

# Free Horizon Montessori PK-8



## Innovation Review

March 2021

Submitted to Jeffco Public Schools Cabinet - 04/21/2021  
Submitted to Jeffco Public Schools Board of Education - 05/06/2021



Free Horizon Montessori PK-8 is a proud Option School of Innovation within Jeffco Public Schools and Full Member of the American Montessori Society

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## INTRODUCTION

In June 2018, Free Horizon Montessori PK-8 (FHM) was designated as the first Option School in Jefferson County School District (Jeffco) with Innovation Status. The key driver of FHM's application and subsequent designation was the ability to provide greater access and opportunity for students in Jeffco to engage in a Montessori education. FHM had a proven academic and fiscal track record for providing this experience within the public sector. This aligned with the intent of the Innovation Schools Act of 2008 (the Act), to empower public schools with the autonomy to support the continually changing educational landscape and delivering educational services tailored to the specific population of students they are intended to serve. In order to monitor the accomplishments of the school, Section 22-32.5-110 of the Act, requires a review of innovation schools every three years after the local school board of a district of innovation approves an innovation plan and every three years thereafter. The local school board shall review the level of performance of the innovation school and determine whether the innovation school is achieving or making adequate progress toward achieving the goals identified in the school's innovation plan. This Innovation Review was prepared by the following staff members at Free Horizon Montessori PK-8:

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## FHM ACCOMPLISHMENT HIGHLIGHTS (2018-2021)

Since FHM’s designation as a Jeffco Option School with Innovation Status, it has operated in constant transition adapting to “new to us” in a new building, adjusting procedures and routines, and implementation of new operational processes within Jeffco systems while still delivering a high quality Montessori program. Despite the challenges, FHM was able to rise to the occasion.

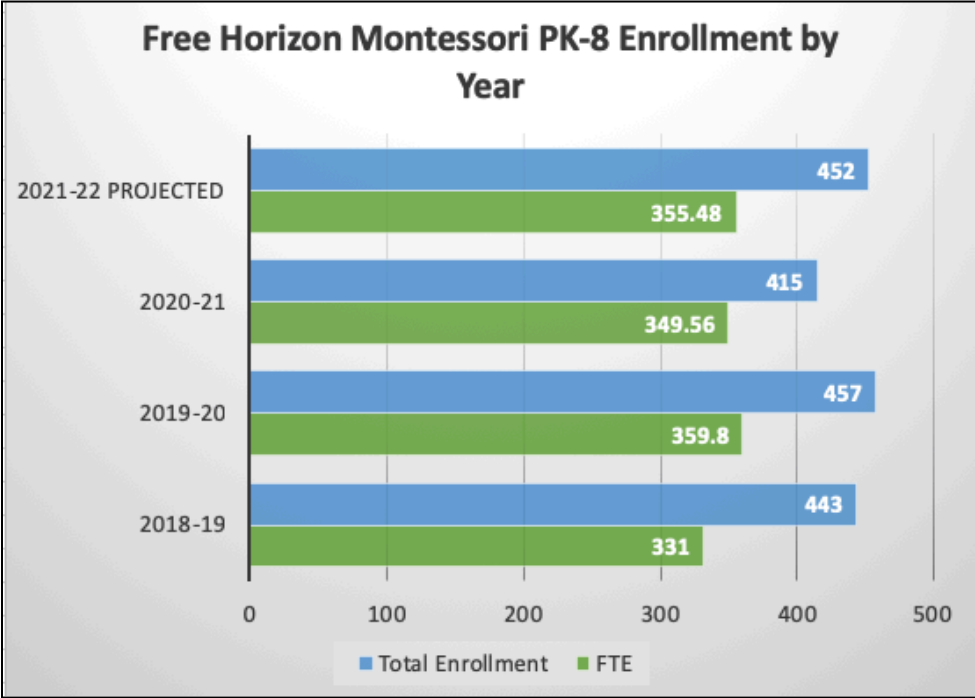
### Program and Enrollment Growth

During conversations with district leadership prior to the conversion, FHM was asked to increase capacity as part of the relocation into a larger school facility. Additionally, FHM aligned grade configurations with Jeffco by shifting 6th grade from Elementary to Middle School starting in the 2018-19 school year. The following table shows our classroom configurations, class sizes, and capacity prior to and following FHM’s conversion from a charter school to an Option School of Innovation Status. Strategically, FHM simultaneously increased each grade level’s capacity while decreasing class sizes.

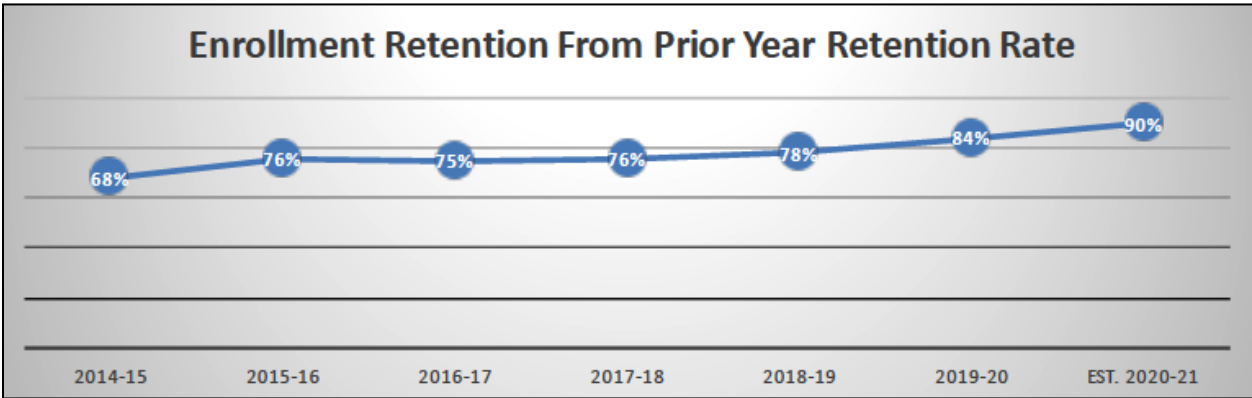
Program	Charter School				Option School of Innovation				Difference
	Grade Levels	# of Classes	# of students per class	Total Spaces	Grade Levels	# of Classes	# of students per class	Total Spaces	
Primary	PS-3, PK-4 & Kdg	4	30	120	PS-3, PK-4 & Kdg	6	26	156	+36
Lower Elementary	1st, 2nd & 3rd Grade	5	30	150	1st, 2nd & 3rd Grade	6	27	162	+12
Upper Elementary	4th, 5th & 6th Grade	4	30	120 (40 per grade)	4th & 5th Grade	4	27	108 (54 per grade)	-12
Middle School	7th & 8th Grade	3	15	30 (15 per grade)	6th, 7th & 8th Grade	3	25	75 (25 per grade)	+45
									+81

FHM continues to have a high level of interest from families throughout Jefferson County and surrounding areas. Round 1 Choice Enrollment Applications have increased from 106 in 2018 to 543 in 2021. This demonstrates the continuing, increasing interest and need for Montessori education within Jefferson County. Through relocation to the larger school facility, FHM had the opportunity to open additional classrooms to accommodate more students across all grade

levels. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, FHM had accepted 486 students/393.22 FTE for the 2020-21 school year. FHM, like Jeffco, experienced an enrollment decrease in 2020-21 related to the pandemic. The following table shows FHM’s enrollment for for the past three years:



FHM also monitors the retention rate of students from one school year to the next as a metric of school health. As a school with 100% choice enrollment and a Montessori environment with mixed-grade classrooms, consistency in enrollment is a matter of both fiscal and educational importance. As of July 2021, FHM’s retention trend was as follows:



Due to the effects of enrollment changes, FHM’s retention rate for the 2020-21 school year landed at 76%. Preliminary data for 2021-22 enrollment indicates likely retention rate of 88%.

## **American Montessori Society Accreditation Pathway**

FHM achieved Montessori Pathway Step 6 designation. [The American Montessori Society's Pathway of Continuous School Improvement](#) is a framework that supports member schools in their ongoing commitment to providing and sustaining quality Montessori programs. There are ten steps on the Pathway, each step building on the other. Step 6 requires 100% of the school's lead teachers to hold Montessori credentials and implementation of the four core [components of Montessori Education](#). FHM not only met these requirements, but also demonstrated a retention of an average of 86% of lead teaching staff since 2018. FHM is currently preparing the Self Study for Montessori Pathway Step 7, which addresses nine different operational standards including Philosophy, Mission and Vision, Governance, Leadership and Continuous Improvement (Strategic Planning), Teaching and Learning (Educational Nature), Documenting and Using Results (Learner Outcomes), Personnel, Facility Resources, Finances and Stability, Records, Resources, and Support Systems, and Stakeholder Communication and Relationships. FHM is on track to submit our self-study for Step 7 by the end of the 2020-21 school year.

## **Montessori Math Curriculum Extension**

FHM increased student mathematics support in a consistent manner throughout the school while remaining true to the Montessori pedagogy. An Upper Elementary teacher (grades 4 and 5) introduced FHM staff to ETC® Montessori Math cards in the fall of 2018, and a desire for school-wide implementation was born. "ETC® provides Montessori resources that allow schools to better implement educational practices while further enhancing their current Montessori curriculum with up-to-date, accurately researched, and pedagogically sound materials that are based on the Montessori theory, while being supported by current brain research findings (ETC Montessori, 2021)." The elementary lead teachers (1st - 5th grade), middle school math teacher (6th - 8th Grade), math interventionist, and Special Education teacher attended three full days of on-site training from Erika Ohlhaber, Director of the Gulf Coast Montessori Training Center and developer of the ETC® Montessori Math curriculum, in the fall of 2019. ETC® Montessori Math at the lower elementary level includes task cards for Math Facts and Operations in addition to a checklist for teachers to utilize while planning and recording student progress. FHM's upper elementary classrooms use Transition Math (multiplication and division), Decimals, Fractions, Advanced Math, and Geometry. The task cards were submitted into the Transparent Classroom software for record-keeping at the Upper Elementary level. Transparent Classroom is a preferred online record-keeping system among many Montessori schools; FHM continues to utilize many of the features; however, to best support our students and families during COVID-19, FHM focused use of the district-supported platforms such as SeeSaw and Google Classroom.

## **New Reading Curriculum**

FHM introduced a new reading curriculum during the 2020-2021 school year in our continuous improvement efforts and to remain compliant with the updates to the Colorado READ Act. The decision to implement *Wonders: A Comprehensive PreK-6 Literacy Curriculum*, along with the same company's middle school product, *StudySync*, came from the FHM Literacy Advisory

Committee, which was comprised of 12 staff members from all departments (Primary, Elementary, Middle School, Learning Resource, Specials, and Administration) and met over several months to vet and review several state-approved programs. The FHM Literacy Advisory Committee determined *Wonders* and *StudySync* best align with FHM's Montessori core within a compliant, research-based reading program. *Wonders* and *StudySync* include a diverse range of stories, from non-fiction to cartoons, along with complementary science and cultural lessons. *Wonders* and *StudySync* include instructional resources to support students in development of literacy routines and learning academic language in addition to activities to support comprehension, writing, and reading lessons focused on areas that the traditional Montessori Curriculum does not fully address. While not initially a deciding factor, *Wonders* and *StudySync* have options for fully online and in-person learning environments, which have proven advantageous during the pandemic. Many online aspects have been implemented for our remote students during the 2020-2021 school year as well as with our in-person and hybrid students during periods of quarantine and remote learning. *Wonders* and *StudySync* maintain the Montessori view that each child is an individual, providing resources for remediation or advancement. FHM is excited to be an early adopter of the *Wonders* and *StudySync* curriculum.

# ACADEMIC RESULTS

## Culture of Performance

Free Horizon Montessori PK-8 anticipates that academic achievement and growth will continue to maintain and increase the levels already anticipated in the school’s current Unified Improvement Plan (UIP). One outcome of FHM’s transition to Innovation status is the annual fund savings generated by no longer having bond debt service, which FHM strategically allocated toward student academic, physical, and emotional needs.

The 2019 Performance Framework for FHM which is the most recent available due to a statewide moratorium on the CMAS standardized tests related to the COVID-19 pandemic, calculated a total of 75.9 points out of 100 for FHM, with the school landing solidly in the Performance Plan category. This was based on 27.1 out of 40 possible points for Academic Achievement (67.8%) and 48.8 out of 60 points for Academic Growth (81.3%). These translate into ratings of “Meets” in the area of Academic Achievement and Academic Growth. This is an increase from the 2017 Performance Framework, at 72.4 points.

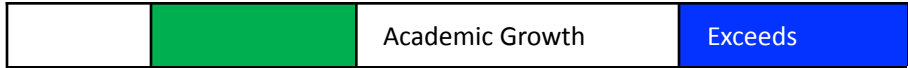
Elementary (3rd - 5th Grade):

Year	Plan Type	Performance Indicator	Rating
2019	Performance	Academic Achievement	Meets
		Academic Growth	Meets
2018	Performance	Academic Achievement	Meets
		Academic Growth	Approaching
2017	Performance	Academic Achievement	Approaching
		Academic Growth	Meets

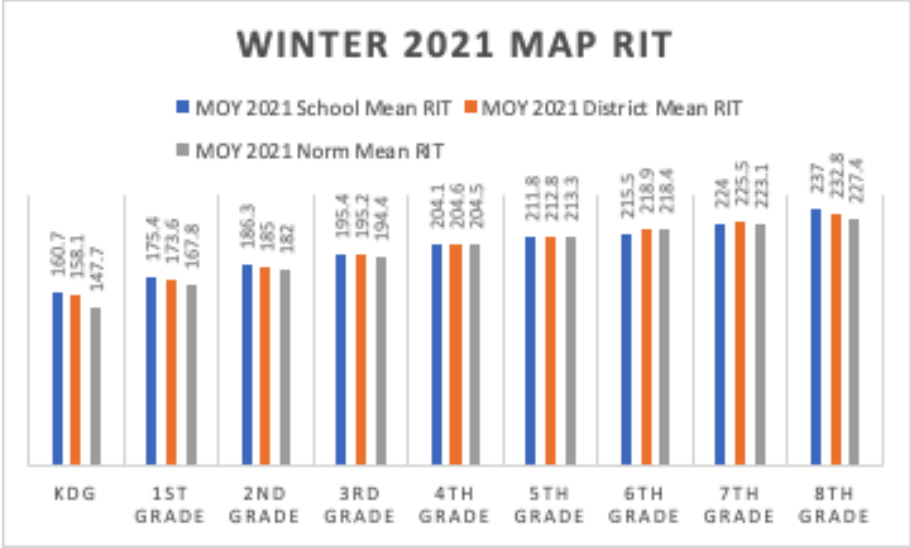
Middle School (6th - 8th Grade):

Year	Plan Type	Performance Indicator	Rating
2019	Performance	Academic Achievement	Meets
		Academic Growth	Exceeds
2018	Performance	Academic Achievement	Approaching
		Academic Growth	Exceeds
2017	Performance	Academic Achievement	Meets





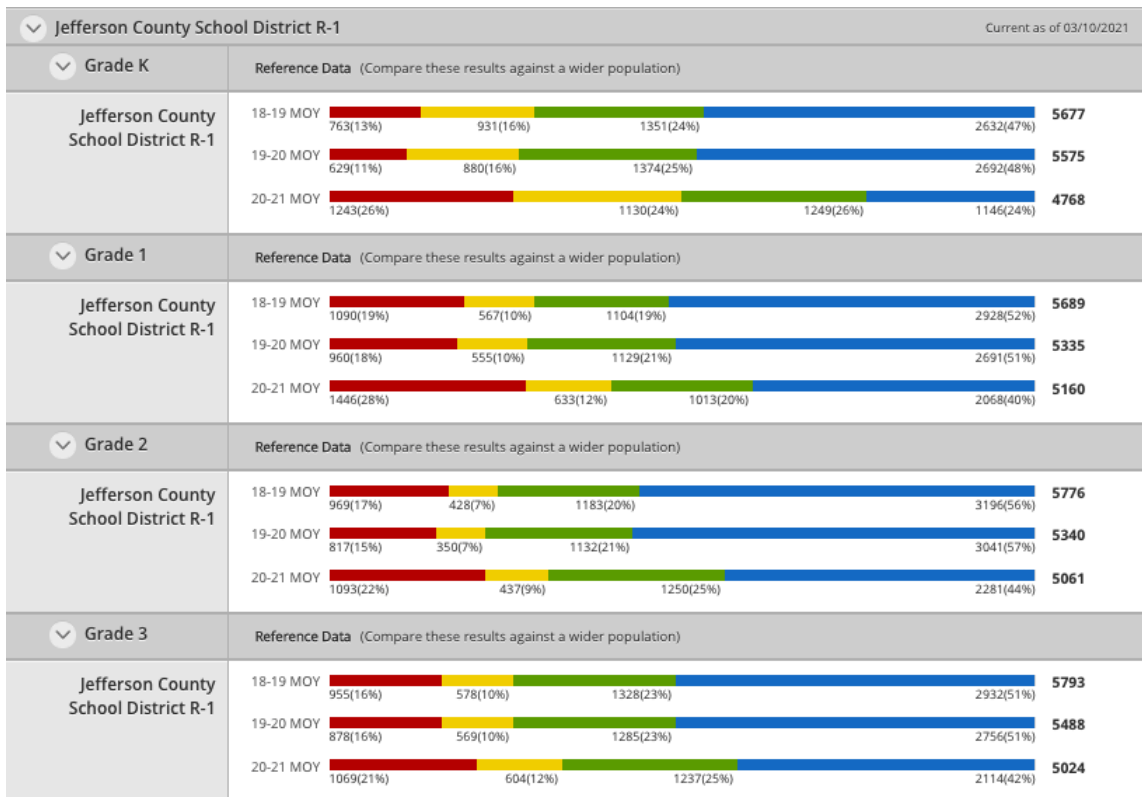
Areas of pride include our Middle School performance which continues to maintain an “Exceeds” in Academic Growth and a return to “Meets” in Academic Achievement. In looking at the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) results for the current 2020-21 school year, the mid-year (MOY) grade-level reports show that students at Free Horizon Montessori PK-8 perform similar to that of the district mean as the norm. MOY data is used due to the interruptions to MAP testing during the spring of 2020 due to the pandemic that prevented end of year (EOY) testing.



In compliance with the Colorado READ Act, students in kindergarten through third grade complete the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Literacy Skills (DIBELS) formative assessment three times each year. In comparing the data from the same Middle of Year (MOY) period over the last three school years, FHM shows stability over time. With the implementation of the *Wonders* research-based and Colorado READ Act approved curriculum, we hope to see better results in the coming years.



The following chart shows the district-level data for the same time periods:



Like all public schools in Colorado, FHM creates and/or updates a Unified Improvement Plan annually and can be found in its entirety in the appendices.

Academic Goals / UIP	Connection to the innovation plan strategies
<b>Goal 1:</b> Maintaining Consistent Classroom Management Practices	Consistent classroom management practices encourage and support the Montessori 3-hour work cycle.
<b>Goal 2:</b> Communication and Community Outreach through the office of Equity and Engagement	Development of school level equity and engagement committee to support our school's understanding and utilization of resources available from Jeffco's Office of Equity and Engagement, as well as resources from Learning for Justice (which provides free resources for educators who wish to make social justice a part of their curriculum) in alignment with Montessori peace education principles.
<b>Goal 3:</b> Need to Review and Implement CDE approved reading curriculum	Free Horizon Montessori has adopted a CDE-approved reading curriculum that continues to support the Montessori Philosophy.
<b>Goal 4:</b> Completion of AMS Accreditation step 7	Continuing through the AMS accreditation step ensure that Free Horizon Montessori maintains high-quality Montessori education.
<b>Future Goal:</b> Assessing the Effectiveness of the ETC Math Curriculum	Free Horizon Montessori has adopted a Math Curriculum for Lower and Upper Elementary, allowing structure and support while honoring the Montessori philosophy.

## **OPERATIONAL UPDATES**

### **Finance**

Following the approval of the Innovation Plan, FHM and district leadership entered into a Governance Agreement that specifies the funding provided to FHM from Per Pupil Revenue (PPR), 5-A and Mill Levy Override funds (MLO). FHM sets tuition rates for preschool with associated revenues housed within in the General Fund (GF-010). Additionally, FHM sets rates for the licensed childcare and camp programs housed within the Enterprise Fund (EN-040). Finally, FHM sets student fees in alignment with district guidelines housed within the Campus Activity Fund (SR-030). Additionally, FHM holds funds in carryforward/reserve to support unexpected financial events and future capital investment.

FHM consistently operates within budget. In addition, FHM has managed the unexpected financial impacts related to the COVID-19 pandemic without financial assistance outside of its own revenue sources. During the 2020-21 school year, FHM faced a more \$500,000 revenue shortfall from what was budgeted due to a combination of the PPR decrease from FY20 levels, lower enrollment, and uncollected preschool tuition. FHM managed the majority of necessary expenditure reduction through unfilled staff vacancies. Like the district, the FHM Board of Directors approved expending reserve funds to backfill the revenue loss. Two full-staff furlough days plus two additional furlough days for the school's executive leadership team rounded out the spending reductions.

With the impacts of the pandemic expected to last over the next few years, the FHM Principal and Director of Finance and Advancement are working with the Finance Committee to assure the school's staffing model and budgeted expenses fall within anticipated flat or declining funding. Through careful analysis of educational and operational needs, adjustments to the staffing model are underway to better leverage supports and services available to us as an Option School of Innovation that were not accessible as a charter school. Together with careful and intentional investment of reserve funding, FHM is poised to weather the current economic challenges with minimal impacts to students while also continuing to invest in our facility, educational materials, and faculty.

### **Transportation**

Transportation is one of the key elements to providing equitable opportunity for the diverse student and family population in Jefferson County to enroll in a Montessori school and environment. As a Jeffco Option School of Innovation, FHM began utilizing Jeffco buses in the fall of 2019 to transport Kindergarten through 8th grade students to and from school. Currently, Jeffco offers nine community-based locations that serve as bus stops for FHM families who can opt in to utilize these services for student morning pick up and afternoon drop off. An added benefit, students who ride the bus are given opportunities to show their independence, a key factor in the Montessori philosophy.

## Facilities

In August 2018, shortly after FHM was approved to become a School of Innovation, the school relocated into the previous Pleasant View Elementary building, which is 10,000 square feet larger than FHM's previous facility. FHM worked in partnership with Jeffco Facilities Department to prioritize the needed building improvements with FHM using funds held previously as a Charter school to invest in various building projects. The first of many projects involved painting the interior corridors and classrooms. In April of 2019, FHM funded the replacement of five water fountains equipped with water bottle filler stations. This project was funded by our Community Support Network, our parent and community organization that operates similarly to a PTO. At that same time, the gym flooring was replaced with a rubber sports floor allowing FHM the ability to host and participate in Middle School Athletics.

In the Summer of 2019, the playgrounds utilized by our preschool and kindergarten students were updated. The Jeffco designers used suggestions made by FHM students, teachers, staff, parents, and community members in choosing the equipment and style of the playground to align with the Montessori philosophy. In addition, an outdoor classroom space was built for all students to enjoy. The playground renovation was funded jointly by the Community Support Network and funds from Jeffco School District.

FHM was included in a district flooring replacement project. As a result, all classrooms had flooring replaced in the summers of 2019 and 2020 with carpet, luxury vinyl tile flooring, or a combination of both. FHM was able to fund the update of the entryways from ceramic tile to walk-off carpet. These improvements support the Montessori environment ensuring spaces for small group learning. During the carpet installation, the unused and outdated chalkboards were taken down and replaced with whiteboards.

Currently, FHM is in the planning stages with support from the Jeffco Facilities Department to find a solution hallway storage solution for students and staff and revitalization of the existing gardens. In addition, FHM and Jeffco Facilities Department partnered with HCM in creating a Campus Development Master Plan in order to anticipate and plan for the campus' needs for the next 5 to 10 years.

## REVISIONS TO INNOVATION PLAN NARRATIVE

FHM submits the following revisions to the Innovation Plan narrative to more accurately reflect current and ongoing state following the transition to an Option School of Innovation. Page numbers reference the Innovation Plan, and changes are reflected in RED.

### Talent Management

#### Faculty (page 30)

Free Horizon Montessori **classroom lead** teachers, at time of hire, are required to hold either a Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education (MACTE) Montessori Credential, which can be equated to a Master’s degree, or a Colorado Teacher License. Teachers who do not have a Montessori Credential are required to enroll in a MACTE- accredited program and receive credentialing within two years. Lead teachers are encouraged, but not required to hold a Colorado Teacher license. Currently, 86% of our teaching staff have a current Colorado Teacher License. All members of the Learning Resource Team **shall** hold a license through Colorado Department of Education appropriate for their position (i.e. Special Service Provider, School Counselor, or Teacher). Fourteen out of sixteen lead teachers hold a Montessori credential or are enrolled in a MACTE-accredited program (the other two hold a Colorado Teacher License). **All specials teachers shall hold a license through the Colorado Department of Education appropriate for their position (i.e. Art, Music, Physical Education, etc.) or alternately a bachelor’s level degree or higher and passing score on the appropriate CDE-approved content exam.** All primary and elementary classrooms at FHM have trained Educational Assistants who share in the responsibilities of instruction.

#### Management Services (page 35)

Free Horizon Montessori in collaboration with the Jeffco School District reviewed each of the District’s management services and identified which party will take the responsibility for accomplishing those services. Notes are included for some services for clarification, as needed. These services will be reviewed throughout the first year to determine if there are any needed adjustments. The following table has been updated from the approved Innovation Plan to reflect the current management services. Many of the changes are the result of an evolution of processes and discussions with district departments. Items in RED reflect changes.

Management Service	FHM Managed	JCSD Managed	Jointly Managed
Accident Reporting			X
Assessments (testing K and up)			X
Athletics	X		
Background Screening <b>(includes staff, board member, and volunteer)</b>		X	

Budget and Finance	X day-to-day		X tracking & reports
Building Use. (School continues to coordinate building use. There is potential pro-rata share to the district for utility costs.)	X		
Calendars (FHM will continue to develop its own calendar, however if utilize transportation services, calendars will need to be consistent.)	X		
Child Care Licensing	X		
Communications			X
Community Relations			X
Counseling and social services	X		
Copier Program		X	
Curriculum Management	X	Access to district wide curriculum resources & negotiated pricing	
Early Learning Support (pre-K)	X		
Employee Assistance Program stays the same except no \$100 fee		X	
Energy Management solar agreement on old building			X
Enrollment and Admissions	Allocate spaces	Online applications	X
Facilities Management	X FM	X FM & Custodial (funding matrix in Governance Agreement reflects the adjustment of	X

		FM to district managed)	
Fees	X		
Food Services		X	
Gifted & Talented Program Oversight	X		
Grants	X		X
Health and Wellness/Student Health			X
Homebound Students – SPED covers costs			X
Human Resources	Staffing model & defining positions, job descriptions, interviewing, hiring, supervision & evaluation, leave plan	Background checks, systems & processes (PeopleSoft), benefits	X
Information Technology			X
Insurance Reserve		X	
Legal Services		X	
Library Services	Library Operations	Management System	X
Maintenance - Building & Property (district snow removal, walkways around building, asphalt repair & striping, etc.)		X	
Student Discipline, Expulsion, or suspension			X
Student Records Management			X
Student Schedule development	X		
Serving Students with Disabilities	Special Education Teacher, ECSE, SLP, OT, School Psychologist/Social Worker	ELL, DHH, Vision (itinerant SSP staff)	X
Serving English Language Learners		X	X
Outdoor Lab	X	X	



	(until on Jeffco rotation)	(once on Jeffco rotation)	
Payroll	Salary Scales	Processing	X
Purchasing			X
Professional Development	X		X
Transportation (field trips remain the same; high number of families in a few areas that may allow for transportation)	Field Trip Management	Provides buses & transportation services to and from school	X
Telecommunications		X	
Website Management			X

## REVISIONS TO WAIVERS

FHM submits the following revisions to the Waiver and Replacement Plans submitted with Innovation Plan to enhance clarity of intent. All changes are reflected in RED below:

STATUTE	DESCRIPTION AND RATIONALE
<b>C.R.S. § 22-32-109(l)(f)</b> (delegation)	<b><u>Boards of Education – Specific Duties</u></b> Requires the Board of Education to employ all personnel and fix their compensation.

**Rationale:** FHM will be responsible for its own personnel matters, including employing its own staff and establishing its own terms and conditions of employment, policies, rules and regulations, and providing its own training. Therefore, the school requests that these statutory duties be waived or delegated from the Jefferson County School District Board of Education to the principal and Board of Directors of FHM. As a Montessori school, FHM's success depends in large part upon its ability to select and employ its own staff and to train and direct that staff in accordance with the American Montessori Society standards, this Innovation Plan and the goals and objectives of the school. All FHM staff will be employed on an at-will basis.

**Replacement Plan:** The school will be responsible for these matters rather than the District. All teachers and staff members will be offered an Employment Agreement, which must be renewed annually with no promise of future employment as specified in Board policy. In addition, FHM will comply with the Fair Labor Standards Act and follow our Equal Opportunity Employment policy which states that Free Horizon Montessori affirms that no person shall, on the basis of race, creed, color, age, national origin, religion, gender identity, disability, marital status, sexual orientation or veteran status be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefit of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity, including, but not limited to, employment or enrollment. Sexual orientation is a person's orientation toward heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, or perception of the individual's sexual orientation.

**Duration of the Waivers:** FHM requests that the waiver be for the duration of the school as an Innovation School.

**Financial Impact:** FHM anticipates that the requested waiver will have no financial impact upon the Jefferson County School District. The school must operate within its budget and the cost of employing staff has been included in that budget.

**How the Impact of the Waivers will be Evaluated:** The impact of the waivers will be measured by the same performance criteria and assessments that apply to FHM.

**Expected Outcome:** As a result of this waiver, the school will select, employ and provide professional development for its own teachers and staff.

**Services – Disbursements**

(substantive)

Prohibits

disbursement of district monies to teacher without a valid teacher’s certificate, letter of authorization or written authorization.

**Rationale:** As a Montessori school, FHM should be granted the authority to hire teachers and principals that will support the school’s goals and objectives. The principal will not function as a traditional district school principal, but rather will be responsible for a wider range of tasks and act as the school’s chief executive officer. FHM will seek to attract principals and teachers from a wide variety of backgrounds, including, but not limited to teachers from out-of-state, persons with Montessori credentials, persons with several years of successful teaching experience in a setting not requiring a license, as well as persons with business or professional experiences. All employees of FHM will be employed on an at-will basis.

**Replacement Plan:** FHM will, where possible, hire certified teachers and principals. However, as a Montessori school it may be advantageous for the school to be able to hire teachers and/or principals without a certificate and who possess unique background and/or skills or fill the need of FHM. Teachers and principals holding a bachelor’s degree or higher and a current and valid Montessori credential from a program recognized by the Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education (MACTE) shall be considered fully licensed under this Innovation Plan as long as they also pass all required background checks and content exam appropriate for the position held as approved by the Colorado Department of Education. MACTE is the only national education accreditor recognized by the US Department of Education to accredit Montessori teacher education programs within colleges and universities, free standing institutions and distance education with 120 hours of residency. FHM will comply with the Fair Labor Standards Act and follow our Equal Opportunity Employment policy which states that Free Horizon Montessori affirms that no person shall, on the basis of race, creed, color, age, national origin, religion, gender identity, disability, marital status, sexual orientation or veteran status be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefit of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity, including, but not limited to, employment or enrollment. Sexual orientation is a person's orientation toward heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, or perception of the individual's sexual orientation.

**Duration of the Waiver:** FHM requests that the waiver be for the duration of the school as an Innovation School.

**Financial Impact:** FHM anticipates that the requested waiver will have no financial impact upon the Jefferson County School District. The school operates within its budget and the cost of employing staff is included in that budget.

**How the Impact of the Waivers Will be Evaluated:** The impact of these waivers will be measured by the same performance criteria and assessments that apply to FHM.

**Expected Outcome:** As a result of this waiver, FHM will be able to hire the most qualified staff and provide instruction in accordance with the American Montessori Society standards, CDHS licensing requirements, the school's philosophy and mission as stated in this Innovation Plan and any associated governing documents.

**C.R.S. § 22-9-106**  
**(substantive)**

Local Board of Education – Duties  
Certificated Personnel Evaluations

**Rationale:** Free Horizon Montessori will be responsible for its own personnel matters, including employing its own staff and establishing its own terms and conditions of employment, conducting regular observations and written evaluations for all instructional staff, and completing annual summative performance evaluations. Therefore, the school requests that these statutory duties be waived or delegated from the Jefferson County Board of Education to the principal and Board of Directors of FHM. As a Montessori school, the strength of FHM's instructional programming is enhanced by its ability to provide focused, constructive, and individualized feedback for all instructional staff to ensure the quality and fidelity of each teacher's performance in the classroom and broader school setting. FHM teacher and Special Service Provider observations and evaluations are conducted by FHM Principal, Assistant Principal, and with input from the Instructional Coach(es). FHM's system of performance evaluation will continue to meet American Montessori Society standards and the intent of the quality standards established in SB 10-191 while maintaining the goal of improving student academic growth.

**Replacement Plan:** The school will be responsible for these matters rather than the District. The staff performance evaluation process used for each staff member will comply with FHM Board Policies. Under the school's plan, the FHM will use its own evaluation system. The school is attempting to meet the intent of the waived statute by using an evaluation system which includes quality standards that are clear and relevant to the administrators' and teachers' roles and responsibilities, have the goal of improving student academic growth, and meet the intent of the quality standards established in SB 10-191. The school attached an example teacher evaluation tool in the appendices. Teachers who are rated unsuccessful may be terminated by FHM. FHM will comply with the Fair Labor Standards Act and follow our Equal Opportunity Employment policy which states that Free Horizon Montessori affirms that no person shall, on the basis of race, creed, color, age, national origin, religion, gender identity, disability, marital status, sexual orientation or veteran status be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefit of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity, including, but not limited to, employment or enrollment. Sexual orientation is a person's orientation toward heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, or perception of the individual's sexual orientation.

**Duration of the Waivers:** FHM requests that the waiver be for the duration of the school as an Innovation School.

**Financial Impact:** FHM anticipates that the requested waiver will have no financial impact upon the Jefferson County School District or the school budget.

**How the Impact of the Waivers will be Evaluated:** Since teacher and principal performance has a critical impact on the performance of the entire school, the impact of this waiver will be measured by performance criteria and assessments that apply to FHM.

**Expected Outcome:** With this waiver, FHM will be able to implement its program and evaluate its teachers in accordance with its Performance Appraisal System, which is designed to produce greater accountability and be consistent with the school's goals and objectives. This will benefit staff members as well as students and the community.

**C.R.S. § 22-63-201**

**Employment – Certificate required**

Prohibits board from entering into an employment contract with a person who does not hold a teacher's certificate or letter of authorization.

**Rationale:** Free Horizon Montessori (FHM) should be granted the authority to hire teachers and principals that will support the school's goals and objectives. The principal and teacher responsibilities and competencies for the position may have limited variations to traditional competencies for administrator and teacher positions (for example, Montessori certification). As such, the school will need to – at times – seek innovative recruitment channels that identify strong candidates for open positions even though the candidates may not have an active Colorado teacher license. The school will seek to attract principals and teachers from a wide variety of backgrounds, including, but not limited to teachers from out-of-state, teachers with a lapsed Colorado certificate, persons with several years of successful teaching experience in a setting not requiring a license, as well as persons with business or professional experience. All employees of FHM will be employed on an "at-will" basis. **All FHM teachers and principals will meet the standard of possessing, at least, a Bachelor's Degree plus 24 hours in their content area or passage of the requisite PRAXIS exam appropriate for the position held as approved by the Colorado Department of Education. FHM will report "in field" and "out of field" as per ESSA and will work to meet the new standards of "in field" and "out of field".**

**Replacement Plan:** The school will, as is appropriate, hire certified teachers and principals. However, in some instances it may be advantageous for the school to hire teachers and/or administrators without a certificate and who possess unique background and/or skills that fill the need of FHM (for example, Montessori certification). FHM preferentially employs Montessori teachers holding certificates from training centers accredited by the Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education (MACTE), a member of the Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors (ASPA) and recognized by the United States Department of Education (USDE). The school recognizes the value of state teacher certification and will therefore also maintain a tiered compensation model that incentivizes and rewards

teachers for earning and maintaining an active Colorado teaching license. In addition, on a funds-available basis, the school will make financial support available to teachers and staff who wish to enroll in an educator or administrator licensing program. All school staff will receive a written, signed agreement specifying compensation for the year, provision of benefits, work responsibilities, and employer responsibilities.

**Duration of the Waivers:** FHM requests that the waiver be for the duration of the school as an Innovation School.

**Financial Impact:** The school anticipates that the requested waivers will have no financial impact on Jefferson County School District or FHM.

**How the Impact of the Waivers Will be Evaluated:** The impact of these waivers will be measured by the performance appraisal criteria and assessments that apply to FHM.

**Expected Outcome:** As a result of these waivers, the school will be able to employ professional staff possessing unique skills and/or backgrounds, filling all staff needs.

## CLARIFICATION RELATED TO COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AGREEMENTS

FHM's original Innovation Plan specified that Free Horizon Montessori PK-8 did not employ any members of Collective Bargaining Agreement(s) (CBA) and therefore no vote was taken. However, the full staff was afforded the opportunity to vote on the Innovation Plan in its entirety, and this included exemption from CBA's.

Due to the specialized and specific nature of the Montessori pedagogy and model, no staff at Free Horizon Montessori PK-8 shall be subject to the provisions of any Collective Bargaining Agreement, including but not limited to JCEA, JESPA, and JCAA. This has not changed from the original Innovation Plan and is included here to afford clarification. In order to assure clarity of understanding among employees, FHM added the following statement to new and annual employment offer letters:

*Furthermore, I acknowledge that I am expected to read, understand and adhere to the FHM Mission and Vision statements, the FHM Employee Handbook, the FHM Innovation Option Plan and the FHM Board Policy Manual. I affirm understanding that under FHM's Innovation Plan, the School operates under waiver and replacement plans to several state statutes and district policies, including exemption of all employees from all Collective Bargaining Agreements. In addition, I agree to abide by all applicable Jeffco Public School Policies.*

## **FUTURE GOALS**

Building upon the continued success of providing an authentic, high-caliber Montessori educational model, FHM proposes the following goals for the next three years, 2021-22 through 2023-24 school years:

### **Educational Program**

FHM looks forward to measuring the impact of the Wonders and StudySync comprehensive literacy curriculum and the ETC<sup>®</sup> Montessori Math extensions on student achievement and growth. Additionally, FHM will continue working through the American Montessori Society Pathway of Continuous Improvement with the ultimate goal of reaching Level 10: Fully Accredited.

### **Academic**

FHM will maintain or improve academic performance and growth metrics in specific areas identified in the school's Unified Improvement Plan as measured by MAP, DIBELS, and/or CMAS data while adhering to Montessori pedagogy.

### **School Climate and Culture**

During the past year, data from the Jeffco Family Partnership Survey and the Teaching and Learning Conditions in Colorado (TLCC) survey data declined in several areas. FHM will work to show improvement in satisfaction among families and staff through enhanced communication and increased opportunities for collaboration. For staff, FHM plans to reimagine and reinstate an Instructional Leadership Team based on tenets from EL Schools.

### **Operational**

FHM will continue to work in partnership with Jeffco central administrative offices to more fully integrate into the district PeopleSoft systems in order to increase administrative efficiency, timeliness, and accuracy.



## **EVIDENCE OF SUPPORT FROM STAKEHOLDER GROUPS**

### **Free Horizon Montessori PK-8 Board of Directors**

The FHM Board of Directors had opportunities to provide input into this Innovation Review, conducted a first read at their March 11, 2021 regular board meeting, and completed a second read at their March 16, 2021 special board meeting where they unanimously expressed support of this Innovation Review as presented for submission to the Jeffco Public Schools Cabinet and Jeffco Board of Education.

### **Free Horizon Montessori PK-8 Staff**

Following approval of the Innovation Review by the FHM Board of Directors, it was sent via email to the entire FHM staff on April 21, 2021. Time on our April 30, 2021 Staff Development Day agenda will be dedicated to collegial discussion of the Innovation Review, with opportunity for staff members to ask questions. With goals tied to the Unified Improvement Plan process, staff will continue to have voice in action steps.

## **APPENDICES**

- A. Free Horizon Montessori Innovation Plan, approved by Jefferson County Public Schools Board of Education 05/03/2018 and approved by the Colorado State Board of Education 06/05/2018
- B. Free Horizon Montessori Board Policy Manual, approved by the Free Horizon Montessori PK-8 Board of Directors, version 2021-04-27
- C. Free Horizon Montessori Staff Handbook, version 2021-04-05
- D. Free Horizon Montessori School Performance Framework 2019 (most recent available)
- E. Free Horizon Montessori PK-8 2020-21 Unified Improvement Plan
- F. Free Horizon Montessori PK-8 School Insights Snapshot 2020-21
- G. Statement of Innovation Review Support from the Free Horizon Montessori PK-8 Board of Directors