

Breakthrough Board Minutes - Complete
3/22/2023

Attendance:

X	Vivek Swaminathan, Parent rep Secretary
X	Kendra Harpster, Parent rep SHA President, Finance Committee
X	Katie Brown, Board member
X	Keith Whitescarver, Founder and former Board Chair
X	Juliette Berg, Board member
	Emily Hedin, Executive Director
	Genevieve D'Cruz, Principal
	Ino Okoawo, Director of Operations
	Patrice Feinstein, Compass
	Jane Slatter, Compass
	Emma White, Compass
	Anne Aaron, Compass
	Emma White, Compass
	Francesca Pisano, Compass

Community members: Miguelina Zapata, Emunah Ammi, Rebecca Bonhomme, Tova Wilson

**Breakthrough Montessori PCS
Board of Trustees**

Thursday, March 22, 2023

5:05-6:30pm

Zoom:

<https://breakthroughmontessori-org.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZAtduyorzMsGNRPPBOLkl1M6gl7Rz0sRATZ>

- I. 5:00pm: Call to order & Welcome
- II. 5:05-5:10pm: Approval of the Minutes from February 9, 2023

- III. 5:10-6:00pm: Strategic Alignment Update from Compass and Board Discussion
- IV. 6:00-6:10pm: Public Comment
- V. 6:10-6:30pm: New Business
 - A. Academic Committee Update
 - B. Debrief of Insight Survey Results discussion with staff
- VI. 6:30pm: Adjourn

Approval of the Minutes from February 9, 2023

Vote to approve minutes from February 9, 2022 - Postponed to next Board meeting due to lack of quorum

Strategic Alignment Update from Compass and Board Discussion

Full Compass presentation can be found [here](#).

- **Patrice Feinstein** shared an overview of findings regarding mission and goals.
- Input revealed consensus on direction but opportunities for minor tweaks and word changes to reflect more input from parents, faculty and Board leadership.

Compass interviews with Breakthrough stakeholders: Themes pertaining to mission and goals

These **themes** were the most commonly cited by interviewees during interviews:

- General support for current mission statement
- Improving student outcomes (both academic and developmental), including test scores
- Serving a diverse student body, including at-risk and special ed students
- Staff and leadership retention and development
- Support for a refined “3 Pillars”

Compass interviews with Breakthrough stakeholders: Highest and lowest ranking priorities for all stakeholders

When forced to rank a series of priorities, the **highest ranking priorities** were:

- Leadership/Faculty Retention and Development
- Improving students' scores in literacy/math
- Meeting the needs of at-risk/Special Ed students (i.e., Student Support Services)
- Ensuring students' SEL development at appropriate age-level

The **lowest ranking priorities** were:

- Montessori pedagogy
- Transparent Communication
- Family engagement
- Equity/Anti-Racism

Jane Slatter presented findings on 3 pillars and SWOT analysis

3 pillars

- Prevention development and community
- No one objected to pillars, but many could be reworked
- Perhaps add social justice or special education as additional pillar
- Prevention and development could be combined into one pillar

SWOT findings

- Strengths: Emily highlighted, diversity of students and compensation
- Opportunities: collaboration with other Montessori schools, better use of faculty skills
- Threats: Key person dependency, lack of succession planning
- Weaknesses: staff morale, overextended leadership, retention, communication and knowledge between special ed, students having a creative outlet

Elizabeth Meers shared Feedback on Mission Vision and Goals

- MISSION: Board supports mission statement with potential for tweaks - adding diverse, delete full implemented and change program to education
- Priorities Leadership faculty retention/development, social/emotional learning, improvement in english and math scores
- No discussion of special education

Board focus group: **Goals**

- **Leadership/faculty retention and development**
 - Need institutional stability and strong, capable, and diverse teachers and leaders
 - Implement and/or revisit goals/metrics in 2021 retention plan
 - Need emergency plan and longer term succession plan for Executive Director
- **Social/emotional learning**
 - Need documentation of SEL protocols and related training
 - Establish separate goals for students and teachers
 - Current metric (decrease in number of students leaving classroom because of behavior) should be made positive
- **Improvement in English/math scores**
 - Meet D.C. requirements

Board focus group: **Breakthrough staff's draft vision statement**

Possible Board revisions to staff's draft vision statement:

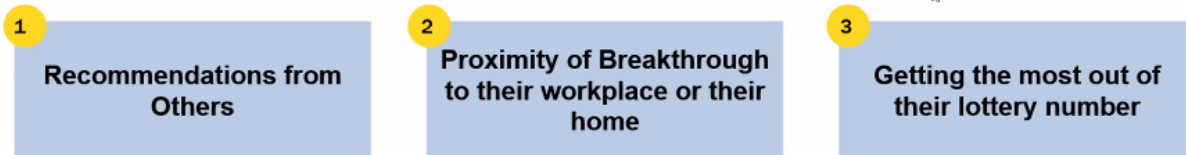
- Change "*become*" to "*envision*," delete "*are liberated to.*" "*Overcoming challenges*" should be stated positively.
- "We *envision* an antiracist, peaceful, and just society that dismantles systemic oppression. At Breakthrough Montessori, our students, staff, and families see their unbounded potential and develop the confidence [to overcome challenges] throughout their lives."

Alecia Ortiz shared findings from the Parent Survey

- 167 parent responses, no mandatory questions, mostly primary classroom parent responses

Compass survey of Breakthrough parents: Why parents selected Breakthrough

Respondents were asked to choose what factors informed their decision to enroll their child at Breakthrough. Parents prioritized...

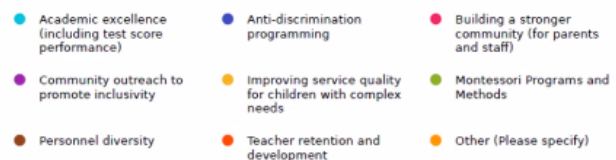
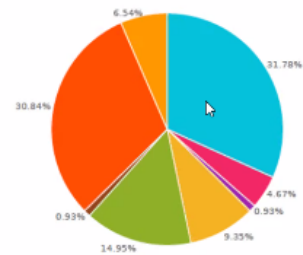


When choosing a school, they did NOT prioritize academic excellence, Montessori teaching methods, or special programming options.

Compass survey of Breakthrough parents: Views on top priorities

Parents were asked to identify a “number one priority” for Breakthrough over the next three years.

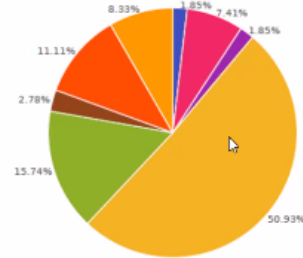
Parents identified **teacher retention** and **academic excellence** as top priorities.



Compass survey of Breakthrough parents: Views on investment areas

Parents were also asked to identify one area for substantial investment.

Parents identified **enrichment activities** as the area to invest in.

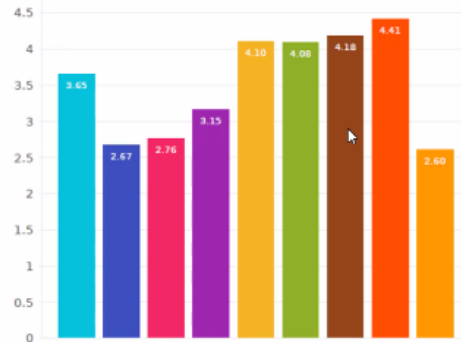


- Capital Investments
- Dedicated Transportation (a Bus)
- Educator training regarding services for children with complex needs
- Enhanced nutritional options (better meals)
- Enrichment Activities (Music, art, field trips, technology integration, language classes)
- Recruitment of certified Montessori guides
- Recruitment of diverse educators and staff
- Teacher bonuses
- Other (Please specify)

Compass survey of Breakthrough parents: Parents' ranking performance of current activities

Parents were asked to rank current activities on a scale of 1 (low performance) to 5 (high performance).

Parents identified **Special Ed, Referrals to Special Ed Programming** and **Behavioral Support Services** as low performing.



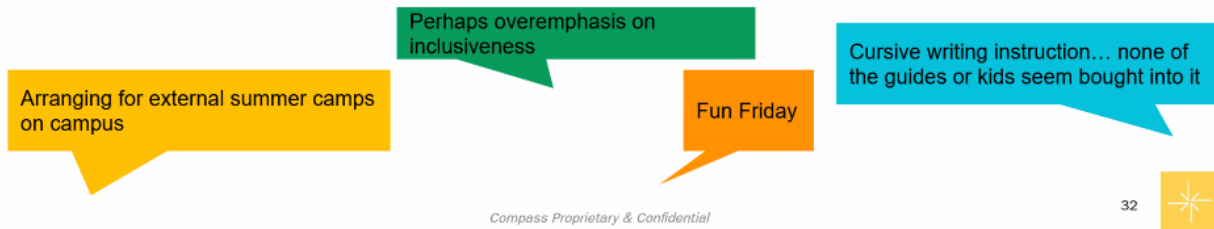
- Academic Performance of the Student Body
- Referral and Eligibility Process for Special Education Services
- Behavioral Support Services
- Specials (Spanish, Outdoor Education, P.E.)
- Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Outreach and Programming
- English Language Learner Services
- Reading Partners and/or Support from the Literacy Specialist
- Montessori Programs and Methods
- Special Ed Services Methods

Compass survey of Breakthrough parents: Views on deprioritization areas

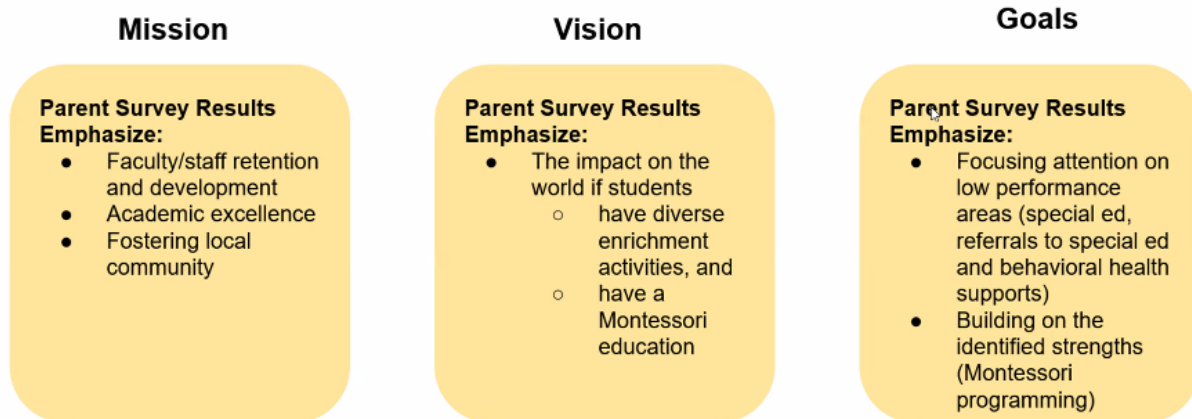
Parents were given the opportunity to share feedback on which activities Breakthrough should not continue.

Many respondents elected to not answer this question, or noted that there are no activities that Breakthrough is currently completing that should not be continued.

However, some recommendations for discontinuation were made...



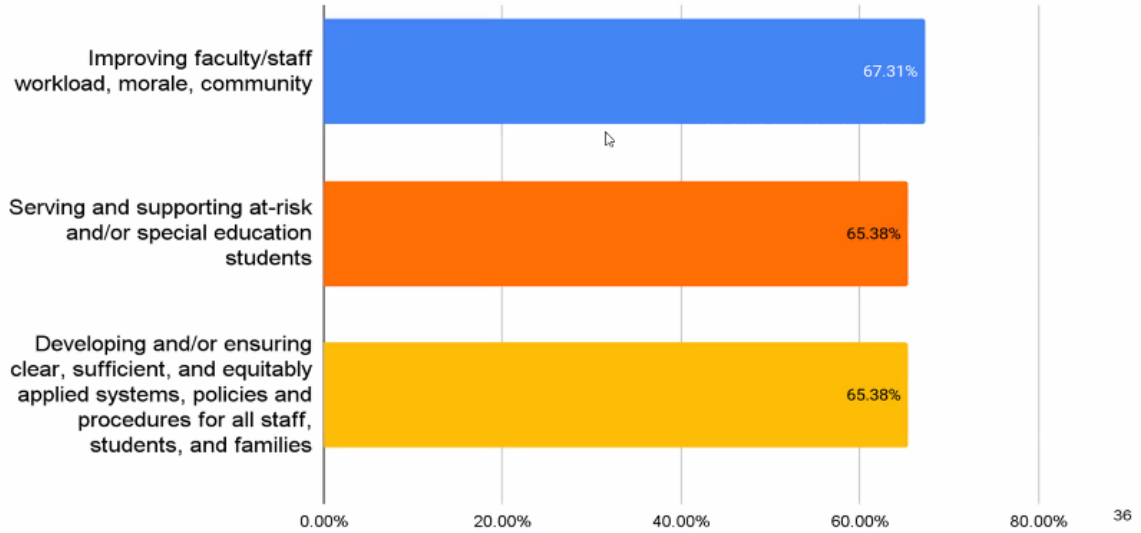
Compass survey of Breakthrough parents: Takeaways on mission, vision, and goals



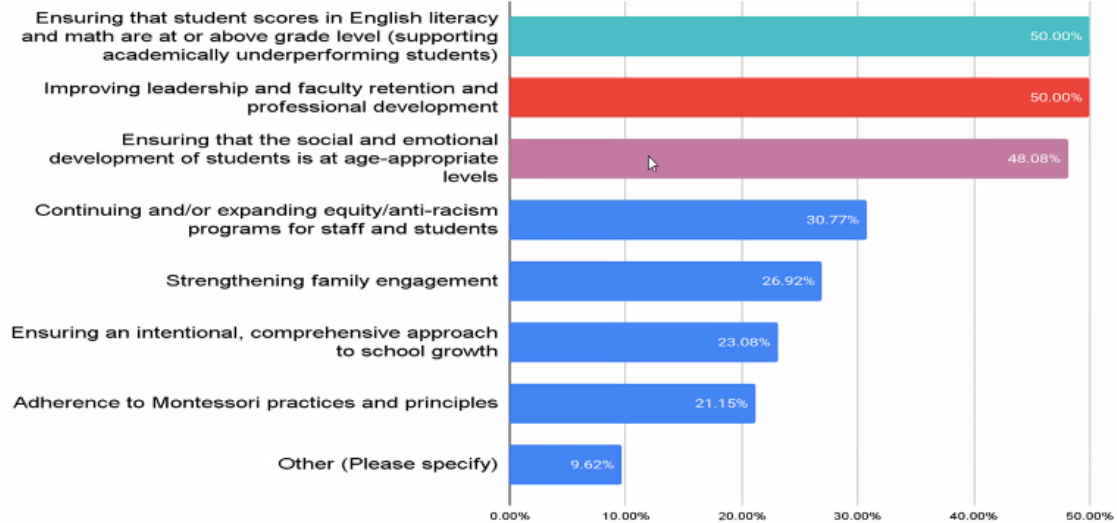
Anne Aaron Results of Staff Survey

- Faculty and staff support mission and drafted a vision as a consensus view
- Survey was meant to zero in on goals and priorities

Compass survey of Breakthrough staff: Top priorities for the next 3-5 years



Compass survey of Breakthrough staff: Secondary priorities for the next 3-5 years



Compass analysis:

Key strategic challenges for Breakthrough

- Tension between fidelity to Montessori pedagogy and DCPS requirements re student performance
- Issues driven by rapid growth as Breakthrough has become a larger, more complex organization:
 - Staff morale and workload
 - Perceptions that policies, systems and procedures are insufficient for an organization of Breakthrough's size and complexity and that existing policies are not uniformly or equitably enforced
- Differing views on how and *how much* to support special ed students
 - Who is responsible for the equitable support of special ed students, and to what standard? Where and on what timeline should interventions take place?
- Tension between discipline and emotional well-being policies and staff concerns re classroom safety

Emma White shared summary of mission, goals and vision

Summary analysis:

Mission: views across stakeholders

Faculty and Staff

The faculty and staff are **largely in agreement** with the mission statement. Some suggestions include:

- Ensure mission is unique to BM, and not applicable to any Montessori school
- Emphasize school [community](#)
- Like emphasis on high fidelity Montessori

Parents

The parents suggested including the following in the mission:

- Teacher development/retention
- Academic excellence
- Fostering local [community](#)

Board

The Board suggested the following edits to the mission:

- **De-emphasize "fully-implemented" as it relates to Montessori**
- Mention diversity of families/students
- Montessori is a method of education, rather than a program

Patrice: Next Steps

- Consult with ED and strategic planning committee
- Benchmarking with other schools
- Develop Compass recommendations with respect to Breakthrough's mission vision and goals for May 18th presentation

Q&A

- Katie asked about parent reasoning for choosing Breakthrough to make the most of Lottery with parents and Jack Katz sharing the question as written. It was another way of saying it was the best choice given their lottery results.
- Emily noted differing priorities, and wanted to know about lowest ranking priorities. Jack explained that results was just what people ranked as high priority, not a commentary on 'low priority'
- Emily is happy to see convergence on priorities
- Parents putting a high priority on teaching and retention was refreshing
- Academic achievement can cover other priorities overlap is promising

5:58 Juliette Berg Academic Committee update

- Emily and Genevieve shared mid-year assessments. Committee dug into grade level assessments. Principal and ED are comfortable with results and confident we can meet growth goals posed by DCPCSB
- Emily added that we're headed in the right direction. Good dialogue about new perspectives on math instruction. Multi-tiered approach to reading is working.
- Genevieve reviewed OSSE data on helping teachers understand math better instead of focusing on practice. Look at making math relatable for students. Find a multi-tiered equivalent for Math.
- Kendra noted 'mystery' of Montessori math can be difficult for parents to grasp and support
- Emily mentioned special education as an opportunity, Breakthrough exploring training and NCMPS offerings

6:07 Insight Survey results update

- Group discussion on 3 different topics, compiled feedback and make things available
- Vivek added that the conversation was constructive and tactical and can connect well to Compass themes on Mission, Goals and Vision

6:12 Meeting Adjourned