Wildflower Montessori
Public Schools of Colorado

WMPSC Board Agenda

December 16th, 5:30-7:30 pm

In attendance:
Betsy Symanietz - Board Facilitator
Kelly Gomes - Shared Service Partner
Latia Henderson - Board Chair
Marcellee Fulllwood - Treasurer
Sarah Vescio - Parent, Cactus Bloom / Board Member
Hali Nernberg - Parent, Cactus Bloom / Board Member
Megan Smith - Teacher Leader
Michelle Hobbins - Teacher Leader
Marthe Briggs - Teacher Leader
Tina Wallace - Financials
Zoey He - Emerging Teacher Leader
Emely De Jesus - Emerging Teacher Leader
Jeremy Franklin - Board Compliance Officer

Meeting Purpose
Monthly board meeting for Wildflower Montessori Public Schools of Colorado, including welcoming a new board member, reviewing financials, and receiving financial oversight training.
WMPSC Board Meetings are held on zoom. This agenda can be found in the WMPSC Board Meetings folder.

Time	Format	Topic (includes links to supporting documents)	Facilitator
5:30-5:45	N/A	Welcome, call meeting to order, request proposal to approve the agenda ● To prepare to engage in our check-in reflection, take 5-7 minutes to review this pre-read material before the meeting ● BS: The pre-read for our meeting was about domination pattern-thinking--in particular, the above/below dynamic and how it shapes our relationships. What do you find inspiring and/or challenging about these ideas? ● Several people shared ● JF moved to move the agenda forward ● Unanimous support	Betsy
	N/A	Public Comment	
5:45-5:55	Information, Validation	November Financials ● TW shared financial results ● Board unanimously validated	Maggie
5:55-6:05	Discussion	WMPSC Network SSP Update ● KG introduced the ETL from The Sunflower School ● KG went through the SSP updates	Kelly
6:05-6:15	Validation	Consent Agenda: ● November Meeting Minutes ● 2023-2024 Audit Findings ● Lease for The Sunflower School ● Policies ○ School Closure ○ FAMLI+ ● KG gave an overview of the items on the consent agent ● MF - do we have funds to pay for FAMLI and insure continuity of care ● BS asked if we wanted to remove any items from the consent agenda ● Reaction round from all present members ● KG proposes to move forward ● Board unanimously updated ●	Betsy
6:15-6:45	Discussion	Midyear Budget Revisions	Kelly

		• Aurora • GV • KG shared the powerpoint, each site shared updates • OpeKG asked for board to give advice for change for the 20th for changes to be made to be updated before January 6th to post on the website no later than 10 days before the final board updates need to questions or concerns •	
6:45-7:00	Discussion	Committee Updates • Each committee leader shared updates from work that has been done. P&E specifically was seeking advice about the evaluation policies	Kelly
7:00-7:10	Discussion	24-25 Board Priorities Midyear Stepback • MF named that finance has made a lot of progress towards their goals • KG shared that most of the priorities have had conversations at the committee level • JF wants to learn more about Montessori	Betsy
7:10-7:20	Discussion	New Policy: Mountain Juniper Stipend Structure • BS shared the creation of policy overview • MB shared overview of the why for the bonus they created • LH and JF asked questions about noticings they had • MB asked for advice before break	Martha and Michelle
7:20-7:25	Survey	Spring Board Retreat: Date and Location	Kelly
7:25-7:30	Reminders	Upcoming Events and Reminders • TS Gold for Aurora and GV in December • NWEA for Aurora in December • Staff Development day December 20th • WMPSC Closed December 23-January 3rd • Staff Development Day January 6th	Kelly
	Feedback	Share your feedback on tonight's meeting	

- JF moved to close the meeting
- Unanimous vote to close the meeting

Check-in Pre-Read

Please review the blog post below before our meeting! If you are already familiar with these concepts, skip ahead to the last 3 paragraphs (highlighted in grey).

Beyond Above and Below: Undoing Domination Culture From Within

By Betsy Symanietz for The Wildflower Foundation, 2022

At Wildflower, we believe in freedom. The schools Teacher Leaders create embody their commitment to children's freedom in every detail. From the way the classroom furniture is set up to the schedule of the school day and the expectations teachers model regarding how people speak to one another, each decision grows from teachers' commitment to the sanctity of human freedom, and their responsibility as the classroom guide to support children's growth into independent, capable human beings.

The extraordinary environments of Wildflower Schools are one expression of a pattern of liberatory work reverberating throughout the Wildflower network. Energizing and strengthening this pattern of liberation for all is the core purpose that unites us across affiliated organizations in the Wildflower network. We know that in order to create liberatory learning environments for children, we must also support and nurture a liberatory environment for adults, and one important way we do that is by working together in very intentional and deliberate ways. We call this part of our work self-management. And practicing self-management challenges us.

As our self-management practice has developed over the years, we have figured out some things that work, and from that learning have created guidelines, structures, practical tips, common pitfalls, new vocabulary, and new systems. We have needed this structure to help us work together in an intentional way as we grow. But the more "built up" our practices have become, the more distortion I have noticed creeping in. Guidelines become boxes to check. Tips become rules we use to control one another. New vocabulary becomes a way to determine who has access to important conversations and who doesn't. And I found myself wondering: what's happening here? Even in the new environment we're striving to create, why do we - again and again -

continually find ways to control one another's behavior? To demonstrate our compliance? To seek approval? To impose - or surrender - our will?

One reason we struggle with this is because we are all living and breathing the toxin of **domination culture** every day in every other area of our lives, and many of us are not aware of how it shapes our thoughts and actions. Domination culture is the fundamental idea - in very simple terms - of one person being "above" and the other being "below." In this system of thought and behavior, above and below are the only two options: there is no other way to relate to one another. Every relationship becomes defined by its positionality. Consider your relationships with colleagues, with family members, even with strangers - can you see how above and below defines how you relate?

It's important to try - because in so many ways, this idea determines how we behave and the choices we make. In this paradigm, if I don't want to be subjected to someone else's will, my only choice is to get myself into a position in which they are subjected to mine. This is an interpersonal expression, but domination-oriented thinking doesn't stop there, expanding and hardening at the cultural level into the big systems of oppression that hurt us, inhibit us, trap us, and isolate us from one another (i.e. white supremacy, patriarchy, cisgender supremacy, homophobia, English-language supremacy, xenophobia...).

Domination-oriented thinking, thankfully, isn't the only way to see the world, but it is impossible to unravel in ourselves until we can begin to see how it shapes our own attitudes and behaviors - and in practice that is much harder than it sounds. Domination culture is as familiar to us as the air we breathe, and shows up not only in organizational life, but in our language, in our families, in faith communities and civic life–even the Montessori world is not immune. It's hard to learn how to see it. And there are many forms domination culture can take, including some that can feel supportive and nurturing in the moment. In our workplaces and on our teams, domination culture expresses itself not only as the authoritarian boss or the all-powerful leader, but also as the nurturing parent, the knowledgeable expert, the capable hero. Roles like these can be necessary and helpful, of course - but they can also trap us in above/below relational patterns - and as a community of adults who are striving for liberation for all, can become obstacles to our transformation.

Also, because of the ways our social identities shape our experience of the world, we each have a different, often complicated relationship with domination culture - some of us have benefitted from this paradigm more than others and some have been hurt

more than others. Some of us appreciate the familiarity of this way of operating - we know the rules and how to navigate a domination-oriented system - others can see that they've been fighting against domination culture since the day they were born.

The relational trap of domination culture is a powerful obstacle in the work of creating a liberatory workplace. Our brains are so saturated with this way of perceiving ourselves and one another that even seeing other possibilities for ourselves and our relationships is challenging - and that is where our liberation work begins.

Wildflower's self-management practices are one way we have integrated liberatory practice into our institutional structure. But no amount of creative organizational design can make liberation for all possible without adults who are committed to self-examination and transformation, to learning a new way to be together. This requires each of us to understand how domination culture expresses itself in and through us: to develop awareness. Developing awareness can start by asking ourselves - or others we trust - with curiosity: in which relationships do I speak most freely? In which spaces am I most confident in taking action? How might this concept of above and below be shaping my instincts in those spaces? In what kinds of situations do I feel powerful - or powerless? What assumptions am I making about myself and others in those situations?

When we begin to see ourselves clearly, we can decide whether or not our actions are serving our purpose of liberation for all, and then make intentional choices about how we will show up. Rather than allowing our patterned instincts of powerfulness or powerlessness to shape our words and actions, we can choose how we behave. Rather than shaping the group's discussion by sharing our opinion first, we can pause and ask a question. Or, if our instinct is to stay silent, we can practice speaking up. With each shift, we begin to practice relating to one another as humans side-by-side, working together for a better future, bringing all the complexity of our identities, all our strengths, all our limitations, all our questions, all our hope. We can learn to approach one another with curiosity, to talk about it when we notice dominance or deference showing up in our dynamics, and together, to create new ways to collaborate, to listen, to learn from and lean on one another, gradually raising our heads above the clouds of above and below thinking.

From this place of grounded awareness, of an emerging understanding of ourselves and our relationship with domination culture - Wildflower's self-management practice becomes rocket fuel for collective transformation. But the practice of self-management must grow from a commitment to inner transformation, to liberating ourselves from the above/below paradigm first. As rev. angel

Kyodo williams wisely writes, “Without inner change, there can be no outer change. Without collective change, no change matters.” The structural changes we’ve made in our network and the community of committed partners we’re developing are certainly necessary for a better world to blossom, but the true struggle for liberation for all must begin within ourselves.

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Deepen your knowledge about self-management and domination culture by completing Wildflower’s Introduction to Self-Management and Domination Culture learning module.