



*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.*

## MFCS Meeting Minutes for December 16, 2020

Public Meeting held remotely as per emergency provisions during COVID-19 State of Emergency

### 1. Call to Order, Roll Call & Welcome Public (Connors)

**Present:** Connors, Marr, Levin, Bee, Wrubleski, Trombley, Johnson, Bashier, Talbot, Butterfield, DePasse, **Absent:** Corriveau.

### 2. Public Comment: No public members at this time

### 3. Meeting Business

a. **Approval of Minutes** from November 5, 2020 meetings.

**Motion:** Talbot motioned to approve the minutes; Bee seconded. **Vote:** Unanimous.

### 4. Foundation Update: Levin shared that the Foundation gave Mill Falls employees an Academic Excellence bonus in their payroll in recognition of their hard work this very challenging year. She added that the Foundation's Annual Appeal has been sent out, and while donations are down overall for many non-profits, she hopes that the Appeal will be profitable. She ended the update noting that the Foundation has added Maryclare Heffernan to their board.

### 5: Update on Misc. COVID-related Items (Levin & Wrubleski)

- **Computer Purchase Update:** Levin shared that the majority of our technology acquisition this year has been paid via federal funds – both title funds and COVID-related funding from the federal government being overseen by the state. After the CARES funding which provided the school with just over \$15,000, Mill Falls got \$33,600 as part of the statewide distribution of COVID funds rated at \$200 per student (Supplemental Funding for Public Schools #1). She also applied for additional funds (Supplemental Funding for Public Schools #2) and received just over \$20,000 of the \$29,000+ she had requested to reimburse for COVID-related expenses between March and Dec 30, 2020. She noted that all ordered and needed Chromebooks have been ordered and received and the students have what they need for 1:1 technology. She added that the sound/mic issue has largely been remediated with a software update designed to solve the problem between HP and Google.
- **Current COVID Levels:** Levin reviewed the alarming rise in COVID cases in Manchester and across the state. The numbers suggest that there should be many steps taken to further protect our community including closure of gyms, restricted dining, closure of bars, etc. Only some of the recommended additional actions are being taken by the state at this time. She and Wrubleski stand confident in their decision to have moved to the emergent All-School Remote Learning Model during this surge in cases, hospitalizations and high infection rate. She highlighted the fact that COVID spread in the community is beyond our control, and beyond the state's ability to contract trace at this point. She urged all members of our community to be incredibly careful, test, and quarantine when necessary. She does not expect a return to in person learning in January, given the predictions. She is working with and talking to the Manchester City Health Department and others for guidance on this.

- **Expanded Hybrid Learning Planning Continues**

Wrubleski and Levin reviewed the goals of creating an expanded hybrid learning model once it is safe enough to re-open for in person learning. That metric is not yet established locally or nationally. Levin is continuing to discuss this with the Manchester Health Department and other public health professionals. The goals of the Expanded Hybrid Learning model are: to provide in-person teaching and learning at all program/grade levels; to redesign teaching model in the time of COVID; to create successful and sustainable teaching and learning for staff and students.

Wrubleski went on to share some of the details of the current planning which the Board has been hearing about since last month. She shared that the model was arrived at after careful reflection of the two in-person models offered in the fall – 2 full days per week in person for our Kinder Students, and the 4 full days in person offered to our 1<sup>st</sup> year students.

Additionally, it takes into consideration the difficulty of having all other students only in remote learning.

After that review and in consultation with our Montessori Coach and other public Montessori schools across the country, she has arrived at the following:

Morning and afternoon cohorts – 4 days a week – K-6 Students Wed still Big works for kids and planning day for teachers. Students who select remote learning will be assigned to a remote-only teacher.

**This model allows for:** Use of Montessori materials so students can work from concrete to abstraction; multi-age classrooms; social and emotional support of our students; all in support of our public Montessori mission. In terms of safety, cohorts allow for: physical distancing; the schedule does not include extended unmasking (students will not have lunch or recess at school) meaning less potential exposure. Teachers are only responsible for the students that are in front of them; no longer have to try and do both in person and remote simultaneously; remote students are only working with their remote teacher(s).

**Work to Roll This Out?** Need a few weeks to create cohorts. Will need to hire (timing is challenging since we do not know when we can reopen to in-person learning yet. We will also need to hire additional paras once students are back in school in person.

**Challenges We Face:** Wrubleski added that we do face a lot of challenges. For example: What happens if we cannot hire anyone for remote? This schedule means that the school day will need to be creatively and highly planned/orchestrated. Transportation remains a real challenge for our families – MSD will only supply bussing for one way for each cohort, unless we pay for additional busing which is very expensive. Families will also face childcare challenges. But Wrubleski reminded the Board that this is a Kid First approach to solving the very difficult problems presented by COVID. That is the driving force. How can we help the kids in the best possible way?

**Steps to Roll Out:** There are a very complex and interwoven steps to implement: We must first determine the level of parent interest; determine staffing current vs possible hiring; and determine when it is actually safe to reopen to in-person learning. The timeline for rollout will include a presentation to families, a non-committal family survey, followed by a commitment to a learning model by each family, building of cohorts – then...a start ONLY once it is determined to be safe to do so.

Connors thanked Wrubelski and Levin for their focus on the children and careful planning. She asked if the remote teacher(s) would need to be Montessori trained. While Wrubleski would

love that, she also noted how hard it is to hire now, generally, and that we may not find Montessorians at this point, so we will need to have flexibility in that. Connors also asked about cleaning between AM and PM cohorts. Levin noted that we have a schedule for cleaning time and expectations, and that many items are now touchless (water fountain, paper towels dispensers, etc) and the school did recently purchase a sprayer to clean the bathrooms between cohorts. Wrubleski added that teachers and assistants will be in charge of their classrooms Admin will be in charge of common areas.

Connors also asked if there will be flexibility for families to move into the Hybrid Model if they originally choose remote, but then decide to switch. Wrubelski noted that in the fall if families chose remote, they chose it for the trimester. However, it may be easier to switch back with new plan. Have to see how it goes.

Johnson noted that some organizations are doing re-entry training in terms of best practices in the age of COVID so everything is synchronized. Levin shared that they will regroup with staff as they prepare for this in-person model but that she expects that the building will only remain open to students and staff; no volunteers, family etc...

DePasse closed out the discussion noting that we really have no way right now, of knowing when we will be able return to hybrid. Numbers are still going in the wrong direction and it also may be a huge tax on our organization to 'pull this off.' He used the body's circulatory system as a comparison, noting we need to be focusing on our core – identifying it and concentrating on it. Core is the kids, Heart is the staff. The staff has been grinding for months – are we looking at this realistically – can we take all this on and be successful? Levin noted that she hopes that everyone realizes, that the plan they have is kid-first, but definitely focuses on the staff as well. DePasse wants us as an organization to have the hard conversations about what's realistic and attainable. Feels like the current remote learning will probably be the plan for a while. Laura added that our teachers are keen to have the children back at school, with them, but realizes that it can only be done once it is safe to do so. Bee added that she is impressed with thoroughness and thoughtfulness of the planning and shared her thanks to Wrubleski and Levin for coming to the board with a review of the fall experience and solid ideas for the next Hybrid plan.

Connors reminded Levin and Wrubleski that she would like to know what the staff has said about this expanded hybrid plan, when next the Board discusses it. Levin and Wrubleski will speak with staff soon after the New Year about plan details.

**7. Next Meeting:** **Wednesday, January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2021.** (Connors, 2 min)

**8. Public Comment\*** (10 min)

Sandra, MFCS parent, said thank you for the meeting; she'd like to continue coming, maybe will have questions in the future, but none now.

**9. Adjournment –**

Motion to adjourn: DePasse motioned to adjourn at 7:15pm; Jeffrey seconded. Vote: Unanimous.



Educational Program Director  
Board Report  
December 16, 2020

**Creating a Sense of Normalcy:** For students and teachers, this year has been anything but normal. But even in these crazy times, there have been small glimmers of normalcy in the ways that we structure our time with students:

- All students login live with their teachers at least 4 times per day. These live lessons include meetings with their class, specials, academic instruction and small group meetings with their teachers to reinforce concepts.
- Lessons are still provided in recorded format to support those that need a lesson twice or if they missed a particular lesson.
- Social chat times: Times have been offered for students to just get together and chat, many times during lunchtime or in the afternoon during what might be a recess time.
- Zoom open check-in times offer a 1:1 or small group time to get extra help or for teachers to individually check in with students if there are concerns.
- Intervention and special education supports: All services and supports are fully up and running live. Students IEPs are being implemented as written but through live sessions with a teacher via zoom. Intervention is being offer in math, reading and writing as needed for all students.
- The learning platforms of Seesaw and Google Classroom have created a communication space that is independent and clear. Both platforms offer continual contact with teachers, if there any concerns or issues. Additionally, students can see work expectations on a daily basis as well as view individualized schedules so that they can just click and go.
- Curriculum has been geared to meet the needs of the students but also to ensure that we have a solid pace that hopefully will meet benchmarks by the end of the school year. Teachers have integrated cultural students into traditional math and language lessons when possible, encouraging the exciting aspect of learning!
- Moving into a full remote instructional model has allowed teachers to focus on one format of instruction versus two. As one teacher said, “ I’m able to breathe again knowing I’m not forgetting anyone “. This model switch was relatively seamless because we had all systems in place already.

**Parent Teacher Conferences:** The first conferences of the year were held via zoom just before Thanksgiving. Parents and teachers are afforded 20 minutes to look over the progress report that was sent out via ALMA one-week prior and to celebrate strengths or discuss ways to support each child individually. This conference is very well attended annually and essential to our mission of working with parents collaboratively as a team.

**Cultural Studies in December:** This year, the kindergarten has focused their cultural study around Jan Brett’s story- *The Gingerbread Man*. Students created their own gingerbread house at home, counted and practiced tally marks with gingerbread men and took ‘a trip’ to Germany to see the first gingerbread house. The lower elementary has focused on 4 different celebrations around the world- Christmas, Kwanzaa, Chanukah, Diwali. The historical significance of these celebrations was discussed, and small projects completed based on the traditions celebrated on Big Work

Wednesdays. The Upper Elementary has taken a more narrowed viewpoint of traditions and decided to look closely at student's family heritage by completing a family totem pole project. This activity ties in with our North American continent study as well offers a deeper study of their family history. On December 21st and 22nd, students will be offering a 5-minute presentation on their families including displaying items significant to their family heritage via zoom to their peers.



**Executive Director Report  
December 16, 2020  
Submitted by Meryl Levin**

### **Required Reporting**

We received our second installment of the **2020/21 Per Pupil Aid**. This is based on the reported enrollment (167 on the reporting date of Nov 1; though the 168<sup>th</sup> spot was filled the day after). The DOE has shifted reporting tools from paper to an on-line report incorporated into their single-user sign on website on which most other reporting is done. This Nov 1 report was the first done online.

The Fire Marshal completed his **Annual Fire Inspection**. His report has now been filed with the DOE, as per the annual requirement.

In addition to these reports, there are a number of smaller surveys and data that have been reported to the DOE, as required annually this time of year.

### **Board Related**

Board members should plan meeting times to set **Committee Goals & Planned Actions** for the year. These goals ought then be shared with the full Board in the coming months.

***Sharing this piece in case there are some resources among Trustees:*** As we struggle to find storage solutions, we are looking for **cabinets that can be hung on the wall**. Perhaps you have a lead to any sources of gently used/still in very good shape wall mount cabinets that can be repurposed for use here, please speak to me directly.

### **Facility**

Thrilled to report that our **touchless water bubbler/bottle filling station** has been installed after a long-back order period.

When we first went into Remote Learning in late November, staff members (without high COVID risk) were expected to **work from school** 2 days per week. We have reduced that expectation to one day, and will continue to revisit that as the COVID case count trends upwards. We have created a spreadsheet to make sure that the number of staff in the building at any one time does not exceed 10 persons.

We are now able to **forward calls made to the school to our admin team when working remotely**. This helps us stay connected with our families, vendors and anyone else needing our attention. There is also a sign on the door instructing anyone who does not get a response via the doorbell, to call the school for assistance during school hours, as there is not someone always in the building these days due to COVID.

Access to the building is still restricted to staff, approved service providers or emergency personnel. Anyone entering the school is required to conduct a wellness check (which we have set up electronically) – responding to the typical COVID-related questions of travel, exposure and symptoms and a recorded body temperature.

### **Enrollment**

Grace Eaton, our Project Manager, has done a great job keeping our **enrollment full**, usually managing to fill an open spot almost immediately upon a student's unenrollment. Thus far we are just seeing the usual small number of un-enrollment common by this time of year.

She and I are working now to complete the preparation for our **10<sup>th</sup> Enrollment Lottery(!)**. The Lottery Enrollment Period will begin on **January 4<sup>th</sup> and run through March 8<sup>th</sup>**. During that time, we will host 4 Virtual Information Sessions for those interested in applying to our Enrollment Lottery.

**Please help us spread the word about our upcoming 2021 Lottery** - encourage friends, neighbors and colleagues to consider applying to Mill Falls, and if they are interested ask them to send us an email at [admissions@millfalls.org](mailto:admissions@millfalls.org) so

we can add them to our Lottery Information List. You can also direct them to our website, millfalls.org - where the Lottery Enrollment details are housed. There, by week's end, they will be able to find dates of the Information Sessions as well as link to the application which will be live as of Jan 4 at 9am.

Our 2021 Lottery Day is scheduled for March 15th at 4:15pm. This will be held remotely, as we did in 2020. **If you have any suggestions of potential Lottery Officials** (we need one person, not connected to Mill Falls to participate), please let me know directly!

### MFCS ChildCare Program

Due to the COVID pandemic, this program is on hold until further notice.

### Financial

**Special Education:** The flow of payment of Special Education invoices for services has been timely from all districts we are working with.

**Title Funds:** We are now in a regular flow of expense reimbursement with our various title funding grants for Title I (support for our students needing intervention), Title II (staff professional development); Title III (support for our English Language Learners); Title IV a flexible area of funding for student and staff support.

**ESSER/CARES Funds & Supplemental Federal CARES Funding to Support Us During COVID:** To date, we been approved for (just over \$15,000 in ESSER/CARES funds. In addition, the state provided every public school/district with \$200 per student which provided us with another \$33,600. And earlier this month, our application for additional Supplemental Funds to cover costs beyond the \$200 per child was reviewed. We had asked for just over \$29,000. The state has funded all requests to this Supplemental Public School Response Fund Discretionary \$10 Million Reserve Fund (SPSRF#2) at about 68% of the requested amount, bringing the amount we have been awarded to just over \$20,000. Disbursements were processed last week and deposited into our checking account. Both Supplemental Funding amounts must be spent and operational (in use) by 12/30/2020. The majority of our allotment will be used to cover past costs. The CARES funds can be accessed until next September. All told, at the moment, we have had to shoulder about \$10,000 in COVID-related costs. However, we expect that this will go up further when we need to hire remote teachers for the return to hybrid, and as the year continues to unfold.

**1:1 Technology Purchases:** The majority of our technology costs have been covered by Federal Title Dollars and the COVID funds noted above. Additionally, I have raised \$7500 from 5 private sources to help offset our 1:1 Technology Purchase. This fall's purchases also include the replacement of our original 25 8-year-old Chromebooks which were failing during student at-home use.

As some of you know, the first set of Chromebooks we received – **an HP touch screen model** – have had a significant sound/mic issue. We have been working with the manufacturer to address this issue. The first step was to insist that they send headphones for each of the malfunctioning machines, which they did several weeks back, and which we immediately distributed to our families. That is the workaround that our tech person, Jen Zedler, identified. We are in ongoing contact with them regarding the next steps which may include a 'fix it' day here at school in January if current efforts to update software does not work. Stay tuned...

The Field Work for our **FY20 Audit** will be done remotely due to COVID. Our engagement letter is in place, and our auditor has the materials he needs to get going, but he and staff have not yet begun the audit work, as COVID has altered and complicated their usual fall schedule. We look forward to beginning the process soon. As part of our annual audit the same firm does the 990 for the MFCS Foundation. The firm requested that we file an extension for the Foundation's 990 and the appropriate extension paperwork with the state, both of which have been done.

### COVID-Related

I continue to attend weekly COVID-related meetings held by the state's Department of Human Services and led by Dr. Chan, our state's epidemiologist. I have also participated on a similar national call held by the CDC recently. Additionally, I continue to seek information and wisdom from the Manchester Health Department and other contacts in the medical and public health fields.

I share what I learn in that weekly state call with our Admin Team and also relevant portions in our weekly newsletter for our larger school community.

### MFCS Community Building & Volunteerism

While this is usually a very exciting time of year full of friend-raisers and even a few fundraisers, all school-sponsored in-person events are on hold until further notice, due to the COVID emergency.

We continue to engage a few families – parents and grandparents – for their help in assembling our first set of **Montessori Home Kits** which include paper versions of some Montessori materials and are being going home to our students for them to practice with as part of their follow up work.

Additionally, to help continue to forge our connections, I include photographs, academic work, and stories from our students and staff during this Remote Learning Period in our weekly newsletter. I hope you take time each week to view the newsletter as way of staying connected to our work.

We have launched a new parent education series called **Tea with Laura**. This provides a regularly scheduled opportunity for parents/guardians/caregivers to explore topics with Laura that are impacting their children. Thus far we have hosted two – the first about the prepared (learning) environment at school and in the home, and the second about student independence in their learning. Our attendance doubled between the first and second gatherings. It is our hope that the audience will continue to grow. Info about the Teas are in our newsletter, we would love to have you join us if you can!

### **Human Resources**

As you are aware the challenges of this year continue to have **significant impact on our staff**, no matter the role in our organization. We have taken many steps to address this, problem solving, and looking to support staff as we make our way through the year.

Just before Thanksgiving Break, we held our final of 5 sessions with **Ashleigh Mondoux**, the therapist we originally brought in during our Opening Days for a 3-hour workshop around COVID-related trauma. We established a standing set of meetings with Ashleigh every other Wednesday for staff to attend both to talk through challenges we are facing, to find community in that process, and to hear about some COVID coping strategies for ourselves and our students.

As we always do this time of year, we finalized the plan for our **staff health insurance for 2020**. We remain with Anthem, and will offer 2 options for 2021 that are very similar to those that we have had for almost a decade (the plan had been grandfathered -pre-ACA- but are no longer being offered). The cost to staff is slightly less than previous years. Qualifying staff members have made their plan selection, and that coverage will begin on Jan 1.

### **Foundation News:**

The Foundation recently voted to provide staff with another '**Recognition of Excellence**' in the form of a small additional payment to each staff member on this week's Friday paycheck. The amount totals \$11,200.

**Maryclare Heffernan** will be joining the Foundation Board as its newest member.

Last Friday I mailed the **Annual Appeal** to over 125 recipients. The Appeal was also mailed to each of you. **The Foundation Leadership asks that Board Members join them in prioritizing Mill Falls in their end-of-year giving and send their thanks in advance for your financial support!**

Preceding that payment to staff taking place later this week, the Foundation currently holds \$434,147 in its accounts.