

Accountability Committee Handbook

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What is the Accountability Committee?

The Accountability Committee at Free Horizon Montessori (FHM) is a group of school staff, parents, and interested community members that advise the Head of School on ways to improve the school. Some schools call this committee the School Improvement Committee. The Accountability Committee comes to their recommendations through writing a School Improvement Plan (SIP) in a format dictated by Jefferson County Public Schools (see example in Appendix A), conducting an annual survey of parents and staff, and maintaining open dialog with members of the school community. The Accountability Committee also plays a role in informing the school community on progress being made towards and accomplishment of goals set by the committee, other school groups, and authorizing agencies such as Jefferson County Public Schools. The Accountability Committee plays a role in helping outside organizations evaluate and rank us for accreditation, adequate yearly progress, and school accountability reporting. A description of each of these items put together by Jefferson County Public Schools can be found in Appendix D. Finally, the Accountability Committee makes sure that activities at FHM are supporting the school mission which is:

Our preschool through sixth grade program creates respectful, independent thinkers with an understanding of diversity who are grounded in their community.

The mission of Free Horizon Montessori Public Charter School is to:

Nurture and empower students to become responsible citizens and self directed learners who embrace education as a life long process,

Provide an education that promotes academic excellence utilizing the Montessori philosophy in balance with the rigor of Colorado State and Jefferson County standards, and;

Help children attain high levels of academic, personal and social achievement so they may become successful and constructive contributors to our community and society.

Who is the Accountability Committee?

The Accountability Committee has a minimum membership of:

- Chairperson, required by law to be a parent
- Two additional parents (parents will ideally represent all three class levels: Primary, Lower Elementary, and Upper Elementary)
- Three teachers, ideally representing all three class levels
- The Head of School
- If possible, a liaison to the Board of Directors
- If possible, a liaison to the FHM community

Activities of the Accountability Committee

Though the Accountability Committee may take on additional tasks, especially during re-chartering or accreditation cycles, the primary activities of the Accountability Committee are:

- Meet approximately monthly during the school year
- Report progress made on the School Improvement Plan (SIP) submitted during the prior school year
- Set goals for the current school year and create a SIP describing those goals
- Conduct a survey of parents and staff
- Collate the results of the survey and report them to the Board of Directors at the annual April meeting
- Report goals and progress to the school community via articles in the school newsletter
- Maintain open communication with the school community throughout the year and advise the Head of School on improvements that could be made

Without being exclusive, the Accountability Committee is primarily focused on three areas:

- Academics
- Safety
- Creating a Welcoming Environment

Why is there an Accountability Committee?

The Accountability Committee is required by the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) and FHM's charter.

The Colorado Department of Education's Description of Accountability

This description can be found on the CDE web site at:

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdeedserv/account.htm>

Accountability in Colorado Education

Accountability: Holding ourselves (students, parents, educators, and community members) responsible for meeting identified student achievement targets through a continuous cycle of planning, evaluation, and reporting.

Colorado has in place a management strategy for school improvement called **public education accountability**. It involves a statewide method to establish **clear goals** for all public schools K-12 and to put responsibility for improvement plans in the hands of **local school communities**.

The strength of this strategy lies in two key features:

- significant involvement of the community in school improvement planning, and
- disclosure of actual progress **to the public**

Accountability is the effective use of information to focus energy toward the attainment of student results.

How It Works

- The State Board of Education has set high statewide goals for improvement of education.
- Each local district develops its own goals and accountability program tailored to its community and consistent with the state's goals.
- Each school in a district develops its own goals and accountability program consistent with the state and district's goals.

Colorado's accountability program is designed to strengthen and improve each local school through team management appropriate to its community.

- Each accountability program-- district, and building level--is guided by a representative advisory committee which reviews improvement plans, makes recommendations, and reports its progress frequently and clearly to the appropriate audience whether it be the general public, the State Board of Education, the local school board, or the school community.
- Annual reports are disseminated by each school to its public, and by each district to the community on progress toward local and state goals as well as improvement plans for the next school year.

An effective accountability program focuses on asking the right questions, choosing the right indicators of student performance, and reporting the results to the right audiences.

Background

The Accountability Act of 1997 and Part 2 of the Public School Finance Act of 1988 provide the legal basis for accountability in public education. This process is administered through State Board of Education rules.

History

From 1897 through 1952 the University of Colorado approved high school graduates for college. In 1952 accreditation and accountability became a function of the Colorado Department of Education. In 1971 School District Advisory Accountability Committees started the process of significant involvement of the community and disclosure of progress to the public. In 1988 School Building Advisory Accountability Committees were set up. In 2001 the annual School Accountability Reports (SAR) were issued. For more information regarding the SAR Reports click here: <http://reportcard.cde.state.co.us/reportcard/CommandHandler.jsp>

School Level Process

In Colorado, the focus of accountability is at the school level. The local accountability committees function as follows:

- Set prioritization of expenditures of school money
- Meet at least quarterly
- Work on means for determining whether decisions affecting the educational process are advancing or impeding student achievement
- Report educational performance to the public
- Review safety issues
- By September 1 of each year adopt high, but achievable goals and objectives for improvement of education in its building and adopt a plan to improve educational achievement in the school, to implement methods of maximizing graduation rates in

secondary schools of the district and to increase the rating for the school's accreditation category.

Excerpt from the Free Horizon Montessori Charter

Accountability Plan

Free Horizon Montessori is committed to developing a process to assure that we will meet our mission, goals, and objectives as stated in this charter application. The process and tools we will use to measure our success must emerge out of the needs of the School once it is in operation. Baseline data will be gathered during the first year of operation of Free Horizon Montessori, and this data will form the basis for further development of an elaborated plan including specific and measurable goals to be put in place by the School's board and School Director of FHM at the beginning of our second school year. The goals of our accountability program are outlined below:

- To include an agreement on accountability as part of our charter with the District.
- To implement the programs and policies of FHM as delineated in our Charter and as approved by the Jefferson County Board of Education.
- To use measurable data and Quality improvement methods such as PDCA cycles (plan, do, check and act) to increase our level of success in attaining our stated goals for student achievement as measured by individual progress within the Montessori curriculum, by student success in meeting or exceeding identified content standards developed by Jefferson County Schools, and by student scores in standardized tests such as the CSAP.
- To develop new improvement goals and objectives based on continual self assessment.
- To maintain an open attitude and to utilize recommendations resulting from external reviews by auditors from the District or State to promote continuous improvement at FHM.
- To develop an annual school improvement plan and measure success in its implementation.
- To report annually to the community, parents, major stakeholders, the District, and the Colorado Department of Education and others with an interest on the progress that FHM has made in meeting academic goals, objectives and pupil performance standards.
- To follow the five-year accountability plan as recommended by the Colorado League of Charter Schools.

a. Charter Accountability Agreement

As developed in our negotiations with the District, we will include an accountability clause or an amendment to our contract, drafted in clear language that is understandable to both parties to the agreement. The agreement will include the following sections:

- Intent
- Expectations (Goals, Objectives and Pupil Performance Standards)

- Documentation (School Improvement Plan, Annual Report, Self Study, External Report, Reaction Report, Follow-up Report, etc.)
- Timelines
- Contract Renewal
- Costs

b. Accountability Committee

The Accountability Committee will fulfill an advisory role to the Board of Directors and will be representative of the major stakeholders within the FHM. The committee will be responsible for designing and implementing an accountability process with measurable goals and objectives for continuous improvement of Free Horizon Montessori's educational program. This committee will continuously monitor and assess FHM's fulfillment of its mission, vision, goals, and objectives as stated in the FHM charter and will hold meetings open to all who are interested in attending. All parents of children who attend FHM will be encouraged to attend. Meetings will be conducted during the evening to ensure convenience for working parents, and minutes of meetings will be a matter of public record with copies available upon request.

During Free Horizon Montessori's first two years, the Accountability Committee will be required to meet on a monthly basis during the school year, at least 8 times a year. Thereafter, this Committee may elect to meet on a less frequent basis as long as accountability issues can be addressed in a timely and effective manner. A summary of each meeting will be included in the School's monthly newsletter, which will be distributed to all parents and any others desiring a copy.

c. Baseline Data Gathering

All students will be given a baseline assessment in a method to be determined by the board of directors, which is in compliance with State and District assessment requirements. This may include assessment within the Montessori curriculum against Jefferson County content standards or baseline standardized testing as deemed necessary. The information gathered will be used for comparison with subsequent assessments to determine whether Free Horizon Montessori is meeting its academic goals as defined in the Charter.

d. Annual Improvement Plan

Prior to the end of the academic school year, the Accountability Committee will review the progress FHM has made in meeting our accountability goals for that year. The Committee will also consider other areas within FHM where improvements can be made. The Committee will then develop an improvement plan for the subsequent year.

e. Implementation of the Accountability Process

Further development of the accountability process will occur during the first five years of existence of Free Horizon Montessori as recommended by the Colorado League of Charter Schools.

Year One/Step One

- Internal Review and/or technical assistance in goal setting ∴ Governance and Administrative Reviews
- Prepare School Improvement Plan for Year Two

Year Two/Step Two

- Gather data, conduct surveys, etc. for Critical Questions and Self-study .
- Prepare report for visiting team.

Year Three/Step Three

- External Site Visit by a group of peers .
- Team creates Year 3 Report; sends to School.
- Renewal application/decision.

Year Four/Step Four

- Reflect and act on Year 3 Report and recommendations .
- School writes, sends Reaction Report to Year 3 team.

Year Five/Step Five

- Follow-up visit/ review by two members of Year 3 team; they write follow-up report for School

The sequence and timing of the self-study and site visit may be varied slightly at the discretion of the Accountability Committee in consultation with the Board of Directors. A decision to delay these elements until years three and four respectively may be made if a substantial increase in enrollment is experienced in years two and three. This decision would be made based upon the need to perform these elements during a time when the School has reached a good baseline for the student body population.

By using this planned approach to accountability, FHM will help assure that it will meet its goals and objectives for pupil performance as stated in this charter application to the District, that it will meet or exceed Jefferson County Content Standards, and that it will remain consistent with its charter application goals, mission and vision.

Operating Norms of the Accountability Committee

- Roles
 - Chairperson
 - Creates meeting agendas
 - Facilitates meetings
 - Ensures that required documents are submitted on time
 - Recorder
 - Records meeting minutes

- Maintains applicable committee documents (e.g., meeting agendas and minutes, SIPs, and survey results) in a location accessible to the FHM community
 - Liaison to the Board of Directors
 - Facilitates communication of goals and activities between the BOD and the Accountability Committee
 - Liaison to the FHM community
 - Actively solicits comments from the FHM community
 - Informs the FHM community of Accountability Committee activities and goals
- Group Norms
 - As an advisory committee, there is little need for the Accountability Committee to vote on actions to be taken.
 - Any goals set by the Accountability Committee will use the SMART Goal format (see Appendix B).
 - When a decision is required, the decision should be made cooperatively (see Appendix C).
- Meeting Norms
 - Meetings will follow the posted agenda.
 - Communication at meetings will be respectful.

Legal Considerations

As a standing committee of a public entity, the Accountability Committee is subject to a number of legal considerations. An outline provided by Jefferson County Public Schools follows, along with some considerations on confidentiality and the Colorado Sunshine Law.

“Assurances” listed on the SIP template and as outlined in State Accountability Laws, District Policies, and the Strategic Plan

- Meetings are advertised and open to the public.
- Meeting minutes are accessible to staff, students, parents, and the public.
- Meeting times, dates, and location are collaboratively decided by the members of the committee.
- Rules of operation exist that are consistent with Board policy and state law.
- Accountability chairperson is not a district employee.
- Accountability committee has broad representation.
- Efforts to involve diverse members are made.
- The school and accountability committee have developed strategies, assessments, responsible parties, resources, etc. for each goal.
- The accountability committee made budget priority recommendations to the principal.
- The cooperative decision making process is used in major school decision making committees that involve community members, and through the brochure and

video the school committees will be trained in and made aware of the cooperative decision making process.

- A progress report to the community will be distributed by the end of December.
- All schools have engaged in the self assessment review process and have identified support efforts for at risk students.
- This plan includes goals to close achievement disparities and/or goals to address special needs students reaching their potential.

(The following *plans* should be available at each school but do not need to be submitted with the SIP:)

- The school has a current *Discipline Plan*.
- The school has a current *Emergency Management Plan*.
- The school has a *Safety Plan* and will submit the Safety Plan Checklist in September and May.
- The school is implementing drop out retrieval and retention strategies.

Confidentiality Statement

Open Meeting Requirements Of The Colorado Sunshine Law

A Publication of the Office of Legislative Legal Services

November 1, 2004

The Colorado Sunshine Law generally requires that any state or local governmental body that meets to discuss public business or to take formal action do so in meetings that are open to the public. Under the law (§ 24-6-402, C.R.S.), "meeting" refers to any kind of gathering convened to discuss public business, whether in person, by telephone, electronically, or by other means of communication. Electronic mail messages can be considered "meetings" under the statute. The statute does not apply to chance meetings or social occasions where public business is not the central purpose of the meeting.

Local Body DEFINITIONS:

LOCAL BODY: Any board, commission, or other advisory decision-making body of a political subdivision of the state; or any entity that has been delegated the governmental decision-making function

MEMBERS: Three or more members of the body (or two members if two constitutes a quorum) conducting business are subject to this law

NOTICE: The statute requires full and timely notice, posted in its designated place within a reasonable time prior to the meeting. A local body may comply by posting notice at least 24 hours prior to the meeting

MINUTES: Required to record minutes of meetings, including executive sessions

EXECUTIVE SESSION: Requires announcement of topic for discussion, citation to authorizing law, and a two-thirds vote of the members present

Appendix A: Example School Improvement Plan (SIP)

2006-2007
Free Horizon Montessori Elementary Accreditation /
School Improvement Plan

School: Free Horizon Montessori School Principal: Jami Boarman

2006-2007 Accountability Chairperson: Kimberly Shockley-Babb

School's Mission/Vision statement:

Mission Statement: Our mission is to provide a preschool through 6th grade education that promotes demonstrated academic excellence using the Montessori method and philosophy resulting in a partnership with teachers, parents, and children to create constructive contributors to our community

Vision Statement: Free Horizon Montessori is a learning community of children, families and educators dedicated to providing a Montessori education that strives to meet each child's interests, developmental needs, and learning styles. We seek to develop socially responsible children who are joyous, internally driven learners with a passion to understand their world and who possess the academic tools to follow their interests.

Signatures indicate involvement and agreement with the attached:

Accountability Chairperson

Principal

THE 2006-2007 SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE

Number of school accountability committee members who are:

American Indian/Alaskan Native	_____		
Asian/Pacific Islander	_____	Male	_____
Black, not Hispanic	_____	Female	<u>6</u>
White, not Hispanic	<u>6</u>		
Hispanic	_____	Total:	<u>6</u>

Number of school accountability members who are:

Parents who are not district employees	<u>3</u>	Students	<u>0</u>
Parents of Special Ed. or G/T Children	<u>0</u>	Employees	<u>3</u>
Community Representatives	<u>0</u>		

Times of meetings: 2nd Tuesday of every month at 4:30 pm Location of meetings: Free Horizon Montessori School

Jefferson County Schools Board of Education Ends Strategic Plan Goals

- *All children are prepared for a successful future.*

Ends 2

- *Students will meet or exceed district standards in English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies.*

Ends 3

- *Students will meet or exceed district standards aligned with their individual talents, interests, and abilities in world languages, career development, visual and performing arts, music, family studies, and physical education.*

Ends 4

- *Students will demonstrate responsible citizenship in our communities.*

Ends 5

- *Students will possess personal characteristics and life skills to successfully meet life's challenges.*

Strategic Plan Goals to Meet the Board of Education Ends

- *All students graduate with meaningful choices.*
- *All employees are accountable for a high performing organization.*

Assurances

As outlined in State Accountability Laws, District Policies, and the Strategic Plan

- ✓ Meetings are advertised and open to the public.
- ✓ Meeting minutes are accessible to staff, students, parents, and the public.
- ✓ Meeting times, dates, and location are collaboratively decided by the members of the committee.
- ✓ Rules of operation exist that are consistent with Board policy and state law.
- ✓ Accountability chairperson is not a district employee.
- ✓ Accountability committee has broad representation.
- ✓ Efforts to involve diverse members are made.
- ✓ The school and accountability committee have developed strategies, assessments, responsible parties, resources, etc. for each goal (does not have to be included with this report).
- ✓ The accountability committee made budget priority recommendations to the principal.
- ✓ The cooperative decision making process is used in major school decision making committees that involve community members, and through the brochure and video the school committees will be trained in and made aware of the cooperative decision making process.
- ✓ A progress report to the community will be distributed by the end of December.
- ✓ All schools have engaged in the self assessment review process and have identified support efforts for at risk students.
- ✓ This plan includes goals to close achievement disparities and/or goals to address special needs students reaching their potential.

(The following *plans* should be available at each school but do not need to be submitted with this document:)

- ✓ The school has a current *Discipline Plan*.
- ✓ The school has a current *Emergency Management Plan*.
- ✓ The school has a *Safety Plan* and will submit the Safety Plan Checklist in September and May.
- ✓ The school is implementing drop out retrieval and retention strategies.

Section 1:
Academic Achievement Indicators
CSAP Scores

Reading Achievement	Actual Weighted Index Scores		Student Achievement Growth	Jeffco Strategic Plan Weighted Index Targets
	2005 2006	2006 2007	2005-2006 2006-2007	
The aggregate CSAP reading weighted index score will increase for:				2006-2007
• All Students	80.9	96.2	15.3	85.4
• All Females	93.8	107.9	14.1	90.4
• All Males	69.4	85.0	15.6	80.6
• All Minority Students	87.5	100.0	12.5	70.4
• All Students on Individualized Education Plans	40	68.2	28.2	30.3
• All Students on Advanced Learning Plans	108.3	116.7	8.4	119.9

	Increased	Stable	Decreased
Number of Scores	6	0	0

Reading Action Plan

Urgent Challenge(s) in Reading:

Coordinate all reading instruction to ensure alignment of curriculum with instructional strategies and assessment practices

Planned Short Term Goals and Action:

- Gain consensus on scope and sequence of reading curriculum
- Assess materials in classroom, identify gaps and prioritize purchasing based on classroom needs
- Provide support and if necessary professional training on delivery of reading curriculum and standardized assessments
- Define exit criteria for kindergarten and 3rd grade

System for Monitoring Progress:

- Reading materials inventory
- Documented exit criteria for kindergarten and 3rd grade
- Utilization of standardized assessments to measure individual student reading growth
- Documented support and professional development as completed

Work of the Instructional Coach in Reading:

Coach is not engaged in work in this area.

****Please indicate if this goal is the primary measure of the work of the coach in your school. If the coach is not working in this area, just indicate that the coach is not engaged in work in this area.*

Writing Achievement	Actual Weighted Index Scores		Student Achievement Growth	Jeffco Strategic Plan Weighted Index Targets
	2005 2006	2006 2007	2005-2006 2006-2007	
The aggregate CSAP writing weighted index score will increase for:				2006-2007
• All Students	71.3	84.6	13.3	84.5
• All Females	82.8	100.0	17.2	91.7
• All Males	61.1	70.0	8.9	77.6
• All Minority Students	75	76.5	1.5	71.6
• All Students on Individualized Education Plans	60	68.2	8.2	43.1
• All Students on Advanced Learning Plans	100	100.0	0	121.1

	Increased	Stable	Decreased
Number of Scores	5	1	0

Writing Action Plan

Urgent Challenge(s) in Writing:

Coordinate all writing instruction to ensure alignment of curriculum with instructional strategies and assessment practices

Planned Short Term Goals and Action:

- Develop rubrics of writing to ensure consistent expectations in all classroom instruction
- Assess materials in classroom, identify gaps and prioritize purchasing based on classroom needs
- Add revisions / editing to lower elementary curriculum expectations to be utilized in creative writing and research writing activities
- Provide support and necessary professional development on delivery of writing curriculum
- Define exit criteria for kindergarten, 3rd grade and 6th grade

System for Monitoring Progress:

- Writing materials inventory
- Documented exit criteria for kindergarten, 3rd grade and 6th grade
- Documented support and professional development as completed
- Observation / audit of delivery of writing instruction, particular to revision and editing
- Common rubrics of writing is used in all lower and upper elementary classrooms

Work of the Instructional Coach in Writing:

Instructional Coach is not engaged in work in this area

****Please indicate if this goal is the primary measure of the work of the coach in your school. If the coach is not working in this area, just indicate that the coach is not engaged in work in this area.*

Math Achievement	Actual Weighted Index Scores		Student Achievement Growth	Jeffco Strategic Plan Weighted Index Targets
	2005 2006	2006 2007	2005-2006 2006-2007	
The aggregate CSAP math weighted index score will increase for:				2006-2007
• All Students	82.4	98.1	15.7	80.3
• All Females	95.3	107.9	12.6	79.6
• All Males	70.8	88.8	18.0	81.1
• All Minority Students	70.8	91.2	20.4	59.2
• All Students on Individualized Education Plans	45	81.8	36.8	23.5
• All Students on Advanced Learning Plans	100.0	100.0	0	132.5

	Increased	Stable	Decreased
Number of Scores	5	1	0

Math Action Plan

Urgent Challenge(s) in Math:

Ensure exposure to variety of math terms and practice to support students moving to abstraction

Planned Short Term Goals and Action:

- Define and document pivotal basic skills to be achieved the by the end of 3rd grade
- Assess materials in classroom, identify gaps and prioritize purchasing based on classroom needs
- Define exit criteria for kindergarten, 3rd grade, 6th grade

System for Monitoring Progress:

- Math materials inventory
- Documentation of exit criteria for kindergarten, 3rd grade and 6th grade
- Documentation of support and professional development as completed
- Observation / audit of delivery of math instruction, particular to abstraction of math concepts

Work of the Instructional Coach in Math:

Instructional Coach is not engaged in work in this area

****Please indicate if this goal is the primary measure of the work of the coach in your school. If the coach is not working in this area, just indicate that the coach is not engaged in work in this area.*

Science Achievement	Actual Weighted Index Scores		Student Achievement Growth	Jeffco Strategic Plan Weighted Index Targets
	2005 2006	2006 2007	2005-2006 2006-2007	
The aggregate CSAP science weighted index score will increase for:				2006-2007
• All Students	73.1	84.8	11.7	69.1
• All Females	87.5	82.1	-5.4	67.2
• All Males	50.0	88.9	38.9	70.9
• All Minority Students	50.0	83.3	33.3	44.5
• All Students on Individualized Education Plans	66.7	100.0	33.3	15.9
• All Students on Advanced Learning Plans	100.0	150.0	50.0	119.2

	Increased	Stable	Decreased
Number of Scores	5	0	1

Science Action Plan

Urgent Challenge(s) in Science:

Improve understanding of the experimental nature of science and the value it plays in our society

Planned Short Term Goals and Action:

- Review science curriculum
- Assess materials in classroom, identify gaps and prioritize purchasing based on classroom needs
- Provide resources to teachers outlining simple scientific experiments that can be integrated into the classroom

System for Monitoring Progress:

- Improved scores on the Science question (I am learning more about doing science) on Make Your Voice Heard questionnaire

Work of the Instructional Coach in Science:

Instructional coach is not engaged in work in this area.

****Please indicate if this goal is the primary measure of the work of the coach in your school. If the coach is not working in this area, just indicate that the coach is not engaged in work in this area.*