In addition, teachers monitor the effectiveness of instruction and delivery of the curriculum through the use of formative classroom assessments, teacher observation, and parent and student feedback.
- (c) The school is consciously and consistently in the process of curriculum review on both formal and informal levels. Teachers meet twice weekly in grade-alike teams in informal settings to plan, assess and revise curricular topics. Since the Montessori curriculum is geared to sets of three-year cycles it is important to monitor actual progress through the curriculum annually. The staff does this monitoring as a team each year. Samples of school wide planning and goal setting

relating to improving the curriculum are included at the end of this section. The Montessori curriculum provided in this document lists the content by topic. As a part of the curriculum revision process, the school has developed each topic according to Bloom's Taxonomy of Critical and Creative Thinking. Samples of the revised version of the curriculum are included at the end of this section.

(d – e) Intervention for students at risk, described earlier in this document, is evidenced in the following ways: students considered to be at-risk are included in the Intervention Team process, students at risk for low performance in reading receive regular supplemental instruction from the staff reading specialist, students identified as needing special education intervention receive additional interventions via the district special education program. A special education Caseload list documenting special education intervention at the school is included in this section. The school is attractive to students with special needs as the Montessori Method is particularly suited to accommodating individual student needs. The school complies with all federal and state laws and regulations regarding these populations.

(f) At this time Soldotna Montessori has no LEP students. However, if an LEP-eligible student(s) enrolls, district program services for LEP would be provided.

14. COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

- (a) Where applicable, does a collective bargaining contract exist that alludes to contract exemptions that are agreed to by both the school district and bargaining unit?
- (b) If no contract exemptions are agreed to, are the employees of the charter school subject to all provisions of the collective bargaining agreements enforced in the school district?

- (a) Soldotna Elementary Charter School staff members adhere to all components of the written collective bargaining agreement of the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District.
- (b) There are no exemptions to the collective bargaining agreement at the time of this proposal.

15. CONTRACT TERMINATION

(a) Is there a charter school contract termination clause currently in effect?

- (a)** The termination clause in the School Board and Charter School contract states that “The contract may be terminated by School Board for Charter School’s failure to meet educational achievement goals or fiscal management standards, for a default in any material provision of this agreement. The School Board shall provide 90 days written notice to Charter School of its intent to terminate this contract and the reasons therefore. If Charter School fails to remedy the cause for termination within the time provided by School District, this contract shall automatically terminate at the end of the stated time. Any unused funds and all properties remaining shall immediately be returned to School District upon such termination.”