

Board Election Update – meet the Parent and Community Nominees!

The election is coming next week!

Ready your ballots... read about your choices, and make sure to vote!

Last week, you had the opportunity to read about the Faculty who are applying to the board. This week, we are posting the Parent/guardian and Community Bios for applicants to the board.

Next week, the election begins at the Annual Meeting on the 25<sup>th</sup>. If you don't attend the annual meeting, a ballot will be mailed to your home (each family gets one ballot.) You have 1 week to return the ballot to GRS.

There are six Parent and Community nominees for the three open board positions:

Robyn Aiken, parent of Sam (11<sup>th</sup>) and Ellen (8<sup>th</sup>)

Greg Bernstein, parent of Harris (8<sup>th</sup>)

Elizabeth Childs, parent of Eliot Larson(9<sup>th</sup>)

Leigh Hansen, community member, Montessori teacher at Crossroads Elementary.

John Haine, parent of Abby Shade 97<sup>th</sup>), attorney and teacher, William-Mitchell College of Law.

Lynn Schultz, community member, teacher at JJ Hill Montessori.

In the upcoming elections, you will be able to vote for three of the four nominees. All are fully qualified to hold the position and all come with unique strengths. Please take some time to read over their bios to help with your selection.

Each applicant was asked to write about their reasons for applying and their unique qualifications for the board position. Here is what they chose to share. The words are their own. The formatting has been changed slightly to bring consistency to the presentation.

## **Robyn Aiken**

Dear Board of Directors,

This is in response to the call for applicants to the Great River school board in that I provide the below information of myself.

My name is Robyn Aiken, the mother of 2 Great River students, Sam Aiken (11<sup>th</sup>) and Ellen Aiken (8<sup>th</sup>). I am married to James Aiken and our family has lived in Oakdale since 2001. I grew up in south Minneapolis and graduated from South High school from their Open program. I have a Bachelors degree from Concordia University, St. Paul in Organizational Management and Communications. I am proud to say that I am a Summa Cum Laude recipient and take education seriously.

I currently work as a Lean Six Sigma Black Belt for Apogee Enterprise, a company that adds Green Building design to glass for commercial buildings around the world. In shorter terms, I manage projects using statistical data from which business decisions for improvements are made. Prior to this position I spent 18 years in the service and ending my military career with the Minnesota Army National Guard as an officer in a local aviation support unit.

Qualities that I feel I could bring to this position is a great ability to facilitate discussions or projects, analyze data, and over all be able to help guide decisions with a diverse group of people. I believe in serving as a volunteer and have done so in many capacities from planting trees, being a PTA Treasurer and running a national sponsored volunteer program for Minnesota supporting Minnesota's military families during deployment.

My experience with formal Montessori is short as I was introduced to it through another GRS parent. However, the depth of our relationship goes back to our junior high school years and it was through her way of life and upbringing where Montessori really touched me. As childhood friends, I always recognized that she had a different way of seeing the world and learning about it of which to this day I still rely on. Being a military family didn't afford my husband and me the opportunity to choose our children's schools easily and in 2007 we learned of Great River and a more formal definition of Montessori through this friend. We now have been with GRS for three years and will continue to for another four with our younger child.

Participating in a Montessori community formally may be fairly new to me, but the principles and practices of learning in all environments and working together for achievement is something that I was raised with and is natural to me. I would be honored to serve the GRS community as a board member.

Thank you,

Robyn Aiken

**Greg Bernstein**

*Please provide a brief profile of yourself, including biographical, educational, employment, and community and school service experience information.*

I moved to Minneapolis nearly 25 years ago after graduating college and feel like the Twin Cities are a fantastic place for my kids (and someday grandkids). My wife and I have three children; my step-daughter who recently graduated from Hamline University, and two sons, one an 8th grader at GRS and the other a 5th grader at Saint Anthony Park. I have a BA in the Management of Information Systems from the University of Wisconsin and have been working in that field since moving here. At this point, I've worked as a consultant for most of the Fortune 100 companies in town.

Regarding community service; I have served on the boards of the Pratt School Council and Simpson Housing Services (a Minneapolis-based transitional housing and overnight shelter), and am currently serving on the board of the Consumer Association for Community Action (a neighborhood organization chartered to fund community projects – like the block nurse program and the food shelf). I have been an overnight volunteer at St. Stephen's Shelter since 1991 and have been the co-chair of the Pratt School annual neighborhood Ice Cream Social since 2002.

Regarding school service; when time allows I volunteer in the classroom at the elementary school assisting kids with reading or math or whatever the teacher needs. I also served on a neighborhood group to write a charter school application and secure Augsburg College as the charter partner when the Minneapolis School Board was threatening to close Pratt school. Augsburg signed-on and the charter was approved, but the school board didn't close the school – so we didn't need the charter. But I did learn a lot about the financial and organizational complexity of starting up a charter school.

*Please describe why you are interested in serving as a Great River School Board member.*

I am passionate about my children being in a position in life to select the future they want for themselves and having the willingness to take responsibility for where they are at any given point in time. The path to this is a healthy curiosity about the world around them, the ability to resolve that curiosity, and an understanding of the choices they are making. To be on that path, the kids need a diverse and caring community of knowledgeable coaches, willing to challenge them when necessary and able to let them run when they're ready. I believe that the people and environment at Great River School is in a strong position to fulfill a role in that community. I'm interested in being on the board to protect that position, to ensure that the school staff is recognized for what is working well and that the right resources are brought to bear to identify and improve the areas that are not. I also believe that, given the budgetary uncertainties from the state, the Great River community will be well served to focus on building an independent financial foundation

to relieve the pressure associated with the variable nature of a public school budget.

*What are the primary strengths, skills, or expertise you would bring to your position on the Board?*

I have assisted for-profit and non-profit organizations both as a volunteer and professionally, with strategic planning, business planning and organizational transformation. I have experience working with organizations to find and enhance strengths and to identify and mitigate threats and risks. I am a Project Manager by trade and am familiar with working with budgets and within complex resource and schedule environments.

Please describe your experience with or interest in Montessori education.

We chose the GRS Montessori-based environment because we believe it offers a good mix of fostering curiosity and giving children the tools and mentoring necessary answer their own questions.

Please describe your experience with public school operations or other public sector experience.

My experience with school operations comes primarily from the process of developing the Pratt Charter application mentioned above. We met with charter consultants, the Augsburg sponsorship team and state representatives to lay out the financial, organizational, education, staffing and physical building plans as part of the charter application.

Please add any additional information you would like to share about yourself for this position.

The more time I spend at GRS the more I like it. Being on the board would be a fun and interesting way to become more engaged in the GRS community.

**Elizabeth Childs**

I have a bachelor's degree in English, a master's degree in leadership, training in voice and dance, and was licensed to teach and taught junior high English for four years. I have worked for 20+ years in Minnesota's nonprofit arts community as a fundraiser, grant maker for institutional and artist in the schools programs, organizational consultant, and director and faculty member of a master's program in arts administration. Currently I am an associate dean for program development and assessment processes for graduate and bachelor completion programs in education, business, health and human services at Saint Mary's University—Twin Cities Campus. I have been a member of several nonprofit boards, facilitated board planning sessions, and served on many grant review panels. My husband, Todd Larson, and I are parents to Eliot Larson, a GRS ninth grader.

My interest in serving as a Great River School board member is to ensure that the school continues to implement its vision for adolescent Montessori education with the needed resources and support. The educational approach is one that sets students up well to continue into higher education, as lifelong learners, and as thoughtful citizens and workers. My experience with Montessori education is primarily from a parent's viewpoint. As an educator who works with programs for adults returning to school, I see similarities between the adult learning programs in my professional work and Montessori education. Both create an environment for relevant and rigorous academic experiences that supports individual learning and acknowledges the experience or abilities of each learner.

I offer skills in strategic and financial analysis, experience as a nonprofit worker and board member planning within financial constraints, and an awareness of the demands and challenges in implementing educational programs.

## **John Haine**

### RESPONSES TO GRS BOARD APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1.Personal Profile. I grew up in Stamford, Connecticut, the fourth child of a family doctor and a very busy mother. After attending Amherst College for two years, mixing pre-med classes with music and theatre, I came to the University of Minnesota to study for a year, and stayed. After earning my bachelor's degree, I attended the University of Minnesota Law School and became a lawyer. Except for two years in California, I have lived in Minnesota ever since. For most of my nearly 25 years as a practicing attorney, I worked in large law firms helping employers navigate the complicated tax and labor law rules that affect employee benefit plans. Along the way, I helped raise four children, three of whom are now grown up. For the last two years, I have been working from home as a Senior Editor for Thomson Reuters, writing manuals on consumer-driven health care and fringe benefits. I also occasionally teach a class on employee benefit law at William Mitchell College of Law. I continue to have an interest in both music and theatre, and enjoy hiking and travel.

2.Reasons For Wanting to Serve on the Board. I want Great River School to succeed. Not just for my daughter, but for every student at the school, and also as an example of an educational model that really works. I would like to serve on the Board so that I can apply the skills I have learned as a lawyer and as a parent, and my enthusiasm about the Montessori method, to help make that happen.

3.Strengths, Skills and Expertise. Most of my career as a lawyer has been in the role of advisor, helping clients avoid problems and get things done. I prefer cooperation to confrontation. I have served on the boards of two nonprofit theatre groups, including the Steppingstone Theatre, which I helped found. I served as President of the Midwest Pension Conference, a group for employee benefit professionals that offered continuing education and networking opportunities. These experiences have made me sensitive to the needs and importance of the Board's role, and the skills necessary to work effectively as a Board member. I think my experience with Montessori, both as a parent and as the husband of a Montessori educator, have also given me a real appreciation of the Montessori teaching method that is Great River's most distinctive feature. School boards inevitably have to deal with mundane subjects like budgets, staff issues, and fund raising. But in its deliberations on those subjects, the Great River Board should never lose track of its unique mission, and should take every opportunity to support the school's Montessori methods.

4.Experience with Montessori Education. I first encountered Montessori education about nine years ago, when my wife and I went to visit Lake Country School. We were amazed by how different it was from a traditional classroom. The children moved freely about the classroom, but they were under control. And they were enjoying their schoolwork! After learning more about Montessori, my wife resolved to take the Montessori training herself, and we both started learning. Since then, I have had lots of exposure to the Montessori method, both through my youngest daughter's schooling and through my wife's training and

teaching, first as a Montessori Children's House guide and then as an elementary teacher. I understand the theory and have seen it in action.

5.Public School or Public Sector Experience. My experience with the public schools/public sector is limited to my own schooling and that of my children.

6.Additional Information. Much of the debate over public education misses the point. What really needs to change in public education has less to do with budgets, buildings and technology, and more to do with technique. Great River has a great opportunity to point the way. I would like to help make that happen.

## **Leigh Hansen**

Hello, my name is Leigh Hansen, and I am submitting my application for the Great River School Board.

My educational background is a B.B.A. and Masters of Education from the U of MN, and Montessori Elementary certification from the Institute of Advanced Montessori Studies in Maryland.

I have been a Montessori teacher for 20 years. My first 11 years of employment as a teacher were at Lake Country School. I worked as an E-1 (first-third) grad teacher for 8 years, and at the Lake Country Land School as the farm-school manager for 3 years. During the summers, I planned and led summer Odyssey trips for Lake Country 6th-8th graders.

In 2001, I came to work for the St. Paul Public Schools. I have worked at Crossroads Elementary as both an E-1 and E-2 (fourth-sixth) grade teacher. I am happy to have “sent” several of my wonderful students on to Great River where they are continuing their Montessori education.

I’m a strong believer in the opportunities that a Montessori experience has to offer students, and I believe these opportunities should continue for students beyond elementary years. I was very excited at the opening of Great River a few years ago as a way for those students and their families who also valued this method of education to continue their journeys.

What I can offer the Board of Great River is my experience as a Montessori teacher of different ages and different settings (private school, public school, and the farm school). I would love to learn more about Great River’s operation, curriculum, and long-term goals, and how I and other public school teachers can support this Montessori junior/ senior High school.

## **Lynn Schultz**

*Please provide a brief profile of yourself, including biographical, education, employment, and community and school service experience information.*

I have been a public school Montessori teacher for twenty years. I spent my first three years as a teacher in the Minneapolis Public Schools, and for the past seventeen years have been a Montessori teacher (E2) at J.J Hill Montessori School in St. Paul (with the exception of one year, when I taught at Crossroads Montessori School, also in St. Paul).

In my many years of teaching at J.J. Hill, I have served on a number of committees, including our school's Site Council, PTO, H.E.A.R.T. (our art committee), and Peace Committee; I have also served as our building's Union Steward. I am also a part of the E2 team of five teachers who meet weekly to handle business and curriculum issues relating to our school.

Also at J.J. Hill, I organized and run an after school program for students who are interested in working on service projects. These projects have included educating others about the issues of child labor and fair trade products; and this past year the focus has been on raising money to help the victims of the earthquake in Haiti.

This past year I also began working with the St. Paul Homeless Project. I tutor students who are living in emergency homeless shelters one night a week.

I received my teacher training and licensure through the University of Minnesota, and my Montessori certification (E1 and E2; AMS) through the University of St. Catherine. I also have a degree in sociology (criminal justice studies) from the U of M.

*Please describe why you are interested in serving as a Great River School Board member.*

I have been interested and impressed with Great River School since it began. As an elementary Montessori educator, it is important to me that our students have the option of continuing their Montessori education after the elementary level, and GRS provides that opportunity. Being a GRS Board member would allow me to be involved more directly with the school that I want my students to attend.

*What primary strengths, skills, or expertise you would bring to your position on the Great River Board?*

I have twenty years experience as a public school Montessori teacher at the elementary level. I think this experience is beneficial in that most of the students who attend GRS come from the public schools (and many from the public school Montessori programs). I also have had twenty years experience of working with a team of teachers, and am happy to say that I am a "team player."

*Please add any additional information you would like to share about yourself for this position.*

As a believer in "life long learning," I have been studying flamenco dance for the past six years. I participate with a group that does flamenco street performances randomly through out the Twin Cities.