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Steven I. Rosenbaum  
Of Counsel

John H. Blish  
(1986-2007)

March 14<sup>th</sup>, 2023

***By Courier and Email***

Edward Pimental, AICP  
City of East Providence – Zoning Division  
145 Taunton Avenue – 2ndFloor  
East Providence, RI 02914

**Re:   Orchid Montessori School – 877 Broadway  
      Supplemental Materials and Scheduling Matters**

Mr. Pimental:

Please accept this correspondence as a formal request for a continuance to the next available meeting of the Zoning Board of Review. Over the last several months, the team at Orchid Montessori has made extensive efforts to evaluate alternative site locations and has considered modified site designs to minimize overall impacts of the proposed day care facility.

Although the C-1 Zoning District permits day care centers “by-right”, most properties in the District would require the same or similar zoning relief that is being requested for the proposed site. The Orchid Team considered at least twenty (20) alternative property locations for the proposed use, each presenting their own unique set of challenges for the use or owners who prefer other types of commercial uses. (An outline of alternative sites considered is attached hereto as Exhibit A).

In February, Orchid retained John Shevlin of Pare Corporation to conduct a thorough site analysis and traffic study in an effort to redesign the site and minimize impacts on surrounding properties. The study places an emphasis on student safety utilizing defined traffic circulation and pedestrian safety measures. (See Pare Engineering Letter dated March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2023 attached as Exhibit B). Pare has redesigned the proposal to provide more efficient traffic circulation; modified parking areas with appropriate aisle widths; and has worked with the Orchid Team to develop appropriate protocols to ensure a safe and appropriate pick-up /drop-off system for students in compliance with State licensing requirements. The redesign meets or otherwise exceeds State licensing requirements, including regulations pertaining to student safety and

March 14<sup>th</sup>, 2023  
Page 2

playground design as required for day care facilities. (See Modified Site Plan attached as Exhibit C).

Finally, the Orchid Team hosted an open forum on March 13<sup>th</sup> at its facility to discuss the revised proposal and answer questions for members of the public. Orchid's intent is to remain transparent in its application and work with neighbors and the City to minimize any impacts the operation may have. Orchid provides a valuable service to the community and hopes to create a day care center to provide additional services to its students and their families. (See Letter dated March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2023 and Letters of Support attached hereto as Exhibits D and E, respectfully).

In connection with the supplemental submission, the Applicant respectfully requests a modification to the relief requested consistent with the modified site plan and documents attached hereto as follows:

- 1) Alternative site analysis;
- 2) Pare Engineering Letter dated March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2023;
- 3) Site Plan (as amended March 2023)
- 4) Orchid Montessori Letter dated March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2023;
- 5) Letters of Support

Thank you for your assistance in this matter.

Sincerely,



Matthew J. Landry, Esq.

Enclosures

**Orchid Montessori School (Proposed)  
Analysis of East Providence Commercial Real Estate Options\***

<b>Property Address</b>	<b>Obstacles/ Challenges</b>
860A Waterman Avenue	Does not meet zoning requirements for yard; parking lot shared with warehouse (safety concern)
334 Waterman Avenue	Does not meet zoning requirements for yard or parking
577 Warren Avenue	In need of extensive renovation;
412-420 Taunton Avenue	Does not meet zoning requirements for yard or parking
65 Valley Street	Does not meet zoning requirements for land or parking
310 Bourne Avenue	Distribution warehouse; does not meet child care licensing requirements
2253 Pawtucket Avenue	Does not meet zoning requirements for yard
198-220 Willett Avenue	Does not meet zoning requirements for yard size
50 N Broadway	Designed for industrial use; does not meet child care licensing requirements
110 King Philip Road	Does not meet zoning requirements: zoned I3 (light industrial)
575-585 Taunton Avenue	Does not meet zoning requirements for land; parking lot is shared with Shaw's (safety concern)
81 North Carpenter Street	Former St. Francis School; too large for our budget and is unlikely to meet new child care licensing requirements
1925 Pawtucket Avenue	Does not meet zoning requirements for land; parking lot is shared with various big box stores (safety concern)
999 South Broadway	Does not meet zoning requirements for yard size; multi-story building with large shared parking lot (safety concern)
50 Jordan Street	Unit is too large and out of our price range; this is a huge office building with a large shared parking lot and no space for a playground
2823 Pawtucket Avenue	Would likely require extensive renovation to meet child care licensing requirements; located in shared parking lot with no space for playground
34 Hemingway Drive	Large shared office complex, no space for playground
10 Hemingway Drive	Large shared office complex, no space for playground
960 Willett Avenue	Unlikely to meet child care licensing requirements due to age and nature of building (Former Riverside Cleaners)
1050 Willett Avenue	Does not meet zoning requirements: zoned C3 (general retail)

\*This analysis includes all current LoopNet listings for commercial properties categorized as office, medical, flex space, or retail as of 3/14/23. Properties classified as restaurants or industrial have been excluded because they would not meet childcare licensing requirements for fire safety and would need extensive renovations.

# Making your world MORE

parecorp.com



March 2, 2023

Ms. Katie Rodrigues  
Executive Director  
Orchid Montessori School  
877 Broadway  
East Providence, RI 02914

Re: **Orchid Montessori School  
Traffic Engineering Services  
East Providence, Rhode Island  
Pare Project No.: 23xxx.00**

Dear Ms. Rodrigues:

Pare Corporation (Pare) has been requested to review the traffic circulation and parking at the existing Orchid Montessori School site and to assist in developing a plan for providing safe circulation and parking at the facility located at 877 Broadway in East Providence, R.I. The Orchid Montessori School provides a unique new Montessori Inclusion program for children ages 3-6. The goal of this school is to empower all children, regardless of neurotype, to learn, thrive and explore their passions. Currently, the school offers drop-in classes and is hopeful to launch a full-day program in the Spring.

In developing this assessment and recommendations, Pare has visited the project site and has reviewed documents provided us by the school staff. The information provided for review includes the following:

- Application for Dimensional Variance
- Survey Plan of Existing Conditions
- Site Plan
- 300' Radius Map with Existing Uses
- Abutter Mailing List
- Site Plan Options
- Zoning Application with Responses

### Project Description

The school site is located on the west side of Broadway approximately 800 feet north of the ramps for I-195. The development around the site on Broadway consists of a variety of uses including an Auto Body Shop just to the south of the school site, an orthodontics office to the north of the site, a church, hair salon, and other commercial and residential uses on the opposite of Broadway. The development west of the site is predominantly residential but also includes other uses such as another Montessori School and a church.

▼  
**8 Blackstone Valley Place  
Lincoln, RI 02865  
401-334-4100**

**10 Lincoln Road, Suite 210  
Foxborough, MA 02035  
508-543-1755**

**14 Bobala Road, Suite 2B  
Holyoke, MA 01040  
413-507-3448**



Ms. Katie Rodrigues

(2)

March 2, 2023

The building on the site is approximately 3,360 square feet. It is proposed, upon completion, to provide classroom space, a therapy room, a meeting room, a staff room, offices and restrooms. Access to the building is provided by an ADA accessible ramp in the front of the building and an entrance that provides access to the back parking area. Parking is currently only delineated by curb stops in front of the existing fence.

Access to the site is provided by two curb cuts. The first is an approximate 20-foot curb cut on Broadway. This curb cut is approximately 160 feet north of the unsignalized intersection of Broadway and Grove Avenue and approximately 125 feet south of the signalized intersection of Broadway with Grosvenor Avenue.

The second existing access is provided by a shared driveway curb cut on Grove Avenue and through an existing easement/driveway to the site. The curb cut is located approximately 85 feet from the unsignalized intersection of Broadway and Grove Avenue.

Grove Avenue is a local collector road which carries two-way traffic on an approximately 28-foot wide road. The roadway alignment is straight. On-street parking is allowed on the north side of Grove Avenue west of the site driveway.

Broadway is a local arterial that also provides two-way traffic, north and south. The roadway in the vicinity of the site is approximately 40-foot wide. Broadway provides one lane of traffic in each direction until the northbound approach to the Grosvenor Avenue signalized intersection where it transitions into two lanes for left/thru and right/thru lanes.

#### Proposed Use

It is the intent of this school to provide a facility that will accommodate 18 students with the future potential to increase the capacity to 26 students in the fall of 2023. In addition to the building, on-site parking will be provided for staff and in accordance with guidance from the Department of Human Services, a useable outdoor space to meet their requirements will be provided. Staffing at the site will include three child care staff members and 1 to 2 persons who will be present in administrative or therapy roles.

For drop-off and pick-up operations at the school is anticipated to have at least three staff members to transition children out and into the cars so that parents do not need to park during drop-off/pick-up. One staff member will take the child out of the car and walk them to the door, one will help them transition from the hallway into the classroom, and one will be in the classroom to support their transition to a chosen activity to start the day. Likewise, the staff will also assist in bringing the students to their parent's vehicle at the end of the day.

It is proposed that the arrival times will be set on a staggered schedule between the hours of 8:00-8:45 a.m. Five (5) minute windows will be designated to parents for drop-off, with the intent of allowing between two (2) and three (3) students to arrive every 5 minutes. At the end of the day, the dismissal will also occur in a similar staggered manner with 5-minute interval departures that will occur between 3:45 and 4:30 p.m.

### Site Layout

Several alternatives for the site layout have been developed to accommodate the drop-off and pick-up operations of students, provide parking for the staff and provide a play area that will be used for outdoor play by the students with staff oversight. Due to site constraints and the need for providing appropriate aisle widths for turning movements, the proposed layout is to provide one-way traffic circulation that will occur clockwise around the building. With this pattern, all vehicles will enter from Grove Avenue, circulate around the building and drop-off the students at the ramp in the front area of the building and then exit onto Broadway. This operation and circulation will allow ample room for any vehicles that may stack on-site for drop-off and pick-up.

Four parking spaces will be provided in the rear of the site, one 90-degree perpendicular space and three 60-degree angled parking spaces. An additional van-accessible handicap parking space will be provided in the front of the building. In addition to the on-site parking, there is also on-street parking allowed on Grove Avenue in the vicinity of the project site if it is necessary.

In addition to the parking and circulation, there is a requirement that a useable outdoor use area be provided. This area, based on the Department of Human Resources guidelines, recommends providing at least seventy-five square feet of usable outdoor space per child. The school intends to split the school into two shifts for outdoor play, meaning the approximate number of students playing outside should not exceed 13 students at any time. The proposed outdoor space on this site will be gated by the Broadway side ramp to the building and by the entrance to the outdoor area in the back of the building. The proposed area as laid out on the plans will provide 1,678 square feet of outdoor play area which far exceeds the Department of Human Services guidelines for 13 students, which would require 975 square feet.

### Site Access

With the proposed development it is anticipated that minimal additional traffic will be generated to the site. The morning peak hour will occur between 7:45 a.m. to 8:45 a.m. and the afternoon peak hour will occur between 3:45 p.m. to 4:45 p.m. With the staff and the number of students proposed (26 maximum) this will generate 26 trips to the site through the Grove Avenue entrance and 26 trips leaving the site through the Broadway entrance. The small volume of traffic that will occur staggered throughout the hours will have no significant impact to the traffic capacity on the site entrances and on the surrounding intersections and roadways.

As far as safety at the egress from the Broadway entrance, the sight lines exceed the requirements of the American Association of State Highway Officials *Policy on Geometric Design of Highway and Streets* for sight distance. The egress from this driveway will also have the benefit of the Grosvenor Avenue/Broadway signalized intersection as the operation of this signal will also provide gaps in the traffic stream along Broadway. Based on our observations, Pare is of the opinion that safe access will be provided in and out of the site and that no significant impacts to traffic flow will occur.



Ms. Katie Rodrigues

(4)

March 2, 2023

Based on the review of documents provided, our site reviews and the development of the site layout, we are of the opinion that the proposed layout will be satisfactory for site circulation, parking and safety. If you have any questions or require any additional information, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John P. Shevlin', with a stylized flourish at the end.

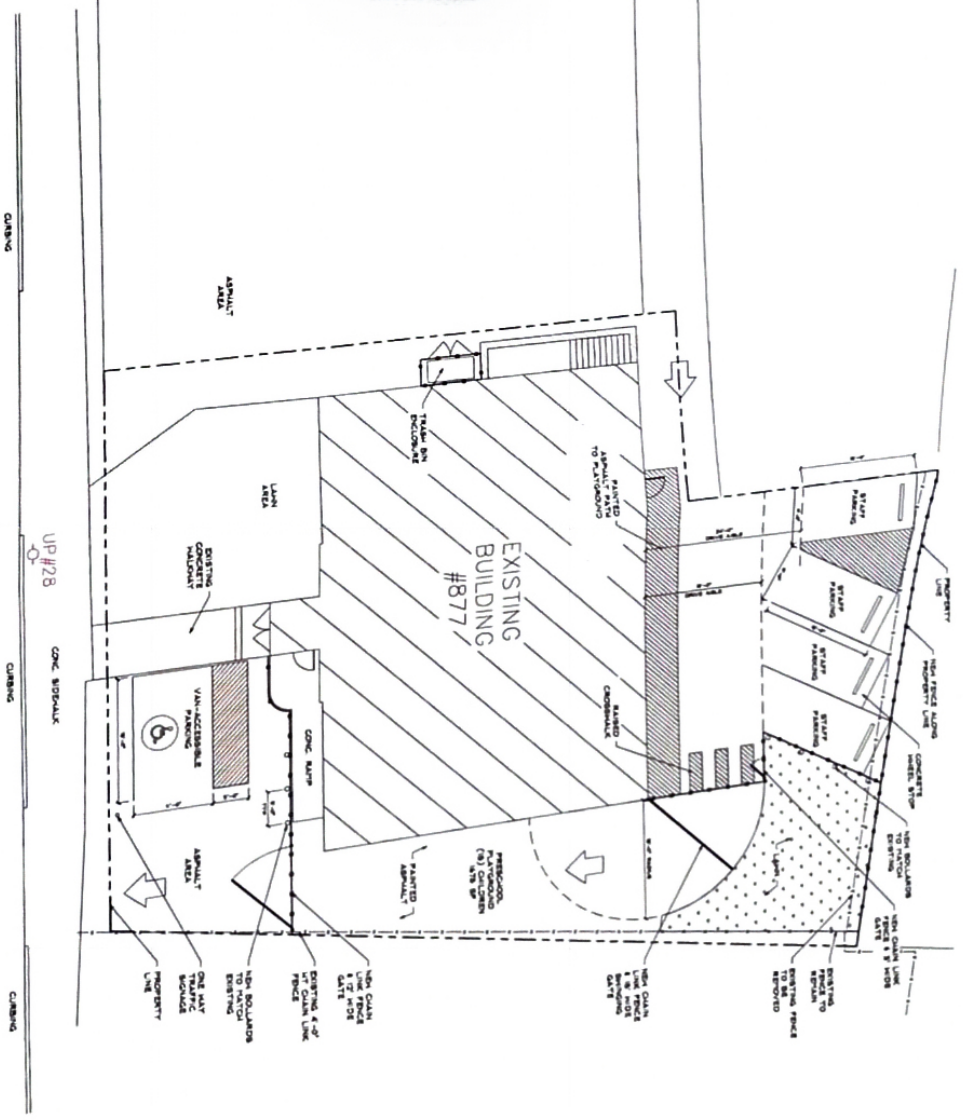
John P. Shevlin, P.E.  
Chief Executive Officer

JPS/

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GROVE AVENUE

BROADWAY



TOTAL ACCESSIBLE PARKING  
 STAFF PARKING  
 TOTAL SPACES



# Orchid Montessori Center for Inclusive Education



March 13th, 2023

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Katie Rodrigues, and I am a longtime teacher and mother to a five-year-old autistic son. I am one of the founders of the Orchid Montessori Center for Inclusive Education, a collaboration between Access Speech, Autism Included, and the Wildflower School Network.

I am writing to ask for the Zoning Board's support for the opening of our unique and innovative new preschool program, Orchid Montessori School, at 877 Broadway in East Providence. I would like to see the school open at this site for a variety of reasons.

- 1) There is a shortage of childcare programs in general for young children at this time, as many centers were forced to close during the first years of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is a fact that is true nationwide, and it has had a profound impact on the economies of Rhode Island and East Providence.
- 2) Children with IEPs, especially autistic children and those with other communication, developmental, and behavioral challenges, often have trouble gaining access to childcare programs. Some of these children have been asked to leave other programs, and this can have a negative impact on our economy if the parents of these children need to leave their jobs or reduce their hours.
- 3) Children with disabilities are disproportionately affected by the current children's mental health crisis. Many of these children struggle with transitions and sensory challenges, lack access to effective communication tools, and have lower self-esteem. Orchid's program hopes to address these challenges by providing wraparound support (speech therapy, occupational therapy, advocacy services, and mental health counseling). We have the unique benefit of a collaboration with Access Speech/ Therapy Group, whose team already includes a variety of clinicians and experts.
- 4) Children who attend the local integrated half-day public preschool program in East Providence have limited childcare options if they need full-day care, and, if approved to open, Orchid Montessori plans to collaborate with the school district to provide much-needed child care spots for these children.
- 5) There are very few properties available on the East Providence real estate market that are suitable for childcare facilities. None of the properties in our price range would allow us to comply with 100% of the zoning requirements and 100% of the child care facility licensing requirements through the state of RI. The building at 877 Broadway is already equipped with multiple open classroom spaces, a modern fire alarm system, and other amenities that would make it a suitable childcare center. This location is also convenient



# Orchid Montessori Center for Inclusive Education



for families, as it is near a bus line and to I-195, and it has already been vetted and approved as an appropriate site by DHS, Rhode Island's child care licensing authority.

- 6) As trained education and therapy professionals and parents of young children, some with special needs, we (the founding team) of the proposed Orchid Montessori School are extremely conscientious about designing programs and facilities that prioritize the safety of students. For example, while some centers choose to walk their students to a local park for recess, we feel that this would be an unsafe option for many of our students, which is why we prefer to build a fully fenced outdoor play space on site.
- 7) The Orchid Montessori team has the unique opportunity to work with an experienced design team from LISC and studioMLA architects. Both of these organizations have extensive experience with converting existing buildings into childcare facilities in a way that optimizes traffic flow and maximizes safety and functionality. This support is being provided free of charge through a state grant and the support of DHS. If we need to start from scratch in another location, it would be difficult to secure a second round of funding for another feasibility study and site plan proposal.
- 8) We made a good faith effort to determine the property's suitability before signing a lease, inviting experts from DHS and LISC to walk the site with us, but we were unable to apply for a zoning permit immediately because we were still raising funds to have a formal site plan prepared. We did take note, however, that a number of other childcare centers in our area have similar property types, with playgrounds immediately adjacent to a neighboring property. We also conducted a property search and determined that we do indeed have legal access to the easement/ right of way located between 891 Broadway and 62 Grove Avenue.
- 9) The Orchid Montessori team has already invested considerable time, funding, and energy into finding and exploring site plan options for this location. If the program is unable to open at 877 Broadway and the team needs to start a new property search, it could delay the program's opening indefinitely until we are able to find another suitable space and raise additional capital. In all likelihood, we would need to relocate our childcare program to another city in order to find a property that would meet all local zoning requirements.
- 10) Though Orchid's initial program will be small, it will be a lab program for innovative early childhood special education programming. Orchid's program will provide training and consulting services for local schools and families and attract funding that will allow them to test out new programming for autistic and other neurodiverse children, improving outcomes for all local children and families.



# Orchid Montessori Center for Inclusive Education



- 11) According to the letter written by our traffic engineering expert, John Shevlin of PARE Corporation, Orchid's preschool program would have a negligible impact on traffic in the area. Should the childcare use be approved, Access Speech will provide services to children enrolled in childcare and limit other therapy uses to hours outside the school day, which would minimize traffic flow in and out of the building. However, if Orchid is not able to open a childcare center, then Access Speech, a registered business that is currently licensed to operate out of the building, will continue to run group classes and therapy sessions out of the space, which they have the legal right to do. This would likely have a more significant impact on traffic and parking, as clients will be coming in and out all day and staying on site during their children's therapy sessions. Indeed, any business running out of a 3,000 square foot building is likely to produce more traffic than our childcare program, where children are dropped off all day and parents do not remain parked on site.
  
- 12) Our team has considered the initial response received from the City as well as concerns expressed by neighboring property owners. The March, 2023 supplemental submission demonstrates our best efforts to address those initial comments. In consultation with our engineering expert, the proposal has been redesigned to minimize traffic and safety concerns and the relief being requested is the least relief necessary to allow a legally permissible use of the property.
  
- 13) Finally, our team hosted an open forum on March 12th, 2023, for members of the community to visit the property and express any concerns they had regarding the project. Our intention is to be forthcoming with our proposal while being mindful of the impacts the proposal has on our neighbors.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter, and please feel free to reach out with any questions!

Sincerely,

Kathleen (Katie) Rodrigues, Executive Director  
Orchid Montessori Center for Inclusive Education



Rhode Island Department of Human Services  
57 Howard Avenue Louis Pasteur Building Cranston, RI 02920  
www.dhs.ri.gov - Tel: 401-462-2121

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Sarah Nardolillo and I am the Assistant Administrator of Child Care Licensing for the state of Rhode Island at the Department of Human Services. I am writing this letter in support of Orchid Montessori and their renovation of 877 Broadway East Providence.

I have been working alongside Katie Rodrigues and her team since they began exploring this location as an option for their program. I was immediately in support of the child care model, Orchid is looking to create. As you may be aware, this program plans to actively recruit children with special education needs who may have been unsuccessful or unable to access care in other child care programs. This low ratio, inclusive model will provide families with an option for care that does not currently exist in this community. At DHS, we frequently receive calls from families whose children are either waitlisted or suspended from larger, traditional care providers due to their specific needs. Orchid Montessori will not only provide a solution to this gap but also ensure that the families and children are experiencing a high-quality program aligned to basic health and safety requirements. The team has been incredibly receptive to any suggestions, technical assistance and support that has been offered to them to achieve this goal.

The grant that Orchid is using as startup has time limitations for outcomes. It is imperative that the space be approved and open to ensure that Rhode Island does not lose the opportunity to offer this unique type of care. Should the program not be able to get off the ground, families in the community will continue to struggle to find care for their children with special needs.

I am excited about this project as it will add another child care option for families in the East Providence area while also creating options for families who currently have limited in their choices. area. I have looked at the floor plan and am confident that it will meet all the child care regulations put forth by the Department of Human Services.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to me, at any time, with any additional questions you might have regarding my advocacy for the repurpose of this space.

Sincerely,

Sincerely,

*Sarah Nardolillo*

Sarah Nardolillo  
Assistant Administrator of Child Care Licensing  
RI Department of Human Services  
Louis Pasteur Building 57  
25 Howard Avenue  
Cranston, RI 02920  
(P) (401) 479-5649





Date: January 31, 2023

Re: Letter of Support for the opening of the Orchid Montessori School and Center for Inclusive Education

To Whom It May Concern:

On behalf of the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) and its Rhode Island Child Care and Early Learning Facilities Fund (RICCELFF), I am writing to offer our support for the opening of the Orchid Montessori School and Center for Inclusive Education at 877 Broadway in East Providence.

LISC manages the RICCELFF, a public:private partnership that was formed in 2001, and since that time has invested more than \$27 million, and leveraged an additional \$28 million to develop and improve child care facilities statewide. In addition, we have provided intensive technical assistance to more than 200 organizations – non-profit, for-profit, large, and small – focusing on developing new centers, expanding programming, and implementing quality improvements to physical space. Through our technical assistance, we have been able to work closely with the Orchid Montessori School on the development of their proposed child care center with a special focus on creating a space uniquely designed for children with disabilities, autism, and those with other communication, developmental, and behavioral challenges. We have been able to provide additional support through the deployment of our project development consultant, studio MLA, a recognized leader in early education facilities architecture and landscape design, striving to integrate sustainable design and natural spaces in support of education and community goals.

In 2019 we conducted the Rhode Island Early Learning Facilities Needs Assessment (<https://riccelff.org/2019-early-learning-facilities-needs-assessment/>) that focused on understanding and describing child care facility conditions, capacity and challenges. More importantly it was designed to lay out a series of actionable recommendations designed to address the facility component of the overarching goal of improving quality and access in the early learning system. It also highlighted that there is a shortage of child care centers in Rhode Island, including East Providence, where the Orchid Montessori School would like to open and operate. This proposed space on Broadway, while not currently used for child care, holds great potential to meet the clear need for early education in the community.

Orchid's program not only creates a sensory experience for children in most need, who are most affected by the mental health crisis, but also provides wraparound support (speech therapy, occupational therapy, advocacy services, and mental health counseling). Though Orchid's initial class size will be small, it will be a lab program for innovative early childhood special education programming. Orchid's program will provide training and consulting services for local schools and families and attract funding that will allow them to test out new programming for autistic and other neurodiverse children, improving outcomes for all local children and families.

We highly support the opening of the Orchid Montessori School and Center for Inclusive Design.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Erin Cox".

Erin Cox, AIA  
Senior Program Officer  
Rhode Island Child Care and Early Learning Facilities Fund  
LISC Rhode Island

7 Locust Street  
Riverside, RI 02915

March 12, 2022

To Whom it May Concern:

We are writing to express our strong support for the opening of Orchid Montessori School in East Providence, Rhode Island. As East Providence residents and parents of a neurodivergent child with unique needs, we are excited to have an inclusive preschool in our community that can accommodate children of all neurotypes.

It can be difficult for neurodivergent students to thrive in mainstream school environments, and Orchid Montessori School is providing an important service to help these students thrive. With an authentic, child-led Montessori environment, along with caring and nurturing staff who are attuned to the unique strengths and challenges of each child, we believe that Orchid Montessori School will be an incredibly valuable addition to our city.

In our opinion, Orchid Montessori School will not only benefit our own child and other young children in the area, but will also contribute to building a more compassionate and equitable community. We are proud to support Orchid Montessori School and thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Justin Uhr and Nellie Rainwater". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Justin" being more prominent.

Justin Uhr and Nellie Rainwater

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Paloma Fana and I am an East Providence resident and mother of a 4-year-old autistic child. I am writing this letter to express my support and discuss my experience in order to emphasize why a program like the Orchid Montessori School and Center for Inclusive Education is needed in our community.

Through my education and professional experience, I was able to recognize signs of autism in my child at an early age. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 Pandemic a lot of the services needed were not provided as many Early Intervention agencies at the time, and some still continue to, only provide virtual services, have a long or entirely closed their waitlist. Many Rhode Island families have missed the opportunity to enroll in Early Intervention and are learning about additional supports needed for their child at the time of dis-enrollment from a child care center as the program is unable to meet child's needs. Very few child care centers in Rhode Island provide therapeutic child care services, none in East Providence. I have struggled to find an appropriate child care program for my child for almost a year.

My child currently has an IEP and is attending the pre-school program for 2.5 hours a day. In order for the East Providence School Department to be able to provide services and busing we have to look for child care programs within the city limits. We have been placed on several "waitlists" in the area and after talking to some program owners I have outright been told that they are unable to accept my child as "it does not seem like the right fit due to him not yet being fully potty trained and they do not have enough staff to help my child get off the bus and into the program". Due to federal regulations, only about 10% of families who are outside income requirements are accepted into the local Head Start, we have been on that waitlist since March of 2022. Child Care programs in Rhode Island are not required to follow a specific waitlist or enrollment system to ensure fairness for all children.

If able to open, the Orchard Montessori School will be able to accept and work with many families who like me face similar challenges. Not only are they trained to work with children of all abilities, but additional therapeutic services could be offered right at the program alleviating the stress of having to transition to different locations for services. Families of children with special needs deserve an opportunity to be able to send their child to a safe and high quality child care program that is able to meet their needs. Please consider all the families that would benefit from this program.

Sincerely,  
**Paloma Fana**

Feb 26, 2023

To the East Providence Zoning Board:

I would first like to thank you for your time and attention to our zoning board application. I appreciate this opportunity to share a little about our organization and the mission of Access Speech and Autism Included.

I have been Co-Director of the 501c3 nonprofit Access Speech (DBA Autism Included) for nearly six years. In that time, my sister and I have served the greater Providence community through reduced and no-fee speech therapy services and educational advocacy. I have been a speech-language pathologist for nearly a decade, specializing in autistic language acquisition. We have empowered families to transition their children from segregated to inclusive classrooms across Rhode Island and Massachusetts. Non-speaking autistic children in our program have thus far had a 100% success rate in gaining functional communication through access to assistive technology.

Our program is a first-of-its-kind, intensively therapeutic lab school setting featuring an interdisciplinary team of educators, therapists, and allied health professionals. It has been years in the making and represents collaborations with several other local and national nonprofit organizations. Through this program, we are on a mission to prove that even children with significant differences can learn and thrive alongside their peers. This isn't only our professional passion, it's also personal. Every member of our leadership team is either autistic themselves or the parent of an autistic child.

If we are not approved to change our zoning classification, Access Speech and Autism Included will continue to operate in the capacity allowed by our current zoning classification while Orchid searches for a new home. We would, however, be grateful for the opportunity to serve the families of East Providence.

Thank you,

*Sarah Hamel*

Sarah Hamel, MS, CCC-SLP  
Director of Special Initiatives  
Access Speech

21-Feb-23

To Whom it May Concern,

Re: Opening of the Orchid Montessori School, 877 Broadway, East Providence, RI

I would like to add my voice in support of not only the opening of the Orchid Montessori School on 877 Broadway, East Providence, RI, but in support of and on behalf of my son, Mikey, who is 4 years old and largely non-speaking.

Our son Mikey is a bright and vibrant 4 year old that loves sea animals more than most anyone on the planet. And though he may be able to differentiate a goblin shark from a basking shark, Mikey is unable to respond to questions most 4 year olds answer routinely, such as "what's your name?," "how old are you?," and, most difficult for me, "who is your Mommy?"

Besides a severe language delay, Mikey has still not been able to toilet train and can have unpredictable and occasionally aggressive outbursts, making traditional integrated pre-schools an impossible choice for him. He suffered greatly and regressed when placed in traditional speech therapy services, where he would often hide under chairs to avoid working with his therapists. Desperate to find someone who could help Mikey while I worked endless hours as a hospital medicine physician during the COVID-19 pandemic, I knew I found something unique and special when I first met Sarah and Stephanie, who took a special interest in Mikey's unique interests and behaviors. Mikey took to them instantly, finally excited to be around people other than his immediate family and crucially, he began to find his voice for the first time. When I learned that they would be joining with Katie Rodrigues to create an inclusive Montessori school just down the road from our daughter's school in East Providence, we jumped on the opportunity to join them in creating an inclusive and progressive space for autistic children in our area.

In the brief time we have been working with Orchid Montessori School while they develop their program, Mikey has had much more access to speech language therapy and occupational therapy than he has had previously. He has finally had teachers and therapists who "meet him where he is," and allow him to thrive without judgement or criticism. The location has been convenient for me to drop off both of my East Providence students (our daughter is at the Gordon School) before taking I-195 to Fall River, where I am employed. The space has transformed into a beautiful and open classroom environment, with plenty of space, toys, and adaptive communication technologies to meet a variety of students' needs. At no point have I doubted the ability of this staff to care for and nurture Mikey, and I have seen the progress before my very eyes. Mikey has become more verbal and social just with the limited time he has spent there during the last few months.

21-Feb-23

East Providence has a unique opportunity here to not only show itself as supportive of the autistic and neurodivergent community throughout Rhode Island and Southeast Massachusetts, but also to boast the first Montessori school in New England that is specifically targeted towards autistic, neurodiverse, and the non-speaking/minimally speaking population of children that may use non-traditional means of communication. As a member of this community, I can attest to how desperately this type of environment is needed. My husband and I, who already have another child attending school in East Providence, have already pledged our financial support, medical expertise, and advocacy to the Orchid School, and I hope you will join us in making this possible for the children of our region.

Thank you,  
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