

Lewis-Palmer High School Principal Bridget O'Connor was recognized for being named a Rookie Secondary Principal of the Year by the Colorado Association of School Executives. This award recognizes remarkable

leadership during the first three years as a principal.

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The Lewis-Palmer D 38 Board of Education usually meets at 6 p.m. on the third Monday of the month at the

district's learning center, 146 Jefferson St., Monument. The next meeting will be on Sept. 20.

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Monument Academy School Board, Aug. 19

## Board mourns Principal Richardson, loosens elementary school shoe dress code

By Jackie Burhans

The Monument Academy (MA) School Board held a special, virtual meeting on Aug. 4 to go into executive session to get legal advice on contract matters. MA also announced the passing of elementary school principal Charlie Richardson.

The board met on Aug. 14 at The Platinum Group Conference Room for its annual retreat to conduct board training. Board President Ryan Graham and member Chris Dole were absent.

MA held its regular meeting on Aug. 19 to discuss the elementary school uniform policy, hear from the chief operating officer (COO), and discuss meetings and board composition.

### Charlie Richardson, MA principal, passes unexpectedly

After returning from executive session on Aug. 4, Vice President Meghan St. Aubyn read a statement about the unexpected passing earlier that day of west campus elementary school Principal Charlie Richardson, known informally as "Mr. R." St. Aubyn said that Richardson's devotion to MA was evident to all who knew him, and MA would always be grateful for the service and dedication he gave. There was a brief ceremony Aug. 13 at the west campus turf field for community members to gather and honor Richardson, and the board held a memorial moment of silence at the start of the regular meeting.



**Above:** Charlie Richardson, Monument Academy west campus principal, passed away on Aug. 4. He was known as "Mr. R" and was beloved by students, staff, and board members. A moment of silence was held during the regular MA board meeting on Aug. 19. Photo provided by Monument Academy.

### Board allows freedom of shoes for elementary kids

At the Aug. 19 meeting, parents said hoodies are less expensive than the allowed jackets and that some girls in middle school felt more comfortable wearing hoodies as their bodies changed. The board noted that hoodies were a security risk due to their pouches and that having hoods up could obscure kids' identities and did not set the tone for attentive learning.

Parents also said the requirement for all black or all white athletic shoes made it hard to find affordable options for growing kids. While the board discussed various options for logos and lace colors, the feedback from teachers was to make the policy simple and enforceable. The board unanimously voted to eliminate the restrictions and allow elementary students greater leeway. See [bit.ly/ma-policies](http://bit.ly/ma-policies) for the uniform policies.

### Board retreat covers strategy, legislation, legal issues

On Aug. 14, MA board members gathered to hear from COO Merlin Holmes, state legislators Paul Lundeen and Tim Geitner, and MA lawyer Brad Miller.

Holmes reviewed the plan for the 2021-22 school year, his vision for the secondary school, and his goals and gave an overview of Core Knowledge curriculum. He said that MA should build on its previous success and discussed the need to secure financing for phase 2 of the east campus buildout. He said that MA had enough space now but would quickly outgrow its capacity. Holmes noted that when a district goes for a bond it needs to get people on board or it would not pass but that since MA would be borrowing money and paying from its operating funds, it is not technically taxpayer money but would be paid from per pupil operating funds (PPOR).

Holmes said that MA needs to define and promote the high school, use multiple sources of testing data to measure student progress, and foster an enthusiastic, positive culture of character. He suggested that MA needed to have a "good to great" mentality and that its momentum had been slowed by COVID-19, opening a new campus, and having a smaller than expected high school. His vision for the high school is to have high expectations; use a classical model of education which focuses on grammar, logic, and rhetoric; and prepare stu-

dents to be successful in college.

Finally, Holmes reviewed the Core Knowledge curriculum and its relationship to a classical education model. Board members agreed that having Curriculum Night events would help explain these concepts to MA parents.

State Sen. Paul Lundeen and Rep. Tim Geitner stopped by to review legislative updates and give their sense of the political climate for charter schools. Lundeen's mother was a teacher at MA, and its west campus library is named after her. Geitner's wife founded Mountainview Academy in D49 and is the only legislator who is homeschooling. Both said they were advocates of parent choice and are on the Education Committee in their respective chambers. Both are on the School Finance Review Interim Committee to look at how we finance public education. The committee is bicameral and bipartisan with equal representation from the state Senate and House as well as equal representation by Democrats and Republicans.

Geitner touched on Senate Bill 21-1295 Rebuttable Presumption in Charter School Appeals, which would have changed the way charters can appeal to the state board in case of a dispute with their chartering authority. The bill was killed in the House but, he said, would come back fine-tuned in another legislative session. Geitner spoke of a bill he sponsored to protect students who participate in online instruction, HB21-1059, that was passed unanimously.

Lundeen challenged the MA board to understand its larger role in the charter movement. He spoke of the need to show up at hearings and testify, and the need for additional voices than the Charter School Institute (CSI) and the League of Charter Schools (LCS). Lundeen noted that some states have banned Critical Race Theory (CRT), but in Colorado local districts have the authority. He said the board should be attentive to this issue and listen to all perspectives, and the board cannot know what others have experienced in their lives.

MA lawyer Brad Miller highlighted education-related legislation in the 2021 regular session, including HB1010 Diverse K-12 Educator Workforce Report, HB1055 Compensation for School District Board Members, HB1200 Revise Student Financial Literacy Standards, HB1304 Early Childhood System as well as SB056 Expand Cannabis-based Medicine At Schools, SB067 Strengthening Civics Education, SB013 Reversing COVID Learning Loss, SB116 Prohibit American Indian Mascots and SB151 Literacy Curriculum Transparency. These and other bills related to education can be viewed at [bit.ly/co-find-bill](http://bit.ly/co-find-bill).

Miller defined different types of meetings the board might have, including regular and special meetings, and work sessions. Executive sessions should not be used as a place for private or uncomfortable discussions but must be used for specific statutory reasons such as student issues, security, and contract negotiations. The board cannot vote in a work session and minutes are not required.

Miller said MA's bylaws allowed it to have one board-appointed seat or it could create a new elected seat. The board could appoint someone now and subject them to an election in the future. He said MA would have to amend its bylaws and vote after publishing the redline (the edited, marked-up version) in its board packet or could discuss an issue at one meeting and vote for the changes at the next. He defined the "sunshine list" as a list of media or interested parties who request notification of public meetings involving the board. He advised it was the best practice to consider them evergreen and not require yearly re-commitment.

Regarding open meetings, Miller said the board cannot make public policy in secret. He said that two members could interact but three could not talk about school business outside of public board meetings for which it must provide notice. A public meeting is any kind of engagement including email or conference calls, except for administrative emails on agenda and schedule. Board members can reply directly to emails but should not reply all. Email using BCC would still be subject to a Colorado Open Records Act (CORA) request and is not recommended. Miller said this year has been unlike any other in terms of community engagement and board/administration conflicts. Holmes said he felt the key to avoid conflict was good communication and building a good relationship.

Miller advised the board to have open, roll-call votes on everything except for choosing board officers.

The board should be consistent about where it places meeting notices and must keep minutes, but the secretary should avoid creating characterizations of the dialog. He confirmed there was no mandate for the board to keep its previous livestream meetings on YouTube and that no specific action or vote was required to take them down. Miller also said the board does not represent the parents but, instead, represents the best interest of the whole school. If a parent comes to them with an issue, the board member should redirect them to proper channels.

Miller shared a list of best practices with the board. He said the quintessential role of the board is not CRT, vouchers, masks, and other cultural concerns but that it should focus on helping to find efficiencies and eliminate hurdles for each significant department, finding better ways to use taxpayers' money and educate kids.

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