



2016/17

Student & Family Handbook

Mill Falls Charter School

100 William Loeb Drive, Unit 1 | Manchester, New Hampshire 03109
603.232.5176 | office@millfalls.org | www.millfalls.org

Welcome...

This handbook has been created as a resource for
Mill Falls Charter School families and students.

It highlights the school's origins, the Montessori pedagogy
and charter school basics.

It includes daily school procedures, safety standards and school-based policies
to ensure the best implementation of the *Mill Falls* mission.

Thank you for taking the time to carefully review this document.

Please contact the administration should you have any questions.

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Mill Falls Charter School creates life-long learners by providing an intellectually rich and challenging experience delivered through the Montessori tradition. In a safe and peaceful setting, dedicated educators foster students' individuality, creativity and critical-thinking skills to fully prepare them for future scholastic, civic and personal success.

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ABOUT US

Who We Are

Mill Falls Charter School is New Hampshire's first public Montessori school. *Mill Falls* brings together children of all backgrounds and learning styles in mixed-age classrooms that merge the individualized and academically integrated Montessori approach with the Common Core State Standards. Students' emotional and social growth is cultivated alongside their academic growth in an inclusive and diverse public school setting.

The purpose of *Mill Falls* is entirely educational, operating in full compliance with all laws and regulations governing NH charter schools. Like all public schools, the school is *tuition-free* to New Hampshire students. The majority of our students reside in southern New Hampshire.

Mill Falls opened in August 2012 welcoming 93 students in grades K-3. We have grown since then to a full Elementary Program serving 168 students in grades K-6. *Mill Falls* offers one stand-alone Kindergarten, three mixed-age/grade Lower Elementary classrooms for students in grades 1-3, and three Upper Elementary classrooms for students in grades 4-6.

The *Mill Falls* Founding Board of Trustees is the governing body of the school. The *Mill Falls Charter School Foundation*, a separate not-for-profit organization, provides an avenue for financial support of *Mill Falls Charter School* and helps to secure the school's long-term sustainability.

Our Mission

Mill Falls Charter School creates life-long learners by providing an intellectually rich and challenging experience delivered through the Montessori tradition. In a safe and peaceful setting, dedicated educators foster students' individuality, creativity and critical-thinking skills to fully prepare them for future scholastic, civic and personal success.

As a Montessori school, *Mill Falls* offers its students a differentiated curriculum and individualized instruction in multi-age classrooms, nurturing our students' social and emotional growth alongside their academic achievements. Learning is maximized by teaching that is geared to each student's individual academic level and by leveraging each child's unique learning style. Classrooms are carefully prepared with a complete complement of hands-on Montessori manipulatives and resource materials to facilitate inquiry and provide students with a concrete understanding of abstract concepts. *Mill Falls* is committed to embracing diversity and creating responsible citizenry through ongoing lessons in grace, courtesy, respect and responsibility.

Our History

In the fall of 2010, ten parents came together to write the charter for what would later come to be called *Mill Falls Charter School*. Their idea was to create a free, diverse and public school that merges the Montessori method with the Common Core State Standards (the national educational standard now embraced by virtually all states in the country, including New Hampshire). *Mill Falls* joins a small but growing group of New Hampshire charter schools. It is the state's first public Montessori school and was the first urban charter school approved by the New Hampshire Board of Education.

Our Model

Mill Falls is committed to establishing high academic achievement and standards as a public Montessori school. The academic program integrates the development of community, peaceful

approaches to conflict resolution and the integration of curriculum partners in areas of art, community service and the natural world. The school offers an educational environment where children of all abilities can progress toward independence, self-motivation and self-confidence, as they become well-rounded learners.

MILL FALLS: A PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL

Our care of the children should be governed not by the desire to 'make them learn things,' but by the endeavor always to keep burning within them the light, which is called intelligence.

~ Dr. Maria Montessori

Like all charter schools, *Mill Falls* is a public school that is organized around certain educational methodologies, themes, curricula, and a core mission. Charter schools offer the potential for research and development, providing the public school environment with space, time and support to develop practices beyond the traditional methods of education. In exchange for the freedom to approach education differently than traditional schools do, charter schools are required to meet strict state reporting standards and produce successful outcomes for their students. Charters are awarded to schools for five-year periods. At the end of the five-year period, schools must reapply for an extension of their charter contract.

As a state-issued charter school, *Mill Falls* reports directly to the Department of Education and functions independently of the district where it is located. By law, charter schools are tuition-free. Students are required to participate in state standardized assessment testing, (see below).

The full *Mill Falls* application submitted to the Department of Education is accessible at: http://www.education.nh.gov/instruction/school_improve/charter/documents/millfalls_application.pdf.

Testing Requirements

All New Hampshire public schools, including charter schools, must administer any state and federally required standardized tests. Like all charter schools, *Mill Falls* is evaluated, in part, based upon its students' achievement on these tests. These tests are based on the Common Core Standards adopted by the NH State Board of Education. As both a public and a Montessori school, our goal is to remain faithful to the Montessori philosophy while meeting the requirements placed on all New Hampshire public schools. We maintain a highly qualified, Montessori-trained faculty and adhere to the Montessori tradition in our teaching and learning activities, while seeking high performance on required standardized tests.

The Economics of our NH Public Charter School

Like all NH state-issued charter schools, the state provides *Mill Falls* with a set, per student/per year stipend (called 'equitable aid'), which is part of the annual state legislative budget. The school does not receive any local funding from the Manchester School District or the City of Manchester. The current rate of equitable aid – \$5,561 for elementary students; \$3,781 for kindergarten students – is equal to less than half of the funds allocated for students attending traditional, neighborhood public schools in the state. Therefore, additional support through individual contributions, as well as corporate support and grants is sought to insure a sustainable and successful program.

Direct solicitations for support to both our parent/guardian body and the greater community includes

invitations to support the annual appeal and participate in our Monthly Giving Program, and attend special events. There are school-based fundraising efforts, as well as larger solicitations by the *Mill Falls Charter School Foundation*. Families are encouraged to make financial contributions at a level that is individually meaningful for them, to help ensure the long-term sustainability of *Mill Falls*.

ABOUT MONTESSORI

*Education should no longer be mostly imparting knowledge,
but must take a new path, seeking the release of human potentials.*

~ Dr. Maria Montessori

Montessori Basics

The Montessori method is a world-renowned philosophy developed in the early 1900's by Dr. Maria Montessori who worked to deliver high quality education to the poorest children living in Rome, Italy. Characterized by multi-age classrooms with carefully selected hands-on materials that enable students to self-correct as they learn, the Montessori approach allows children to experience success at each phase of their educational journey. Alongside children's academic work, Montessori teachers also nurture and observe the students' social and emotional growth, thus taking into consideration the 'whole child.' In response, the trained Montessori teacher then adjusts the academic environment around the child so that it is tailored to continuously offer both a sense of challenge and success. Today the Montessori method is used worldwide, in both public and private settings, to educate children from pre-K through high school. There are an estimated 6,000 Montessori schools in the United States, more than 400 of which are public.

Dr. Maria Montessori: Renowned Education Innovator

The Italian educator and physician, Dr. Maria Montessori, was the first woman to receive a medical degree in Italy. It was her medical degree and commitment to scientific research that served as the underpinnings of the method she was to then develop. From her work with impoverished inner city children, Dr. Montessori created the curricula, unique materials and the individualized approach to education based on the developmental and psychological needs of children. Through her medical practices and clinical observations she analyzed how children learn. She concluded that children "build themselves from what they find in their environment." Advances in brain research continue to validate her discoveries today.

The first Montessori "school" was called *Casa dei Bambini* and was established in San Lorenzo, Italy in 1907. Through scientific observation of these children, Dr. Montessori took note of their ability to easily absorb knowledge from their surroundings and from manipulative materials. It was there that Maria Montessori's methodology was born.

With meticulous attention to detail, a commitment to presenting concepts concretely before moving to the abstract and the creation of a child-centered, "prepared environment" Dr. Montessori's pedagogy teaches children in a developmentally appropriate, individualized and non-competitive environment. Dr. Montessori was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize twice for her work in areas of peace and conflict resolution.

The Montessori Approach

Montessori emphasizes learning through all five senses, not just by hearing through the act of listening, or seeing by observing or reading. Children in Montessori classrooms learn at their own

pace and according to their own choice of activities. The classroom offers a wide variety of possibilities appropriate to their levels and across all academic areas of study. For Montessori students, education becomes an exciting process of discovery, leading to concentration, motivation, self-discipline, and a love of learning.

Montessori students are placed in three-year age groups (e.g., grades 1-3 and grades 4-6), forming communities in which the older children spontaneously share their knowledge with their younger classmates.

Montessori teachers are not stationed at the front of the classroom, but rather they move from area to area, meeting children where they are, working with them individually and in small and large groups. Teachers use their skills and tools of observation to continually assess the students' academic and social needs.

There are Montessori teacher-training centers around the world that carefully develop powers of observation in relation to the Montessori scope and sequence. Such programs are usually offered over two summers, with an additional year-long, in-classroom internship required for certification. The Montessori name is not a trademark and is associated with many organizations.

Mill Falls is committed to providing as authentic a Montessori program as possible within the public school setting. *Note: At Mill Falls the single-grade kindergarten classroom was created because the state of NH does not fund pre-kindergarten education for the general population, therefore we are unable to offer the typical Montessori pre-K/K (age 3-6) program.*

Absences and/or tardiness negatively impacts the offending child as well as all of his/her fellow classmates. Please help to ensure the development of your child's social and academic progress by avoiding unnecessary absences, tardiness and early dismissals.

Please see the *Mill Falls* website (www.millfalls.org) for additional links about Montessori and visit the *Mill Falls* parent/guardian lending library shelf near the reception desk for additional resources.

MILL FALLS CHARTER SCHOOL: A PUBLIC MONTESSORI LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Mill Falls recognizes that ALL children have a desire to learn and, given the proper environment, they will develop intellectually, socially, emotionally and physically. This "prepared environment" as Dr. Montessori called it, includes not only the classroom and materials, but also the social setting and extensive preparation of the adults who guide the children.

Educational Characteristics

The educational characteristics that support *Mill Falls*' mission and distinguish it, include the following:

Individualized, Differentiated Instruction

Montessori education is built upon the tenet that all learners are individuals in style, pace, and interests. At *Mill Falls*, classrooms and class work are structured so that teachers can deliver instruction individually or in small groups. This maximizes curricular options so that students can progress at a rate that meets their needs and challenges their abilities. *Mill Falls*'

individualized curriculum allows children to strive for their own personal best.

Concrete Representation of Abstract Concepts Using Didactic Materials

Montessori instruction progresses from concrete explorations and concept development to abstract understanding. *Mill Falls* classrooms have an abundance of carefully sequenced Montessori materials to support this learning progression. A majority of the materials are didactic, or self-correcting, allowing for greater autonomy of the child. This provides opportunities for the child to learn by making corrections, and reduces the emphasis from competitive to personal learning. As children progress toward middle school and develop higher-level thinking skills, Montessori materials are increasingly replaced by research, reference materials and information technology, used to pursue independent research projects. While the Montessori middle school environment starts to look similar to a more traditional environment in appearance, the philosophy behind the methodology remains.

Prepared Environment

Mill Falls teachers facilitate learning by carefully observing each child's behavior and growth, then guiding each child with direct instruction and invitations for inquiry. Teachers work to create and sustain a classroom and school culture where demonstrations of respect, initiative, risk-taking and persistence in learning are the norm. In the younger grades, teachers provide the majority of lessons with individuals or small groups of children. In the older grades, teachers provide more whole-class instruction. As students begin to direct the development of their progress and pursue research and projects that may take them outside of the classroom, teachers continue to challenge and extend the self-directed habits of the elementary years.

Mixed-Age Classes & Looping

Students are grouped into mixed-age classes that span three years in the elementary program and two in the middle school program. Mixed-age classrooms provide numerous benefits including a greater range of curriculum options and reduced competition. Peer tutoring builds confidence and competence, promotes cooperation and a sense of community. In addition, students remain with the same teacher for three years (in lower and upper elementary). The process of "looping" allows teachers to begin each school year without lost time determining students' academic strengths and weaknesses and their learning styles.

The Grace & Courtesy Curriculum

Montessori schools are founded on the principle that children learn from watching adults around them. Montessori educators practice patience and understanding toward the children and toward all other members of the school community, which helps young learners value and apply these qualities. Everyone in the extended *Mill Falls* community is expected to conduct himself/herself with dignity, courtesy and consideration at all times.

The following actions are examples of how our students model grace, courtesy and respect. As adults guiding our community, our staff models each of these behaviors on a daily basis and we expect that any adult visiting and/or volunteering would do the same.

- Before entering the environment, stop at the threshold and observe.
- Enter the environment with a quiet voice, soft steps and minimal disruption of the classroom.
- Move about the room silently, avoiding carefully placed works on the floor.
- Care for classroom materials and the environment as if they were one's own and conduct oneself with gentle movements.

- When addressing a friend, speak in a pleasant tone and only if they are not engaged in a work.
- The hallway is an extension of our classroom and meant only for quiet travel; avoid waving to friends inside other classrooms through the windows.
- Clean up work when completed and return to its designated place.

Grace & Courtesy are integral to the Montessori classroom and are integrated into the curriculum. Children are given opportunities to grow personally and socially. Their social and emotional growth is monitored by their teachers. Teachers and staff members model these values throughout the school and expect them from students and parents as well.

Community Connection

As children grow, they learn in, and contribute to, increasingly expansive and diverse human and environmental communities. Students at *Mill Falls* first come to understand the world – and their part in it – by discovering community within the classroom. They then contribute to the life of the school by caring for the surrounding plant and animal habitats. Finally, they support the improvement of the larger community beyond the school walls. As a result, community service and service learning are important parts of the curriculum throughout the child’s years at *Mill Falls*.

Integrated Teaching & Learning

Montessori education emphasizes interdisciplinary teaching to encourage connections across the curriculum and to students’ personal lives. Emphasis is placed on projects that require open-ended research and in-depth study using primary and secondary resources as well as other materials. When students understand the purpose for, and connection among, their activities, they become motivated learners.

Areas of Study

The areas of study at *Mill Falls* are arranged according to the world-renowned Montessori approach and align with Common Core State Standards. Those areas are as follows:

Mathematics

Math is initially presented through manipulative materials. The student progresses from concrete to abstract when he/she shows readiness to do so. Further, the study of mathematics includes real-life, word problems and applications.

Language Arts

English/Language Arts emphasizes reading skills and includes fluency, comprehension and vocabulary as well as the etymology, syntax and formation of words. The writing process exposes students to a variety of forms including composition, creative, expository, persuasive, descriptive, technical, informational, and narrative writing. English/Language Arts also includes oral forms, such as debate, speech-making and group discussions.

Cultural Studies

Social studies and science are called Cultural Studies in the Montessori curriculum. They integrate anthropology, astronomy, biology, chemistry, economics, geography, geology, government, history, philosophy, physics and sociology.

Integrated Arts Program

Art, music, fitness and foreign language are integrated and planned to correlate with classroom studies as much as possible. Our Integrated Arts Instructors work with our teaching staff and administration to coordinate these efforts.

Classroom Configurations

Currently, *Mill Falls* offered one kindergarten classroom, three lower elementary classrooms and three upper elementary classrooms. Each class has a Montessori-trained lead teacher and an assistant teacher and 24 students, providing a student-teacher ratio of about 12 to 1.

Kindergarten is a single-aged classroom.

Lower Elementary classrooms include grades 1, 2 and 3. Students are referred to as first year, second year or third year students.

Upper Elementary classrooms include grades 4, 5 and 6. Students are referred to as fourth year, fifth year or sixth year students.

Exploring the World Outside of the Classroom

“Going-out” is a term unique to the Montessori approach. It is a mini-fieldtrip, usually involving four to six students who have a particular interest in a certain area. The children plan the details and arrange the logistics of the trip. These excursions encourage individual interests and responsibility for learning. They provide research opportunities that are an integrated extension of the curriculum. At the beginning of the school year, we request that parents/guardians sign a general permission slip that will cover these mini-field trips for the year. (Please also see page 20 “Field Trips” and *Appendix A, Policy and Related Procedures for Transporting Mill Falls Students in Personal Vehicles.*)

After School Programs

After school programs are offered throughout the school year. Information on each program is shared with families via email, the weekly newsletter, and flyers sent home in backpacks. We aim to offer a range of activities such as STEM, art, music, running club, Lego and more, to students of all ages in our K-6th grade community.

The associated fees with each activity are clearly noted on each flyer. Some programs are organized in-house and provided by our staff, others will be with third-party providers. Those activities offered by third party providers will be made via an agreement directly between the provider and each participating family. For many of our programs, we are able to offer discounts to families who qualify for free & reduced lunch (forms to register free & reduced status are sent home to families each fall). Because many of our families face financial challenges, we also will work to be sure that as many families as possible are able to receive support during the course of the year so that as many students as possible can participate in the after school programming. There fore, not every family who qualifies for free & reduced will be able to get support for each program. To help support this discount program, we ask that families able to include extra funds when they sign their children up for after school programming, kindly do so.

Parent/Guardian Involvement

Mill Falls considers all caregivers vital partners in the education of their children. Additionally, parents/guardians are viewed as key participants in the building of the school community and the success of the program.

Parent-Teacher Communication

In an effort to provide frequent opportunities for parent communication with teachers and staff, the school provides an online, intranet information system, called Montessori Compass. It offers curricular and attendance data for parents on a regular basis. At least two times per year parent-teacher conferences provide an opportunity for the teaching staff and parents to discuss

academic, social and emotional progress. In this individual setting, parents can express concerns and communicate their commitment to doing their part at home to ensure their children's success.

Parent Participation in the School Community

The regular presence of parents/guardians is part of the *Mill Falls* landscape, not the exception. Therefore, parents are welcome and given many opportunities for participation in school life. In fact, it is expected that each family will contribute approximately 10-20 volunteer hours throughout the school year. Volunteer opportunities for supporting the school functions are generated by teachers and/or the administration. (Please see page 12, "Parent Volunteer Partnership" for more information.)

SCHOOL GOVERNANCE & ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Mill Falls Charter School Board of Trustees

Mill Falls is governed by a volunteer Board of Trustees. The Board has ultimate responsibility for the success of the school and is accountable to the New Hampshire Department of Education (DOE). The Board sets policy for the school and hires and supervises the Executive Director, who, in turn, hires the staff of the school. Working through the Executive Director, the Board ensures that all laws and regulations are being followed and that day-to-day operations are consistent with the mission of the school. In consultation with the Executive Director, the Board develops and approves the budget for the school. The Board is designed to be populated by parent and community members.

The Board has regular monthly meetings that are open to the public. The dates and times of all meetings are posted on the school website and at school several days before the meeting is scheduled. Board work is organized to meet the legal requirements of the public school board as it relates to public meeting rules and NH Right to Know Law. The Board discusses issues, sets policy, and conducts business for anyone to observe; public comment is invited at the beginning and end of Board meetings. Meeting minutes are kept at school. Approved minutes are posted on line, while draft minutes are available for onsite review at the school only. School policies not included here are kept at the school office and are available upon request.

The Board of Trustees performs much of its work through committees. These committees consist of trustees, parents, and members of the community. The current committee structure includes: the Executive Committee, the Governance Committee, the Finance Committee, the Charter Committee, the Development Committee and the Facility Committee. Ad hoc task forces will be added as needed.

Mill Falls Charter School Foundation

To address the funding gap between student aid from the state of NH and the school's operating costs, the school founders developed the *Mill Falls Charter School Foundation*, a non-profit organization designed to raise significant funds for *Mill Falls Charter School* in support of the school's financial sustainability. The Foundation Board is comprised of individuals with vast professional, business and community leadership experience and a strong commitment to the School's mission and goals of *Mill Falls Charter School*.

The Foundation works closely with the School Board and with the Administration to develop mission-linked fundraising methods and activities, and to address the evolving needs of the school. Both the

School Board and the Foundation Board have 100% giving on the part of their trustees/members, which is a meaningful model as those groups go out into the community to ask for support from individuals, corporations and foundations *outside* of the *Mill Falls* community.

Mill Falls is a tuition-free public school. However, it is our hope that families will make financial contributions at a level personally meaningful and manageable to assist in the long-term sustainability of the school. Innovative programs are being developed for both school-based and foundation-based giving. The Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non profit. All contributions are tax-deductible to the fullest extent of the law. For more information about the Foundation, please contact the Foundation at: Foundation@MillFalls.org or visit <http://millfalls.org/mill-falls-charter-school-foundation>.

Parent/Guardian Volunteer Partnership

Parent/guardian volunteers are an important group within the overall school community. They assist in projects large and small in meaningful ways. Parent/guardian volunteers work closely with school administration to honor and promote the values of the school when event planning, fundraising and offering assistance through volunteering. Volunteer activities reflect *Mill Falls*' Montessori core values through commitment to inclusion, fairness, grace, courtesy, respect and cross representation of our student/family population.

To ensure a link between projects/events and school needs, all projects and event planning is done in collaboration with the school administration, with their approval and necessary oversight. Fundraising projects and schedules are organized in collaboration with the school administration and the Chair of the Foundation Board.

As the school continues to grow, various committees shall be formed to assist in organizing specific events and activities. Currently the committees set forth are as follows:

Teacher/Staff Support Committee

This committee is designed to complete tasks such as lamination, classroom material preparation, mailings, etc. Tasks are driven by the needs put forth by teachers and staff.

Hospitality Committee

This committee's role is to implement the small touches that keep all events and school activities grounded in the grace and courtesy of the Montessori way (i.e., a schedule of parents/guardians to bring flowers/plants/healthy snacks to the school and for any related community and Board events, ensuring that everyone feels welcome in our 'home').

Family Events Committee

This committee works with the school's administrative staff to organize individual events in the areas of social events and community service events.

Fundraising Committee

This committee works with the school's administrative staff to help coordinate school-based fundraising efforts.

Parent Ambassador Committee

This committee works with the school's administrative staff as a resource to new *Mill Falls* families.

All school volunteers with direct involvement in student life are required by law to have a criminal records check, review the volunteer handbook, sign the *Mill Falls* Confidentiality Policy and be

approved by the administration. Background check forms are available on our website at <http://millfalls.org/parents/volunteer-opportunities/>.

ADMISSION & ENROLLMENT

Enrollment Policy & Process

In order to enroll at *Mill Falls*, children must be at least 5 years old by September 30th of the current school year. *Mill Falls* accepts applications from any child meeting the school's age requirements and residing in New Hampshire. We do not discriminate based on race, color, national origin, creed, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, mental or physical disability, ancestry, athletic performance, special needs, proficiency in the English language or in a foreign language, academic achievement, or town of residence within the state. In addition, Montessori experience is neither required nor used as a selection preference.

Applications

During the annual enrollment period (usually scheduled from January through a portion of March), *Mill Falls* recruits its students through broad outreach and multi-media advertising. We also hold public information sessions during that time in order to help families understand the school's Montessori philosophy and methods before applying for admission to the school. Families interested in enrolling are strongly encouraged to attend one of the outreach events. During this period, the lottery enrollment application is made available. Families are required to complete the application, as well as the Parent/Guardian Understanding Agreement. These documents will be accessible on line as well as at the school location. *Note: Students enrolled at Mill Falls retain their spots from year-to-year unless they choose to un-enroll.*

Lottery

At the end of the posted application period, as per NH Charter School Law, if there are more applicants than available spots, a public lottery is held for student enrollment. This is a 'blind lottery' – a random selection process that results in a completely unbiased ranking of applicants within each age/grade level. As part of the state's lottery guidelines, siblings of students enrolled at *Mill Falls* receive preference in the lottery process in an effort to keep families together in one school.

Wait List

In some cases, the lottery will only add people to an existing wait list at a given grade level. This is because *Mill Falls* offers waitlist 'carry over' from year to year. This means, for example, that this year's kindergarten wait list becomes next year's 1st grade wait list, etc. Families may not re-enroll their child in subsequent lotteries while that child holds a spot on the wait list.

Each year's lottery draws are added to the bottom of the existing wait lists. Siblings of currently enrolled students are placed at the bottom of the existing sibling wait list. Should openings occur over the course of the year, the school will offer admission in the same order described above, using a consistent and documented process. Applicants remain on the wait list until they are offered admission, or until they request in writing to be removed from the list, or until repeated attempts to contact them regarding their desire to stay on or be removed from the list have failed over a reasonable period of time.

For additional information and answers to frequently asked enrollment questions, please see the school's website <http://millfalls.org>.

Un-Enrollment

In the event that a family decides to withdraw their child from *Mill Falls* to another school/learning situation, it is expected that this transition will be done in the most non-disruptive way possible to that family's child and to the school community overall.

As soon as the family has made the decision to un-enroll their child from *Mill Falls*, they are expected to notify the School office in writing. At that time, they will be asked to participate in an exit interview with school administration. Please keep in mind that charter school funding is linked to student enrollment. If a spot is empty, the school does not receive student equitable aid for that spot unless and until another student fills that spot.

It is expected that a student's last day will be calm for the child, his/her schoolmates and our staff. If a parent wishes to help the child empty out the contents of his/her cubby space, this may be done after school hours on the child's final day at *Mill Falls*.

GOING TO SCHOOL

School Calendar

For our most recent calendar, visit the School and Google Calendar at <http://millfalls.org/school-calendar/>. Important upcoming date reminders are also featured in our weekly newsletter.

School Supplies

Each August, teachers send their new and returning students a note with details about what they would like their students to bring to school on the first day.

Every child will need a backpack to carry snacks, lunch and school communications to and from school. Backpacks should be easily worn on the child's back; suitcase style backpacks with wheels are not recommended.

Mill Falls students eat lunch with their classmates and teachers in their classrooms. There is not a cafeteria at the school location, so students are expected to bring their own lunch and snacks, packed in a lunch box.

Student Information Files

Your child's school file must be complete upon their enrollment. The file must include at a minimum: your child's medical form including their immunization records (or related waiver); parent/guardian proof of residency; records form from your child's previous school; a copy of your child's birth certificate; *Mill Falls'* emergency contact form; medication release form (if applicable); home language survey, and the race/ethnicity form as required by the state. If you anticipate any delay or require assistance completing the paper work, please let us know by sending an email to: Office@MillFalls.org.

Parents/Guardians are expected to keep all student health records up to date. The school administration monitors health records to insure that physical examinations and immunizations are completed in compliance with state law.

School Day

Typical Schedule for Kindergarten Classroom:

8:15	Drop off begins with free time in the recess area until 8:30am
8:30	Transition to classroom and preparation for start of day
9:00	Morning circle
9:30	Group snack break / whole group read aloud
10:00	Work-cycle
11:15	Clean up and Pack up for dismissal
11:40	Recess
12:00	Dismissal

Typical Schedule for Lower Elementary Classrooms:

8:15	Drop off begins with free time in recess area until 8:30am
8:30	Transition to classroom and preparation for the start of the day
8:35	Morning circle / work cycle / individual snack (schedules vary depending on classroom)
11:40	Recess / Lunch
12:10	Lunch / Recess (schedules vary depending on classroom)
12:40	Afternoon work cycle / reading / writing instruction / Integrated Arts (schedules vary depending on classroom)
3:00	Dismissal

Typical Schedule for Upper Elementary Classrooms:

8:15	Drop off begins with free time in recess area until 8:30am
8:30	Transition to classroom and preparation for the start of the day
8:35	Morning circle / begin work cycle / individual snack/ Integrated Arts (schedules vary depending on classroom)
12:00	Lunch
12:35	Recess
1:05	Afternoon work cycle / reading / writing instruction
3:00	Dismissal

Arrival & Dismissal by Car

With many students traveling to and from school by car and others arriving by bus, all within a short time frame, a mixture of patience and adherence to the following guidelines is essential for an orderly and safe arrival. For those traveling by car, a family car ID tag with your child's name (provided by the school) should be made visible (on your dashboard).

Morning Drop Off & Lower/Upper Elementary Dismissal: The all-school arrival and afternoon pickup line for our lower and upper elementary students begins at the sidewalk in the cul-de-sac and extends around and down the access road alongside the school building, down the hill near the shipping/loading docks (maps are available from the school).

Kindergarten Dismissal: Kindergarten dismissal (at 12 pm) requires that cars line up alongside the Union Leader's main entrance, behind any bus that may be picking up students. That pickup line extends along the perimeter of the parking lot.

For safety purposes, please note:

- Cars enter and leave via William Loeb Drive.

- All students being dropped off or picked up by car must enter and leave those cars in the designated car area in the cul-de-sac; for Kinders, at the pickup line alongside the Union Leader's main entrance.
- All drivers must stay in the car and allow the children to independently exit the vehicle. If assistance is required, adult supervisors are available.
- Cars must pull forward in single file and must exit in the same, safe manner.
- Children enter and exit from the **driver side of the car onto the sidewalk.**
- Please follow the traffic direction provided by the adult supervisors on duty.
- **Please do not park and walk your child to the front doors unless you are arriving after the designated drop off or pick up times.**

Arrival

Arrival for all students begins at 8:15am. School begins at 8:30am and students are considered tardy if their arrival time is later than 8:30am. Please see page 17, "Attendance Guidelines and Policy." If you arrive after 8:30am, please park your car and walk your child into the school and sign in at the front desk. For safety purposes, students arriving late must always be accompanied by an adult.

Dismissal

Kindergarten students are dismissed at 12pm. All other students are dismissed at 3:00pm. Parents/guardians are expected to arrive promptly at the designated pickup time; no later than 12:05pm for kindergarten and no later than 3:10pm for all other students. Please call the school if you have an emergency or delay. Students not picked up during the release time, will be brought back into the school to await pickup. Parents/guardians who are chronically late will be contacted by the administration.

Any child who needs to remain at school beyond 15 minutes past the end of their school day will automatically be sent to the Kinder or AfterCare Program and the parent/guardian will be billed the rate for the Drop In Care.

In the event that your child is going to be picked up by someone other than his/her family, please follow the following policy:

- 1: Please notify your classroom teacher AND administration of the plan by either calling, sending a note or email.
- 2: If the adult driver is not a *Mill Falls* parent/guardian, then the child will only be released to that adult after review of their photo ID, as per your instruction.
- 3: Please arrange transfer of your child's ID tag to the vehicle of the adult picking up your child. If you need additional ID tags, please contact the front office at 232-5176.

Students Using Bus Transportation

Bus transportation is available only to those students who reside in Manchester. Families residing outside of Manchester must provide their own transportation. Bus routes and schedules can be obtained from the school office. **ALL requests for changes must go through the school office. Parents/Guardians are not to contact the Manchester School District directly regarding busing issues. If you require any information about busing, please contact the school's office.**

On early dismissal days, buses will pick up students at the time designated by the school. Please consult the school calendar for early dismissal days, which are held monthly.

Expectations for conduct on the bus are the same as when children are at school. It is particularly important that students are quiet and respectful so the driver can concentrate on safely delivering the passengers. Violations of bus etiquette can result in loss of bus privileges and/or other consequences. **Riders and their parents/guardians must read and sign off on the MTA busing policy, which is made available at the start of each school year.**

ATTENDANCE GUIDELINES & POLICY

The State of New Hampshire views school attendance as one of the primary indicators of a child's level of success in school. As such, State of New Hampshire RSA 193:1 requires "that every child between six and sixteen years of age [shall] attend the public school at the time the public schools are in session." The law RSA 193:2 further states that "every person having custody of a child shall cause the child to attend such a school during all the time the public schools are in session."

At *Mill Falls* it is asserted that student attendance rates impact student learning and affect a school's culture. Montessori philosophy requires that we respect the child's concentration and follow the development of each child. In addition, teachers spend time and energy preparing curriculum and lessons for each day.

Absences and/or tardiness negatively impacts the offending child as well as all of his/her fellow classmates. Students are expected to attend school on time each day of the school year unless there is an emergency or a personal illness. Please help to ensure the development of your child's social and academic progress by avoiding unnecessary absences, tardiness and early dismissals.

Excused absences include but are not limited to the list below and may require documentation

- Illness of student or immediate family member
- Death in the family
- Religious holiday
- Scheduled medical/dental appointments if such cannot be scheduled outside of the normal school hours
- Chronic illness registered with the administration and verified by physician's note
- Classes missed due to an IEP or 504 plan
- Extreme weather conditions as discussed with the administration
- The administration shall determine if an absence is excused for any other reason not listed above.

Excessive excused absences will be addressed on a case-by-case basis to determine if there is a pattern of non-attendance.

Examples of unexcused absences include but are not limited to:

- Absences as a result of incomplete immunizations records (without appropriate waiver on file)
- Family vacations outside of the established school calendar
- Leaving school grounds without permission during school hours
- Absences determined by the administration to be unexcused for any other reason not listed above.

Extensive unexcused absences shall be addressed in a case-by-case basis to determine if there is a pattern of non-attendance.

Please note the following policy on unexcused absences.

- **5 unexcused absences:** Parents/Guardians are contacted in writing by the teacher and/or administration regarding the absences.
- **8 unexcused absences:** Parents/Guardians are contacted again by the teacher and/or administration and a meeting is scheduled to develop a successful attendance plan. The plan shall include information regarding unexcused absences over 10.
- **10 unexcused absences:** Without full and reasonable explanation provided to the administration, documentation may be given to Division for Children, Youth & Families (DCYF) for intervention.

Absence Procedures

When a child is absent, the parent/guardian must notify the school. **If your child is unable to attend school please call the school office by 8:30am.** If the school is not contacted, you will be called inquiring about your child's absence by 10am.

If there is to be an extended, planned (more than 1 day) excused absence, a note with the dates of the student's absences should be given to both the student's classroom teachers and the front desk, as all work together to monitor student attendance.

Tardiness

Students arriving after the start of school (regularly scheduled at 8:30am) **need to be accompanied to the reception area by their parent/guardian/adult driver and signed in.** Arriving at school on time is another important factor in a child's daily success. Morning routines and classroom meetings set the stage for what will occur throughout the day. A tardy student who is forced to play catch up begins the day at a disadvantage. If you do not contact the school regarding your child's delay in arrival, the school will call you by 10am.

The first half hour of class is very important, as that is when teachers and students discuss their plans for the day. Parents/guardians of chronically tardy students will be notified and the teacher may convene a parent conference to address the pattern of lateness and a plan for remediation.

Please note 5 tardies are equal to one unexcused absence. Accumulated absences, even if arrived at through chronic late arrival, will trigger our absence policy noted above.

Early Dismissal

Ideally, children should be in school during all school hours. Please arrange appointments after school hours or on early release days whenever possible. If it is necessary to make an appointment during school hours, please be sure to send a note to school. As stated earlier, in order to dismiss your child to someone other than a parent/guardian, the authorized person must provide photo identification.

Please note 5 unexcused early dismissals are equal to one absence. Accumulated absences, even if arrived at through chronic late arrival, will trigger our absence policy noted above.

School Closings or Delays

Mill Falls follows the Manchester School District for closings, delays and unscheduled dismissals due to weather or other unforeseen events. If the Manchester School District is closed or has a delay in opening so will *Mill Falls*. In addition, *Mill Falls* will be listed in the WMUR storm center (TV and web), on the radio (i.e. WZID) where announcements will be made as soon as a closing or delay

decision is made. Parents/guardians should refer to these public media sources, as they will be more accurate and timely than calling the school.

Please note, this year, 4.5 snow days have been accounted for in the school calendar. Unless there are more than 4.5 weather-related school closings, those days will not be added to the end of the current calendar for make up. The current calendar meets the number of required hours of school instruction set forth by the state.

The MFCS Before/Kindergarten/AfterCare Program

We are pleased to provide care to children before and after school by dedicated *Mill Falls* staff members, thus ensuring proper alignment with our School's values and mission. Programs are offered to students in grades K-6.

For information on the Program, please visit <http://millfalls.org/parents/aftercare/> where you will find related forms and the Aftercare Handbook, or contact ChildCare@millfalls.org.

FOOD

Each *Mill Falls*' student is expected to bring his/her own snack and lunch daily. In keeping with *Mill Falls*' commitment to supporting the optimal growth and development of the whole child, the school urges parents and caregivers not to send sweets such as candy and soda, which will not be allowed to be consumed by students. Instead, please send students with healthy food choices.

Snacks

Mill Falls defines healthy snacks as fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and other items that have limited sugar, salt and fat content. Procedurally, each classroom has its own time and set-up for snacks. Throughout the year, however, teachers may choose a more managed approach for snacks to better accommodate their classroom's academic activities.

Lunches

Providing a healthy lunch for your child each school day is the responsibility of the family. Lunch times are scheduled in class and paired with recess. Students who forget to bring a lunch should notify their teacher early in the day so that a suitable arrangement can be made. Please note the school does not have facilities to heat up or prepare hot student lunches.

Allergies

If your child has food or other allergies, contact the main office for information on how an individualized plan can be developed for your child to keep him/her as safe as possible while at school, given this important health concern. **Any medications that your child's doctor has prescribed for the treatment of food allergies must be kept in the school office along with a doctor's instructions. Additionally, a signed release form stating permission for school personnel to administer medication needs to be signed by the child's parent/guardian and presented at school.**

For allergy concerns, and other reasons, please note we request that students not share food with their classmates.

A small number of our students and staff have severe nut allergies. Teachers and staff make their best efforts to monitor lunches, snacks, and other foods brought in to school, but it is not feasible to say

that no nuts will ever enter our building, including the classrooms that have been designated as “nut-free.” We ask that parents/guardians in those nut-free classrooms carefully check labels for nuts or nut ingredients. Please note that many foods have “hidden” nut ingredients, and so-called “safe” food manufacturers can change ingredients without warning, so our providing “safe” food lists is not appropriate. There are many peanut-free, tasty and easy lunch and snack choices for your child, and many creative suggestions can be found now that peanut restriction is a more common occurrence at school. We appreciate everyone’s cooperation as we address these serious allergy issues.

Mill Falls may occasionally provide a list of healthy snacks, but this list is not meant to be considered a 100% nut-free product list. It is only a guide for parents/guardians to assist them in choosing healthier snack options.

We also have students with other types of food allergies. If bringing food into your child’s classroom for a special occasion or project (other than packing snack/lunch), please be sure to check with the classroom teacher or main office to ensure an appropriate selection is made.

Recycling

Mill Falls develops students who are stewards of the earth and cognizant of the impact we, as humans, have on the planet. In this regard, we encourage families to minimize waste by packing lunches in recyclable containers. As a school community, we will continue to pursue options to reduce our impact on the environment. Recycle bins are available in each room and students assist with this responsibility each day.

SCHOOL CULTURE

One of the keys to our success as a Montessori school is the ability to balance freedom with responsibility. As students grow and mature, they are expected to take an active and independent role in their own learning. They are expected to be responsible and respectful toward other people and their environment, as well as to have a positive attitude toward their work.

Social Events

Throughout the year, the members of our school community come together for many different reasons, such as educational meetings, student performances, open houses, special events and fundraisers. We usually plan for a part of these gatherings to have a social component, so we can make new acquaintances and get to know our children’s friends and their families.

Whenever we have these gatherings on school grounds or elsewhere, parents/guardians are expected to be responsible for their children unless the child is under the supervision of a staff member. Further, we ask everyone to respect the classroom learning environments by not touching classroom materials unless it is a part of the event or program. A Montessori classroom is a carefully prepared environment and the sequential order of the materials is important for the child. Additionally, the materials are quite costly.

Celebrations

At *Mill Falls* we advocate for celebrations that teach tolerance, peace and an understanding of multicultural differences. We do this both in the classroom as a part of the Montessori curriculum and on occasion at school-wide events. Additionally, the Montessori tradition of the Birthday Walk is a very special opportunity for each child to share pieces of his/her personal story with classmates.

Please contact your child's classroom teacher to determine the individual classroom policy around celebratory activities and to learn more about what our teachers have planned.

At *Mill Falls*, classroom celebrations in which notes, gifts or sweets are exchanged such as Valentines, Secret Santa or Halloween are discouraged. We do this for a number of reasons: some students have differing religious beliefs that prohibit celebratory activities; we seek to minimize the consumption of sweets and encourage healthy eating habits; and we are committed to educating students about mass marketing/consumerism.

Field Trips

Part of the Montessori curriculum includes the tradition of leaving the security of the classroom and going out into the world for intellectual exploration, physical challenge, service, etc. *Mill Falls* teachers periodically organize such field trips to provide students with cultural, scientific, social or educational experiences.

Notices are sent home in advance, describing the objectives of the field trip and requesting drivers, if needed. Parents/guardians who volunteer to chaperone for field trips are expected to adhere to chaperoning guidelines and must first be cleared through a criminal records check and vehicle compliance checklist (if they will be driving) before they are able to chaperone. (Please see *Appendix A, Policy and Related Procedures for Transporting Mill Falls Students in Personal Vehicles.*)

No student may go on a field trip unless his/her parent or guardian has signed a permission slip before departure. The slip will include any special conditions such as cost and lunch arrangements when appropriate. Families for whom any expense of a fieldtrip is a hardship are encouraged to speak to the administration so that financial assistance can be provided.

New Hampshire law requires that any child under 7 years old or less than 57 inches tall (whichever is reached first) must be secured in an appropriate child restraint while travelling in a motor vehicle. Any child who is required to have a car seat according to this law, must provide a seat on any day when travel to a school activity is to be by motor vehicle. Failure to provide a car seat may result in your child not being able to participate in the school activity.

Appropriate Dress

The general atmosphere and environment of the school must be conducive to optimal learning. Dress can affect behavior and influence both the atmosphere and learning environment. As the Montessori philosophy is a hands-on learning process, students are often working on cloth mats that are on the floor. This should be a consideration when students dress each day.

In addition, students are active outside in the play area, and will go outside for playtime most days, weather permitting. Teachers will make outdoor recess decisions on a daily basis, taking into consideration the weather and overall environmental conditions. Generally speaking, temperatures in the twenties or above are suitable for outdoor play. Adequate clothing for outside play (winter coat, hat, gloves or mittens, as well as snow pants and boots when applicable) is required in cold weather. Teachers will not allow children outside without adequate clothing.

When selecting clothes, bags and other things your child will use at school, we respectfully ask that you honor the principles of Montessori by choosing simple, comfortable items which are free of commercialism or distracting media messages or slogans (including Disney or other characters, superheroes, movies, television shows, video games, etc. whenever possible). Additionally, we ask

that you please label all of your child's personal items.

To help parents/guardians determine appropriate boundaries for school dress, the following items of apparel are not allowed:

- Clothing with vulgar, indecent, obscene or insulting messaging;
- Any dress, skirt, blouse, shirt, or trousers of any length or fabric that is suggestive, overly, tight, or revealing.

The teacher or administration reserves the right to address the student if he/she believes that the clothing is inappropriate. Parents/guardians will be contacted and asked to insure that their child/children do not wear such clothing to school again. In the event the clothing is determined to be age inappropriate, the parent/guardian will be contacted and asked to bring in replacement items.

Indoor Slippers or Shoes

Students are requested to bring in a pair of shoes or slippers with soles, which will be worn only in the classrooms. The simpler the design the better (i.e. no flashing lights, Disney or superhero characters, etc.). These slippers will be left at school and used daily. Student cubby areas and shoe trays outside the classrooms will provide a place for outside shoes and boots to be stored.

COMMUNICATION BETWEEN HOME & SCHOOL

Effective communication supports the Montessori triangle of child, school, and parent/guardian. *Mill Falls* has put several structures in place to ensure robust, ongoing communication.

Weekly Newsletter & Montessori Compass

Each week, *Mill Falls* families are emailed a newsletter written by the administration. The newsletter contains information about upcoming events, school information, photographs of our students engaged in school work and programming, parent/guardian education articles and calendar information for the month along with other relevant flyers, forms, etc. Families who do not have Internet access may request hard copies by calling the school at 603.232.5176.

Mill Falls also makes use of Montessori Compass, a private, online application that provides families with current news from classroom teachers about lessons, student progress, basic messaging and upcoming events. Again, arrangements will be made for those without Internet access with regard to Compass communications.

Mill Falls Charter School Website: www.MillFalls.org

The *Mill Falls* website, www.MillFalls.org, has additional information related to the school, including resource information about our mission and goals, the Montessori method, NH charter schools, our original charter contract with the state, School Board information, and application information, among other topics.

Student Progress Conferences & Reports

Student progress conferences provide an avenue for parents/guardian and teachers to track and evaluate the progress of their child(ren). The aim of the fall conference is to discuss the child's current performance and share ideas and plans to support the student over the upcoming school year. The spring conference offers a review of the year. Student progress reports are shared with

parents/guardians in the period preceding the scheduled student progress conferences.

Observations

Mill Falls opens its classrooms for scheduled observations after the month of October. Spending time observing in a Montessori classroom provides parents/guardians with an excellent and unparalleled opportunity to see what life is like inside a Montessori school and classroom. Designated time slots will be set aside for parents/guardians to observe in 20-25 minute periods. Observation forms and guidelines are to be reviewed beforehand, and are available from the school administration. (Please see *Appendix B* for additional information about classroom observations.)

Communicating with Staff

Mill Falls staff members are available through email (both regular and Montessori Compass) and by phone. Parents/guardians should arrange to speak with teachers outside of instructional time (at hours other than 8:30am-3:00pm). Should issues or concerns arise regarding your child's classroom, please first address these issues with the child's lead teacher. More complex concerns will be addressed by the administration and teaching team.

Questions, issues or concerns involving school operations should be directed to the school administration.

Parent/Guardian Education

Each year, *Mill Falls* provides parent/guardian education opportunities on topics pertaining to Montessori education and/or child development. Suggestions for topics/events from parents/guardians are welcome and should be sent to the administration. The weekly newsletter also contains helpful information about the Montessori approach as well as suggestions for home integration.

Social Media Guidelines

Mill Falls is committed to the use of technology and the Internet for educational purposes, operational services and school-related communication. Along with the advantages of using technology also comes the need to educate the students and adults in our school community about responsible and safe use of computers and the Internet.

We have created a common code of conduct for online communications, included here as *Appendix C*. While the rules applicable to staff, students and parents/guardians vary in some particulars, the *Common Code of Online Conduct* in the use of social media should be observed by all members of our community.

HEALTH RELATED POLICIES

Procedures for Injury, Illness & Infectious Diseases

As a charter school, *Mill Falls* is not required to have a nurse on staff, nor is there one in the building. However, our staff has been trained in CPR and first aid response. Procedure dictates that any event that creates serious injury or concern requires a call to emergency services (911/ambulance) for immediate support; less serious issues usually result in a call to the student's parent(s)/guardian(s).

Our main concern when a child becomes ill is his/her comfort, well-being, and readiness of the individual child to learn, as well as the health of the other children and members of *Mill Falls* staff. The following guidelines should be observed by parents/guardians:

Please DO NOT send your child to school if he/she has:

- Fever of 100.3 or greater
(Temperature should be normal for at least 24 hours before returning to school.
Often temperatures are lower in the morning but rise in the afternoon.)
- Vomiting within the past 24 hours
- Diarrhea within the past 8 hours
- Rash not previously diagnosed by your child's doctor and determined not to be contagious
- Severe cold or cough
- Conjunctivitis with drainage from the eye
(child may return after 24 hrs. of antibiotic treatment)
- Impetigo (may return after 24 hrs. of antibiotics)
- Strep throat (may return after 24 hrs. of antibiotics)
- Any acute illness that does not allow them to fully participate in school activities

If these symptoms persist or are severe you should check with your child's health care provider.

It is essential that sick children receive proper care and that the rest of the school population is protected from contagious diseases. When a child becomes ill at school, the parent/guardian or his/her designee is responsible for taking the child home as soon as possible. As stated earlier, in order to dismiss your child to someone other than a parent/guardian, the authorized person must provide photo identification.

If you have questions regarding the advisability of sending your child to school please ask your health care provider. If your child is unable to attend school please call the school office at 603.232.5176 by 8:30 a.m. If the school is not contacted, you will be called inquiring about your child's absence by 10 a.m.

Administration of Medications at School

If your child is on medication and the dose schedule cannot be worked around school hours, the following procedures must be followed:

1. The school office must receive the medication in its original container (this applies to both prescription and non-prescription items).
2. You must contact the school office to sign the permission form and to deliver the medication. Please do not send medication to school with your child.
3. A written statement from the prescribing physician, stating name of the medication, dosage, and time to be given.
4. Non-prescription medication must be in the original container with the student's name and date clearly marked on the container. Please note this includes cough drops.
5. Parents/guardians of children with asthma, allergies or any other special medical needs, must submit their doctor's Emergency Treatment Plan for that child, which is to be kept on file at the school and reviewed and/or updated, minimally, each school year.

Only a member of the school administration may assist in administration of medication. Children are not permitted to have medicine in the classroom or on their person. Parents/guardians must deliver

the medication to the school office where it is kept in a secured place. By state mandate, non-prescribed oral medication, such as aspirin or ibuprofen, will not be made available by the school.

SUPPORT SERVICES

Special Needs

In accordance with current department of education standards, the funding and educational decision-making process for children with disabilities attending a chartered public school shall be the responsibility of the resident district and shall retain all current options available to the parent and to the school district.

~ From RSA 194-B:11

When a new special needs student is admitted to *Mill Falls* with an existing IEP (Individualized Educational Program), a team meeting will be held as soon as possible with members from the *Mill Falls* staff, the sending representative(s) from the district and the child's parent(s)/guardian(s) as well as the existing special education team from the resident district. Following that initial meeting, the child's *Mill Falls* classroom teacher and parents/guardians will meet to determine how best to attend to the child's needs in the new school setting. The convened special education team created in partnership with the sending district and the family, will review the current IEP to determine how the agreed upon goals and services may be best delivered in the Montessori inclusion setting. The team may suggest amendments, further testing or other suggestions based on the findings. The special education team will reconvene as often as necessary to monitor the student's progress.

Additionally, *Mill Falls* will work with parents/guardians who wish to refer their children to the resident district for evaluation and/or services. In certain circumstances, *Mill Falls* teachers and/or administration may recommend that a child not currently on an IEP be evaluated for services.

504 Plans

The "504" in "504 Plan" refers to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act, which specifies that no one with a disability can be excluded from participating in federally funded programs or activities, including elementary, secondary or postsecondary schooling. "Disability" in this context refers to a "physical or mental impairment, which substantially limits one or more major life activities." This can include physical impairments; illnesses or injuries; communicable diseases; chronic conditions like asthma, allergies and diabetes; and learning problems. A 504 Plan spells out the modifications and accommodations that will be needed for these students to have an opportunity perform at the same level as their peers. A 504 Plan will be developed with the cooperation of the neighborhood school district, as needed, to create specific reasonable accommodations to assist the student in the classroom.

Student Support Coordinator

The Student Support Coordinator position is designed to manage all aspects of special education case management at *Mill Falls*, assist in Response to Intervention (RTI) and 504 support, coordinate and monitor services delivered by the service providers from sending districts and support IEPs as necessary.

Reading Interventionist

The Reading Interventionist works with any struggling readers and writers in a sequential, systematic

way, providing her students with a mapping of the predictability of the English language and the consistency of using appropriate tools for reading success. The Interventionist's program gives these lower level readers the tools to achieve the independence they need to participate in their classroom projects, free from dependence on high-level teacher or peer support.

ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages)

Mill Falls welcomes children from a variety of backgrounds and cultures and appreciates our rich and diverse school community. At the time of enrollment, each family is given a brief Home Language Survey as required by the state. After review, students who may need additional support are given a basic English language assessment in school (as per state requirement) to further determine if ELL (English Language Learner) services are needed.

With parent/guardian approval, these services are provided by the school, using local resources and professionals to deliver them. *Mill Falls'* ELL Coordinator supports those students who are new to the English language – English Language Learners (ELL), with a specific service related to vocabulary development, content growth and cultural exposure. This is done through reading books, conversation and hands-on experience with typical American tasks.

OPERATIONAL POLICIES

Cell Phone Policy

Mill Falls discourages students from bringing cell phones to school. However, the school recognizes that for some families this is a necessity. *Mill Falls* is not responsible for phones that go missing due to theft or lost. The following applies during school hours:

- The school prohibits students the use of all telecommunication devices, including cellular phones and pagers/beepers, at all school and school-sponsored or school-related activities on or off school property.
- Students shall be allowed to possess such devices; however, such devices must not be visible and must remain turned off during the instructional school day. In the event of an emergency, students may use the office phone.
- If a student chooses not to follow the conditions outlined above, his/her phone will be confiscated. In order for a phone to be returned to a student, a parent or legal guardian must speak in person with the teacher or administrator who confiscated the phone.

Personal Property

Students are not to bring electronic devices or other personal property such as toys, dolls, etc. to school, unless, of course, they relate to a student's special needs.

There will be no use of personal electronic devices at any time without previous permission while on school property. This includes, but is not limited to e-readers, digital players, other music listening devices, gaming devices, pagers, etc. Additionally, students are not to use trading cards and collectable card games such as sports cards and other trading/gaming cards at any time while on school property.

Violation of these guidelines will result in confiscation of the items. We are not responsible if the items are broken, lost or stolen.

Computer Use

The Internet is compatible with the Montessori philosophy as a teaching resource because it allows students to become familiar with the global nature of information. Nonetheless, access to computers and the Internet is a privilege. *Mill Falls* expects that all of its students will use the computer resources responsibly, respecting the rights of other computer users and keeping in mind that the school's computers are there to support the educational goals of the School. (Please also see *Appendix C, Common Code of Online Conduct*.) In addition, students in all grades and their parents are expected to review and agree to a technology usage agreement, which is sent out at the start of the school year. Violation of that agreement could result in a loss of school technology privileges.

Photography & Videotaping

Photography and/or videotaping may be done regularly in the classrooms to document school programming, as well as for the promotion of the school including but not limited to print and web usage. This includes photographs and/or video images taken by school teachers/leaders as well as outside sources. As part of the contact and permissions form provided to parents/guardians at the time of enrollment, *Mill Falls* asks parents/guardians to agree to allow their child to be videotaped/photographed. If you do not want your child photographed and/or videotaped, please inform the school by contacting the office at: Office@MillFalls.org.

Lost & Found

Parents/guardians are requested to put their child's name on each article of outside clothing, backpacks, lunch boxes, and water bottles. Lost & Found articles are placed at the reception area and parents/guardians are welcome to examine the area for lost articles. Smaller items such as jewelry, keys, money, and glasses are kept in the school office. Several times during the school year (typically following the conferences and/or immediately before winter and summer vacations), all remaining, un-claimed items will be donated to the NH Food Bank or to New Horizons or other local non profits.

BEHAVIORAL EXPECTATIONS

To let the child do as he likes when he has not yet developed any powers of control is to betray the idea of freedom.

~Dr. Maria Montessori

Through extensive preparation of the classroom environment and the Grace and Courtesy curriculum, Dr. Montessori achieved an extraordinarily positive and peaceful environment in her classrooms. At *Mill Falls*, our approach is to follow the Montessori approach to behavioral expectations, leading children towards self-discipline. We try to avoid spending unnecessary time responding and reacting to behavior problems. Instead, we proactively teach and model expected behavior. Discipline is more a learning experience and less a punitive experience.

As such, it is important that each child clearly understands the rules and possible consequences for those times he or she may violate the rules. The following behavior-related procedures will be adopted when expected behavior is not maintained in the school community.

Process for Dealing with Disruptive Behavior

Teachers will work with children to address all issues of misbehavior so that no further steps have to

be taken. However, if no progress is being made, teachers will then follow the steps listed below to address these issues:

Step 1: When an incident occurs, the teacher explains or reviews the expectations and logical consequences with the student and describes why these expectations exist.

Step 2: If the incident occurs again, the teacher:

- a) verbally communicates with the child's parent(s)/guardian(s);
- b) applies appropriate logical consequences;
- c) documents incident and parent/guardian communication;
- d) informs the administration of behavior through written communication.

Step 3: If a third incident occurs:

- a) the student meets with the teacher and the administration;
- b) the administrator sends a written report home and/or calls parents/guardians;
- c) at the discretion of the administrator, a meeting with parents/guardians is scheduled to discuss behavior/incident as well as develop a behavior plan.

Grounds for Suspension

If the student continues to display disruptive behavior, at the discretion of the Executive Director and the Educational Program Director, and with consultation with staff, the student may receive additional, escalated and appropriate consequences, including temporary removal from school (suspension). If the above actions are implemented, parents/guardians will be notified by the administration who will determine the type and duration of the consequence. Any student may be suspended from school by the school administration for gross misconduct, or for neglect or refusal to conform to the reasonable rules of the school. He/she shall not attend school until reinstated by the Executive Director and the Educational Program Director. Physical violence and weapons possession are grounds for immediate suspension.

For incidents involving unwanted, threatening or hurtful behavior as well as physical contact, at the discretion of the Executive Director and Educational Program Director, more immediate steps may be taken including suspension from school. Examples of unwanted, threatening or hurtful include, but are not limited to:

- Dangerous and harmful physical contact
- Physical intimidation
- Fighting
- Using an implement in any way that makes other student(s) or staff feel threatened.
- Serious acts of insubordination

Bullying & Intimidation

NH Law HB 1523 deems bullying a crime. Therefore, the *Mill Falls Charter School Board of Trustees* adopted a bullying policy (see *Appendix D*), which clarifies the definition of bullying and identifies steps toward corrective action because *Mill Falls* will not tolerate any unlawful or disruptive behavior that interferes with student learning and orderly school operations. This includes any form of bullying, cyber-bullying or retaliation. The Executive Director and Educational Program Director are responsible for implementing this policy.

Grounds for Immediate Suspension or Expulsion

For incidents involving an illegal act, the student will immediately be suspended from school pending a more thorough investigation. If necessary, the administration shall take steps to protect the reputation and rights of students under the law while fully cooperating with the police. Illegal acts

include:

- Theft
- Intentional setting off of the fire alarm
- Vandalism
- Use of cigarettes, drugs or alcohol
- Using or possessing a weapon
- Assault
- Arson

Appeals/Grievance Procedures

Mill Falls places tremendous value on grace, courtesy, respect and responsibility. As such, we encourage parents/guardians and staff to develop open lines of communication with each other for the benefit of the children attending the school. We acknowledge, however, that from time to time, situations may arise that are upsetting. If a parent/guardian, student, staff member or other individuals or groups are not satisfied with a school decision, policy or act; or believes that *Mill Falls* has violated or is violating any provision of New Hampshire General Law, they should follow the process outlined below in the *Grievance & Appeal Policy* (see *Appendix E*).

Mill Falls encourages all concerns and complaints to be resolved with the person(s) closest to the source as possible. When teacher conferences and communication to administration are not able to resolve an issue, a parent or guardian may initiate the grievance procedure to appeal any final decision of school personnel.

If a parent or guardian disagrees with established rules of conduct, policies or practices, he or she may express his or her concerns by following the problem resolution procedure mapped out in the *Grievance & Appeal Policy* (see *Appendix E*). No person will be penalized formally or informally, for voicing a complaint with the school in a reasonable, courteous, respectful, manner or for using the problem resolution procedure.

SCHOOL SAFETY & EMERGENCIES

Safety of children is a top priority at *Mill Falls*. The following procedures have been put in place to ensure staff and student safety:

Locked Doors

Entrance doors to *Mill Falls* are locked at all times. Anyone wishing to enter the school must ring the doorbell at the front entrance and wait for a staff person to open the doors. Once inside, the person must sign in clearly stating the reason for their visit to the school. Visitors are not to proceed beyond the lobby without permission by school personnel.

Criminal History Record Checks

All staff, volunteers, and parents/guardians with direct involvement in student life, including transportation or chaperone responsibilities, are required by law to have a criminal records check. The results of the background check are received by the school administration and remain confidential, and are used to determine suitability of volunteers with respect to their position with children. If you are interested in volunteering, please contact the school office for the background check application materials.

Fire Drills

At the beginning of the year, classroom teachers review fire drill procedures with students. An exit plan is posted in each classroom. *Mill Falls* works with the local station of the Manchester Fire Department to hold fire drills throughout the year and is required to follow the instructions and modifications of the local station, including the number of drills each year.

Emergency Response

Mill Falls has developed an emergency response plan to deal with situations that might require evacuation and/or lock down of the building (e.g., chemical leaks, terrorist attacks or other emergency events) and other sorts of responses. Preparedness drills are held during the school year with staff and students. The plan is reviewed annually and the school administration works with local law enforcement and safety officials to do so.

Fire, Weapons, Illegal Substances & Tobacco

Possession or use of fire, weapons of any kind, illegal substances, or tobacco products within the school building, school facilities, or on school grounds or school buses by any individual – including school personnel, students, and parents/guardians – is prohibited at all times. Such possession on school grounds will result in actions in accordance with the NH RSA 193, sections B and D.

Child Abuse & Neglect

To comply with the Child Protection Act (RSA 169C, 1979), it is the policy of the school that any teacher or other school employee or volunteer who suspects that a child's physical or mental welfare may be adversely affected by abuse or neglect must report such abuse. There are two ways to go about reporting. We prefer that you seek the assistance of our Educational Program Director who will then call the Division of Children and Youth Services and/or the student's local police department. If you prefer to report on your own, we do request that you notify the Educational Program Director of your action, which will of course be kept confidential. Under RSA 169C, school personnel, who in good faith make a report of suspected child abuse or neglect, have immunity from any liabilities, civil or criminal. The good faith of the reporter is presumed.

Harassment & Discrimination

Mill Falls is committed to protecting the rights and dignity of all members of the *Mill Falls* community including both children and adults. *Mill Falls* prohibits acts of harassment, discrimination, intimidation or bullying. Any actions that disrupt the safe learning environment of *Mill Falls* will not be tolerated. Such incidents will be treated on a case-by-case basis led by the administration and if need be, the Board of Trustees.

FERPA

Mill Falls abides by the Family Educational Rights & Privacy Act (FERPA), which protects the privacy of students' education records.

* * *

If education is always to be conceived along the same antiquated lines of a mere transmission of knowledge, there is little to be hoped from it in the bettering of man's future. For what is the use of transmitting knowledge if the individual's total development lags behind?

~ Dr. Maria Montessori



APPENDIX A:
Policy and Related Procedures for
Transporting Mill Falls Charter School Students
in Personal Vehicles

Purpose: To clarify the policy and procedure involved in transporting *Mill Falls Charter School* students to activities held away from the school site.

Policy

Mill Falls Charter School (Mill Falls) may need to engage in activities where children are transported for school activities. The School's insurance policy includes *Hired and Non-owned Auto Liability* coverage.

In most cases, the school will contract with the Manchester School District to transport *Mill Falls* students. The District buses provide both the vehicle and driver. In the event of an accident involving a hired bus contracted from the Manchester School District to transport *Mill Falls* students, the District's insurance is primary; the *Mill Falls' Hired Auto Liability* coverage will respond for the school if named in a lawsuit arising from the "hired" vehicle.

In the event that a parent/guardian, teacher, or employee of *Mill Falls* acts as a driver and uses their personal auto for a school activity, the driver's policy is primary and the school's *Non-owned Auto Liability* would respond for the school, if named in a lawsuit arising from the "drivers" vehicle.

Policy-Related Procedures

All students being transported to an off-site activity, whether by hired bus or personal vehicle, will be required to present a parent/guardian signed permission form before entering the bus/vehicle. Those without signed permission forms will not be permitted to be transported to the activity site by anyone other than the child's parent/guardian.

Prior to any driver transporting *Mill Falls* children for school activities, the following must take place:

- Anyone transporting *Mill Falls* children must have a clean background check to ensure there is nothing in their past that could endanger children. Failure to generate a clean background check will make the driver ineligible to transport *Mill Falls* students.
- The driver must provide verification of his/her personal auto insurance. (While it is recognized that personal auto insurance is not mandatory in New Hampshire, *Mill Falls* requires that anyone transporting children must provide proof of insurance.)
- The driver's personal auto insurance must include liability limits of at least \$100,000/\$300,000 designated for bodily injury.
- The Office Assistant will need to review the driver's paper work and initial it, before the driver is allowed to transport *Mill Falls* students.
- A copy of the insurance policy will be made and kept on file at the School.

*Policy Approved by Mill Falls Board of Trustees on January 13, 2014.
Amended Policy Approved by the MFCS Board of Trustees on August 18, 2014.*



APPENDIX B:

Parent/Guardian Guide to Classroom Observation

Inspired by Little Things Montessori

Welcome to *Mill Falls* for your classroom visit!

The parent/guardian observation is an opportunity for you to get a glimpse of what life is like in our Montessori classrooms. This may be your first exposure to the Montessori experience, your first time at our school, or you may be here to find out more about your child's day.

YOUR TIME AND YOUR ROLE IN THE CLASSROOM

In order to give you as clear a picture as possible, we ask that you observe the following procedure, and offer some tips below to help make your visit as meaningful as possible.

When you enter the classroom, you will find an adult-sized chair. This chair is for observation. Please be seated.

When you sit down, children may come up to you. Please try not to engage them in conversation. A polite "Hello" and a direct response as to who you are, is fine. Then quietly ask the child/children to return to work. The children understand that observers come to watch them working and they will understand your response in that context.

Please do not move around the classroom.

Don't be surprised if your child doesn't respond to having you there in the way that you might expect. Children sometimes respond differently to having their parents in the classroom than they do in the normal course of the school day or at home. The skill of the teacher will allow her to guide your child. Depending on the circumstances it may be suitable for you and your child to spend the observation time watching the class together if s/he is not able to separate. However, we do encourage parents to wait until their child is settled well into our classroom before observations take place so that the child is not confused about this observation process.

The teacher will not be able to take time from their classroom duties to converse with you during or immediately after your observation. If questions occur to you while you are watching, please write them down on the paper provided. We will be glad to answer these questions by telephone or in person at a later date. Please call or to set a mutually agreeable time.

If you are undertaking an observation with another person please refrain from chatting together during this time. Observing a Montessori classroom is a quiet, contemplative experience that you will be able to talk together about when you have left the environment.

Observations are usually undertaken for a half hour. However, you may be able to make arrangements to stay longer prior to your visit. When you have finished your observation, please exit the classroom quietly and leave your question sheet on your chair if you wish discuss any areas of the classroom environment or the activities you observed your own child undertaking.

THINGS TO CONSIDER DURING YOUR VISIT

Upon first entering the Montessori environment, many parents are amazed by the diverse activities they see going on. The suggestions below are intended to be focus points for your attention.

Visual Perspective: There is more to the Montessori classroom than the activities of one particular child. Naturally, the first tendency of parents is to focus and follow their own child's activities. First time observers may be attracted to one child or a group of the oldest or youngest children. Try to view both the entire classroom and a focus on a particular child.

Auditory Perspective: Listen to the noise level as it rises and falls. Try to see which groups or individual children are generating the sound. You will hear the normal hum of children working together; the quiet of concentration and, at times, there may be a special peak of excitement — of discovery! See if you can differentiate.

Learning: Notice that children learn in different ways. With some types of materials you will see groups of children working cooperatively, and with others you will find an individual child working alone, intensely. Still other children are walking through the classroom seemingly not engaged in any direct activity. Very often, this last type of child is engaged in actively absorbing information through observation of the children and the materials in the classroom. It will help if you alternate your focus on these three learning patterns. Note the ease and joy with which the children work. You will see the intense self-gratification that the learning process affords each child.

Child-child Interaction: Listen to the way in which children talk to each other. Listen for the level of respect as well as for the normal pushes and pulls of childhood. Very often observers new to Montessori are surprised that a child will zealously guard his/her work and tell another classmate that they are disturbing this work, and that, as a result of this verbal communication, the other child will leave. New observers may also find it interesting to observe the ways in which children help one another.

Teacher-child interaction: Watch the way teachers interact with children and compare it with the traditional classroom mode by which you were probably educated. Notice the way in which a teacher corrects a child, and look at the instances in which she does not. Listen to the teacher's tone of voice with the child. The teacher is a facilitator of the child's autonomous learning process. She guides rather than insists. She prepares the environment, gives the child the tools to utilize the materials and then does whatever else is necessary to help the child interact with the environment without assistance. Sometimes this involves direct encouragement, at other times indirect appreciation, and even judicious absence. There is a basic respect for each individual child's particular style of learning in the Montessori classroom. See if you can pick this up.

Sociability: Watch the ways in which the children offer assistance to one another - with the materials and with everyday tasks - and the ways that they are directly sociable with one another.

The Montessori classroom contains a wide range of both ages of children and of materials that are appropriate to the different developmental levels. Note how the children go to the materials that are appropriate to their developmental level. Note also how the younger children absorb the older children's work simply by being near them, and how, conversely, the older children may assist the younger ones with work that they have already mastered. There are always pockets of social activity occurring in any Montessori classroom, as the child's natural desire to form relationships and be part of an ongoing community is ever present.

Independence: Observe the independence of the children as they do for themselves in the classroom environment. Watch how even the youngest child takes responsibility for his/her

personal environment. Watch, however precariously, a jug of water, or a tray with fragile materials on it is carried. Watch as a child chooses a piece of work, takes it from the shelf, completes the work, and returns it to its place so that the next child can use it.

Autonomy: The generation of autonomy is a function of the prepared environment of the Montessori classroom. What this means is that the child will have available all needed materials, in good working order, to complete a task that has usually been self chosen. The structure of Montessori provides the child with as much time as s/he needs to complete the task to his/her satisfaction, and success is the primary reward. As you look around the classroom notice the materials, how attractive they are in placement, color, cleanliness, quality, etc. The child is attracted to learn by this environment.

We understand that you will not be able to sort out and see all the dimensions of the classroom that are outlined above in the time you have with us. We hope that you are not disappointed, when you discover that all aspects of the classroom have either not been present during your observation or that you did not see it all. We know that learning how to "read" the Montessori classroom is difficult at first, but we know that with each successive observation your skills will become increasingly honed.

Thank you for joining us today! Parent/guardian partnership is a proven ingredient in successful student outcomes.



APPENDIX C: Common Code of Online Conduct

Mill Falls is committed to the use of technology and the Internet for educational purposes, operational services and school-related communication. Technology has allowed the enhancement of curricula and school-based communication in ways not even envisioned a few years ago. Along with the advantages of using technology also comes the need to educate the students and adults in our school community about responsible and safe use of computers and the Internet.

Purpose. The purpose of this document is to provide guidelines for using social media to the *Mill Falls* Charter School staff, students and parent/guardian community.¹

Definition. “Social media” refers to any form of online publication or presence that allows end users to engage in multi-directional conversations or interaction. Social media includes, but is not limited to: Facebook, MySpace, Ning, Twitter, Second Life, YouTube, blogs, wikis, social bookmarking, document sharing, online gaming, and email.

Common Code of Online Conduct. While the rules applicable to staff, students and parents/guardians vary in some particulars, a common code of conduct in the use of social media should be observed by all members of our community.

- **Be respectful.** Employees, parents/guardians and students are a diverse group of people with many different customs, viewpoints and beliefs. Broad generalizations (“all teachers ...”; “all students ...”) are almost never accurate. Nor is it respectful to criticize particular persons in group communications. If the time, manner or content of a communication is not something you would share with *many* others, before you send it, consider whether it is appropriate to share with *anyone*.
- **Be reflective.** Think before you communicate online. Do not skim statements and respond. Understand the thoughts of another before you comment on them. If you are upset or angry, give yourself time to calm down. Consider whether a negative communication you receive even requires a response. If it does, respond factually, not emotionally.
- **Use Appropriate Language.** *Mill Falls* is an inclusive and diverse public school setting and an Equal Employment Opportunity employer. Obscene, insulting, threatening, derogatory, inflammatory and bullying language is not appropriate and almost always detracts from your ideas. Communications that are racist, pornographic, threatening or bullying are not permitted in our school community. (Please see *Mill Falls Bullying Policy*, Appendix D, for further details on this issue.)
- **Be factual.** Add to the information available to others, not just the noise.
- **Discourage Rumors.** Do not rely upon and do not pass on unsubstantiated information or gossip. If information seems unlikely, it is most likely untrue and may be inflammatory. When in doubt, go directly to the source.

¹ Additional guidelines for staff are outlined in a separate staff policy related to this topic. Information about cyber-bullying may be found in the *Mill Falls Charter School Bullying Policy*.

- **Write well.** In a school environment, everyone should try to express himself or herself effectively. Re-read your posts or emails for form and content before sending. Check spelling, avoid slang and do not use excessive abbreviations. Use proper grammar, capitalization and punctuation. Send a polished communication, not a confused draft.
- **Be transparent.** Do not misrepresent who you are. Never assume the identity of another person. Do not attempt to hide or conceal online interactions with members of the school community.
- **Respect the Power of Public Media.** Social media may seem private, but it is both public and durable — many people are likely to see what you write or post, and it may last for a very, very long time. Always remember that posted information may seem private, but is highly public.
- **Respect Confidentiality.** Do not violate the privacy of others. Many personnel issues and many issues involving other families and students are confidential (and many are confidential by law). If you would not want information about your job or your child or family situation made public, do not convey such information using social media. Do not expect to see such information about others.
- **Be smart.** People share too much information electronically. Think about how information can be used and misused. People who reveal the names of their pets, parents/guardians, children or other details may give hackers the clues to passwords. Information about planned vacations can be used by burglars.
- **Own your mistakes.** If you make a mistake in your correspondence, correct it. If another calls you on a mistake, accept responsibility for the error. Apologize, if an apology is due.
- **Make proper attributions.** Follow copyright law and fair use protocols. When quoting or relying on another's work, make a proper citation to your source. When using a hyperlink, double check that it goes to the correct place and to appropriate content.
- **Do Not Spam.** Meaningless messages, mass messages and repetitive messages are not appropriate.
- **Do Not Hack.** Never access another person's identity or account, or restricted sources of information.
- **Communication Between Teachers/Administrators, Students and Parents/Guardians should utilize school-based media whenever possible.** Teachers/Administrators and students should not use non-school media to communicate. Students should not attempt to "friend" a teacher on any non-school social media site (such as Facebook) and Teachers/Administration is not to accept a "friend" request from a student and visa versa. Such requests should be reported to the school administration.
- **Remember to Use Existing Channels for Concerns.** If concerns with a student, parent/guardian, or teacher are not resolved through direct communication with that student, parent/guardian, or teacher, the administration is available to address such concerns. The administration welcomes prompt notice of concerns. If concerns with the administration are not resolved through communication with administrators, the *Mill Falls* School Board Chair may be contacted to hear such concerns.
- **Debate Issues Constructively.** Schools often face legitimate controversies. The School respects and solicits parent/guardian voices in addressing such issues. Effective arguments are usually civil, measured, well supported and take into account the legitimate reasons for opposing views. Communications that are abusive, disrespectful of others, and marked by hyperbole or factual carelessness are ineffective. Help foster positive communication across all parts of our school!

Consequences. Behavior that violates these guidelines will result in potentially serious consequences, ranging from warnings to an end of a relationship with *Mill Falls*. Violations will be handled on a case-by-case basis.



APPENDIX D:
Student Safety & Violence Prevention
Anti-Bullying Policy

A core value of the *Mill Falls Charter School* Board and Staff is to create a safe and secure school environment for our students. All members of the school community are expected to conduct themselves with respect for themselves, for others and for the environment, in keeping with the Montessori philosophy of Grace and Courtesy. However, bullying has the potential to occur when ever groups of children are together.

NH law HB 1523 deems bullying a crime. This policy will clarify the definition of bullying and identify steps toward corrective action because *Mill Falls Charter School* will not tolerate any unlawful or disruptive behavior that interferes with student learning and orderly school operations, including any form of bullying, cyber-bullying or retaliation.

The Executive Director and the Educational Program Director are responsible for implementing this policy, but may delegate specific responsibilities to others as they deem appropriate.

Prohibited Conduct

Students are prohibited from bullying and cyber-bullying actions or communications directed toward other students which:

- Occur on, or are delivered to, school property or a school-sponsored activity or event on or off school property; or
- Occur off school property or outside of a school-sponsored activity or event, if the conduct interferes with a student’s educational opportunities or substantially disrupts the orderly operations of the school or school-sponsored activity or event.
- Students are further prohibited from retaliating against or making false accusations against a target, witness or anyone else who in good faith provides information about an alleged act of bullying or cyber-bullying.

Protection of all Students

This policy shall apply to all students on school grounds and participating in school functions, regardless of their status under the law.

Definitions

For the purposes of this policy, the following definitions shall apply:

“Bullying” means a single significant incident or a pattern of incidents involving a written, verbal or electronic communication, or a physical act or gesture, or any combination thereof, directed at another which:

- a. Physically harms a student or damages the student’s property;
- b. Causes emotional distress to a student
- c. Interferes with a student’s educational opportunities;
- d. Creates a hostile educational environment; or
- e. Substantially disrupts the orderly operation of the school.

“Bullying” shall also include actions motivated by an imbalance of power based on a student’s actual or perceived personal characteristics, behaviors or beliefs, or motivated by the student’s association with another person and based on the other person’s characteristics, behaviors or beliefs if those actions cause one or more of the results in items (a) through (e) above.

Bullying or cyber-bullying of a student on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, race, color, ancestry, national origin, religion, age, marital status, familial status, pregnancy, physical or mental disability may constitute illegal discrimination under federal and/or state laws.

“Cyber-bullying” means conduct defined above that takes place through the use of electronic devices.

“Electronic devices” include but are not limited to telephones, cellular phones, computers, pagers, electronic mail, instant messaging, text messaging and websites.

“Emotional distress” means distress that materially impairs the student’s participation in academic or other school-sponsored activities. The term “emotional distress” does not include the unpleasantness or discomfort that accompanies a differing viewpoint.

“Aggressor” means a student who engages in bullying or cyber-bullying.

“School property” means all real property and all physical plant and equipment used for school purposes, including public or private school buses or vans.

“Target” means a student against whom bullying or cyber-bullying has been perpetrated.

Complaints regarding such conduct may be brought to the Executive Director and the Educational Program Director who may choose to engage the Board of Trustees if the situation requires further assistance.

Prevention and Training

Our mission includes the creation of school culture that encourages students, teachers and parents to disclose and discuss incidents of bullying behavior, both experienced and witnessed. We are committed to addressing these incidents and empowering students to be part of the solution.

As such, our staff professional development will include: training in developmentally/age appropriate strategies to prevent bullying; appropriate strategies for immediate and effective interventions to stop bullying incidents; the power differential that can take place between and among aggressor, target, and witnesses of bullying; research findings on bullying; and information on incidence and nature of cyber-bullying and internet safety issues. In addition, the teaching staff will be expected to integrate bullying awareness and prevention into the curriculum.

Students at *Mill Falls* will be taught the key dynamics of bullying and how to react appropriately and respectfully through modeling, teaching and recognizing pro-social and healthy behaviors. *Mill Fall* Students are encouraged to take the following actions to prevent bullying:

- Treat each other and all members of the *Mill Falls* community with respect.
- Report any observed bullying to a teacher or other adult.

Information on this bullying policy and larger issues related to bullying will be part of parent education as well. *Mill Falls* supports school-wide initiatives, which include relevant presenters, useful curricula and ongoing discussion.

All training and education programs shall be approved by the Executive Director and the Educational

Program Director, who are also responsible for scheduling the required training and education programs each year.

Reporting Bullying and Cyber-bullying

Mill Falls Charter School maintains an open reporting system. School staff and volunteers are required to report incidents of bullying or cyber-bullying to the Educational Program Director as soon as practicable. Students who are subjected to bullying or cyber-bullying, or who observe bullying/cyber-bullying by or against other students are strongly encouraged to report it to the Administration, teacher or other staff. Parents and other adults are also encouraged to report any concerns about possible bullying or cyber-bullying of students to the Educational Program Director.

Reports are to be made to the Educational Program Director and may be provided initially in oral or written form. Individuals may make anonymous reports, but no disciplinary action will be taken against an alleged aggressor based solely on an anonymous report. All reports must also be recorded on an Incident Report Form (see below).

Disciplinary Consequences and Intervention Programs

The *Mill Falls* Administration has the discretion to determine appropriate disciplinary consequences and/or interventions for violations of this policy based upon the relevant facts and circumstances in a particular case, including but not limited to the age and maturity of the students involved; the type and frequency of the behavior; a student's willingness to cooperate in the investigation and correct behavior; and the student's prior disciplinary record.

Disciplinary consequences may include, suspension or expulsion from school. In addition, students may be required to participate in education programs, mediation, counseling and/or other programs and/or activities to address and prevent recurrence of bullying and cyber-bullying behavior.

Forms for Reporting Incidents

The School will make available Incident Report Forms for reporting incidents of bullying or cyber-bullying and shall encourage the use of these forms. Incident Report Forms shall be available in the School's main office.

Report Handling and Investigation

The Executive Director shall notify the parents/guardians of the alleged target(s) and aggressor(s) that a bullying/cyber-bullying report has been made within 2 (two) school days of the report and in accordance with applicable privacy laws, unless it is seemed that a delay in notification would be in the interest of the alleged target(s) and aggressor(s).

An investigation of the bullying/cyber-bullying report will be initiated by the Executive Director and the Educational Program Director, as soon as possible, but not longer than 5 (five) school days. The Educational Program Director will investigate the report and speak with the target, the aggressor, the reporter and appropriate staff and family members, in order to determine the behavior, special needs, patterns of behavior and any past incidents.

The investigation will be documented through the use of the Incident Report Form, and there will be ongoing communication with the target and aggressor.

Privacy rights of all parties shall be maintained in accordance with applicable laws.

The Educational Program Director shall keep a written record of the investigation process.

The Executive Director and the Educational Program Director may take interim remedial measures to

reduce the risk of further bullying/cyber-bullying, retaliation and/or to provide assistance to the alleged target while the investigation is pending.

The Executive Director and the Educational Program Director will work together to take steps to assess the need to restore a sense of safety to the alleged target and/or to protect the alleged target from possible further incidents. Progress monitoring in the form of goal setting and follow up conversations will be maintained by the Educational Program Director in collaboration with the appropriate staff.

The Executive Director may consult with the Executive Committee, as appropriate, concerning the investigation and any remedial measures or assistance provided.

The investigation shall be completed within 10 (ten) school days of receipt of the report, if practicable.

If the Executive Director and the Educational Program Director substantiate the bullying/cyber-bullying report, they shall determine what remedial and/or disciplinary actions should be taken against the aggressor(s) and determine what further assistance should be provided the target(s), if any.

The Executive Director shall inform the target(s), the aggressor(s) and their parents/guardians in writing of the summary of the investigation results and any remedies and/or assistance provided by the school, including strategies for protecting students from retaliation. Such written communication shall be provided as soon as possible but no longer than 10 (ten) school days upon completion of investigation and shall be in compliance with applicable privacy laws.

Appeals

As per our grievance policy, if the student target(s) and/or aggressor(s) remain dissatisfied with the decision by the School administration, the student or parents/guardians may appeal.

Annual Report to New Hampshire Department of Education

As per the annual state reporting requirements, the Executive Director shall prepare and submit an annual report of substantiated bullying/cyber-bullying incidents on the form provided by the New Hampshire Department of Education. Such reports shall not contain personally identifiable information regarding students.

Immunity

Any employee of the School or contracted service provider company, regular school volunteer, student or parent/guardian shall be immune from civil liability for good faith conduct arising out of or pertaining to the reporting, investigation, findings, and the development or implementation of any recommended response under this policy.

Policy Dissemination

This policy shall be included in student and employee handbooks. It shall also be provided to employees of any company contracted to provide services directly to students. The policy may also be disseminated by other means as determined by Executive Director in coordination with the Educational Program Director.

*Originally Approved by the Mill Falls Charter School Board of Trustees on September 4, 2012.
Updated and approved by the Mill Falls Charter School Board of Trustees on August 18, 2014.*



APPENDIX E: Grievance & Appeal Policy

Mill Falls encourages all concerns and complaints to be resolved at the lowest level possible. When teacher conferences and communication to administration are not able to resolve an issue, a parent or guardian may initiate the grievance procedure to appeal any final decision of school personnel.

Step I – Executive Director Conference

A parent or guardian wishing to invoke the grievance procedure shall make a written request for a conference with the Executive Director to discuss the grievance and seek resolution. The request shall state in detail the basis for the grievance, name the specific policy, rule or law believed to have been violated, and specify the relief being sought.

The following additional guidelines shall be observed in Step I:

- No grievance will be heard unless it has been filed in writing within thirty (30) calendar days after the act or condition giving rise to the grievance and such filing must state with particularity the basis for the grievance, the policy regulation and/or procedure, rule or law believed to have been violated, and the remedy sought.
- The Executive Director shall grant a conference within five (5) school days following receipt of the request. The Executive Director will state in writing his/her position on the question to the parent or guardian within five (5) school days following the conference.
- Only the parent, guardian, or someone acting in loco parentis shall be permitted to join or represent a student in the conference with the Executive Director.

Step II – Appeal to the Board of Trustees:

If the grievance is not resolved at Step I, the parent/guardian may appeal the Executive Director's decision in writing to the Board of Trustees, via the Chair. The following additional guidelines shall be observed.

- The appeal must be made within five (5) days following receipt of the Executive Director's written response (Step I above).
- The Board or its designee shall review the grievance within five (5) school days following receipt of the appeal. If the Board or its designee determines that additional time is needed to develop the factual record, the grievance may be put on hold for fifteen (15) additional days (or longer if by mutual agreement) to allow time for investigation.
- A written response shall be made to the parent, guardian, and Executive Director's from the Board of Trustees or its designee within ten (10) days following the review.

If after following the Grievance Policy the outcome is not sufficient, the complaint may be submitted in writing to the Commissioner of Education.

*Approved by the Mill Falls Charter School Board of Trustees on September 4, 2012.
(Note: Head of School changed to Executive Director, as per Board Approval in August 2014)*



2016/17 MFCS Student & Family Handbook

Parent/Guardian Acknowledgement Signature Page

The MFCS Student & Family Handbook is now on line at:
<http://millfalls.org/family-handbook/>

Please review the handbook,
and then return this form to your child's teacher,
no later than FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 30, 2016.

Thank you for taking the time to review the *Mill Falls Charter School Student & Family Handbook*, which includes important information about our mission, goals, operations and policy. Included in the *Handbook* is information pertaining to attendance, field trips, school closings, school policies, computer use, code of conduct, bullying prevention and intervention, disclosure of student information, grievance procedures, dress code, etc.

Please sign below to acknowledge your awareness of and opportunity to review the *2016/17 Student & Family Handbook* and return it to your classroom teacher.

Thank you.
Mill Falls Administrative Team

By the signature below, I am acknowledging my opportunity to review the *2016/17 Mill Falls Charter School Student & Family Handbook*.

Student(s) attending *Mill Falls Charter School*:

Parent/Guardian Names & Signature(s):

Parent/Guardian Names: _____
(please print)

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____