

staff, incorporating the same strategies, tactics, communications, and language throughout each agency, are a real credit.

- You do not see that kind of alignment in the fire service very often and if it were not for the different names on the trucks, no one would know that the response included three different fire departments.
- DWFPD and TLMFPD are publicly discussing a possible unification and that is a major positive step in the right direction for the region. See related DWFPD and TLMFPD articles on page 21.

Langmaid also said:

- The department began issuing standard operating guidelines (SOG's) on April 16 and have already completed 13 for the teams to start working with. There is a need and goal for about 35-40 SOG's.
- A targeted response plan has been created for Edith Wolford Elementary School, and all rigs are equipped with a copy.
- Station 2 was closed for 12 hours on April 26 and it was immediately reopened on his return to duty. The only reason Station 2 will close is for major staffing or a facility issue. During the flood in early April the dedicated Station 2 staff insisted on remaining operational throughout, even though a move to Station 1 was suggested.
- Shore lines (electrical plug-ins for apparatus) were installed at Station 1 and a garage door reconfiguration was completed at Station 2.
- The district is still waiting on the City of Colorado Springs for updates on the exclusion process.
- Another property owner north of Hodgen Road deposited their fee for inclusion into BFFRPD on May 19.

Hinton asked Langmaid to notify him immediately when the expected delivery date for the new Pierce engine is realized, allowing for a current favorable rate lock-in with the bank. See www.ocn.me/v21n5.htm#bffrpd.

Fire safety

Langmaid said that major infrastructure will need to be defensible, standardized, predictable, and very objec-



Above: Newly hired firefighter/EMTs: top left Andrew Hladik, top right Marina Fine, middle left John Singsheim, middle right Lana Trezza, bottom left Luke Marrone, and bottom right Michael Alvarado practice hose skills in April. The six new hires began a three-week mini-firefighter training academy at BFFRPD on April 26 before beginning their first shifts. The academy focused on a rigorous training program that included physical training, firefighting skills, and daily testing to familiarize them with the department protocols. *Photo courtesy of BFFRPD.*

tive. The district is now using an "alternative means and methods" approach to ensure life safety requirements are met by commercial occupancies. Two National Fire Protection Association International Fire Code guidance documents allow for the use of a rural water supply and fire sprinklers, and developers of commercial properties will now be required to hire a Colorado licensed fire

protection engineer and then present a stamped letter of approval stating how the two requirements are going to be met.

Note: BFFRPD does not have a dedicated fire marshal.

Training update

Langmaid said the following:

- Significant recognition goes to Capt. Chris Piepenburg for successfully holding the first professional 50 hours per week, three-week long, mini-fire academy.
- The six new firefighter/EMT staff arrived with prior lateral experience and varying tenure from other departments, but they really got a sense for the culture at BFFRPD and are now a familiarized and a close-working team.
- Piepenburg and the on-duty crews provided a unique learning experience for the newly hired personnel.
- The department hires for character and trains to competency, and the next fire academy may be different.

Public comment

Black Forest resident Linda Smith asked if the department was planning an open house in July to showcase the new training facility to the public.

Langmaid said an open house would be at a cost to the district, and the board would need to approve the funding. He would not force overtime, and the department would be relying on staff to volunteer their time. An open house is on the department's radar, and he estimated staff would need to volunteer six to eight hours.

The meeting adjourned at 8:01 p.m.

Meetings are usually held at 7 p.m. on the third Wednesday of each month at BFFRPD Station 1, 11445 Teachout Road, Colorado Springs. The next regular board meeting is scheduled for June 16 at 7 p.m. For updates, agendas and minutes, visit www.bffire.org.

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Monument Academy School Board, May 13

Board selects new COO, discusses mask use

By Jackie Burhans

The Monument Academy (MA) School Board held several meetings in May, culminating in the selection of a new chief operating officer (COO).

In a special meeting on May 3, El Paso County Public Health (EPCPH) employees discussed masks and quarantines. In the regular meeting, the board passed updates to several policies and announced the sole finalist for the COO position. A community meeting was held with the finalist on May 17, and the board met to confirm him in the position.

New COO selected

At the May 13 meeting, board member Meghan St. Aubyn reported that the COO selection committee had selected Merlin Holmes as the sole finalist. The committee consisted of parents, board members, and administrators. Holmes thanked the committee and briefly described his background with charter schools including The Classical Academy (TCA). He said he'd been involved with seven building projects and was well-versed in expanding schools. St. Aubyn said the process included a 14-day waiting period, a community forum, and a final board vote.



Above: Merlin Holmes, former superintendent of the McClave School District in McClave, Colo., has been retained as chief executive officer of Monument Academy. *Photo courtesy MA.*

On May 17, MA held a hybrid in-person/remote community forum so that Holmes could answer questions submitted by parents. Board member Ryan Graham read the questions aloud from 3-by-5 cards, giving Holmes time to respond. Holmes started by introducing his wife, Zoanne, and saying that in the first 90 days of his transition he planned to listen and not make a lot of changes until he learns more about the organization, its personality, and programs. He said that Good to Great is his favorite business book and informs his philosophy.

Questions included his involvement with the Monument community, plans for creating community, receptivity to parental input, support for concerns about COVID mandates, and his termination from former positions. Holmes noted that he has lived in Monument since 2003 but worked outside the community so had not been able to participate in many local efforts. He

had worked at both SkyView Academy and Aspen View Academy in Douglas County but was terminated in 2013 and 2014, respectively. He noted that both of those charter schools were unique in that they had founders who were also on the school board. He said the founders were reluctant to let go and let the board and principal do their job. He noted that the average tenure for charter administrators is not very long but said that both schools are very successful and that he had learned to be a better administrator.

Asked about the reason for his departure from TCA, he noted that a new person was brought in who wanted his own people to run the school and that he was asked to leave. He noted that his wife continued to work there for nine years and that he maintained good connections with the school. Asked how he would help teachers implement engaging lesson plans rather than be focused on discipline, he mentioned a program called Capturing Kids Hearts to give teachers effective tools to manage without harshness.

After the Q&A, parents in attendance had a chance to meet and talk with Holmes directly. The full community forum discussion can be viewed at <https://youtu.be/6r9bro0z4TE>.

At the May 28 special meeting, the board met to go into executive session; they emerged to vote unanimously to offer a one-year contract to Holmes for the position of COO of MA. Board President Melanie Strop noted that the caliber of the decision was not taken lightly and that while the board originally intended to wait, she felt that Holmes' application was timely.

Masks and mandates

At the May 3 special meeting, about 15 parents spoke out against continued mask use, citing concerns about mental health, the availability of vaccines, and skepticism about mask effectiveness among other issues. They also expressed concern about mass quarantines and MA's policies going beyond the required mandates. Some parents asked that masks be made optional for all. Strop expressed that the board agreed with parents and felt the same frustration. Outgoing COO Christianna Herrera thanked parents for speaking, saying that MA had worked to keep in-person learning in place and worked with EPCPH to avoid quarantines as much as possible.

EPCPH staff who attended include Susan Wheelan, director of EPCPH; DeeAnn Ryberg, deputy director and emergency coordinator for COVID response; Dr. Robin Johnson, medical director of EPCPH; Haley Zachary, program manager; and Diana May, El Paso County attorney who provides legal advice to EPCPH.

May noted that what is sometimes called guidance

is really a requirement from the state and said the rules for schools are different than non-schools. She noted that El Paso County had not added any additional requirements. Wheelan said the county had to follow state requirements and has no authority to lessen them. May said that schools needed to work with their lawyer for questions on legally required accommodations.

Johnson talked about a layered approach using masks, washing, and distance and confirmed that masks do reduce virus-laden droplets. She noted that the most powerful thing people can do to truly put the pandemic behind them is to get vaccinated.

Board member Chris Dole asked if the school is required to report a positive case to EPCPH or vice-versa. Zachary said labs and doctors are required reporters and EPCPH maintains proactive communication with schools. May said the new guidance requires schools to cooperate with public health. Dole said there was difficulty that fifth grade includes kids who are 10 through 12 years old. Graham asked how it would be perceived if the school eliminated the mask requirement for fifth grade. May replied that MA would not technically be following the law but that if it were reported, EPCPH would dialog with the school. Dole then asked if the conversation might take place on May 28 (after the end of the school year.) May jokingly replied it might take place on June 2. Graham asked how a parent might request a medical exemption and May directed the board to discuss it with its lawyer, Brad Miller.

The board unanimously voted to direct the COO to ensure the administration would follow the least restrictive restrictions through consultation with EPCPH. Communication was later sent to parents rescinding all mask requirements at the elementary school.

Highlights

The following items were highlighted at the board meeting:

- Herrera reported that MA had been given a medical release form from the state that required a doctor's signature. After hearing parental feedback and concerns, MA determined it could accept a written statement from parents that they would bring in and sign in front of a witness. The board unanimously approved this plan.
- Herrera also discussed extracurricular resumption plans, including parent and student input on what clubs they would like to see.
- Herrera discussed a proposed 2021-22 Learning Plan that would include purchased online offerings for the elementary and secondary levels that did not require in-person teachers to handle on-