



*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 Agenda for November 5th, 2020 @ 5:45pm**

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, Butterfield, Trombley, Bashier, Corriveau, Bee, Johnson, Talbot, Marr, Wrubleski, Levin

**Absent:** DePasse

### **2. Public Comment:** no public present

### **3. Meeting Business**

**Approval of Minutes** from September 23, 2020 meeting.

**Motion:** Bee motioned to approve; Butterfield seconded. **Vote:** Unanimous.

### **4. Finance Committee:** Update (Trombley/Levin, 10 min)

Levin presented the recommendation of the Finance Committee to add a stand-alone cyber insurance package to our current insurance coverage. This has recently been strongly recommended by our insurer given how much of our operations are happening online. Our current package provides \$50,000 in coverage, the new package would provide \$1million at a cost of about \$2300. We may choose to reassess next year when our plan comes up for renewal.

**Motion:** Trombley motioned for the Board to approve an additional expenditure of up to \$2,300 on cyber insurance. Butterfield seconded.

**Vote:** Unanimous.

Levin continued reporting, noting there is no budget-to actual for this meeting, due to the date of the meeting which is early in our monthly bank and credit card statement schedule. She shared that the school is tracking COVID-related costs in QuickBooks, and that cost thus far is close to \$75,000 since last year. Most of that is covered by Title Funds, Cares Act Funds, and the upcoming Supplemental Funds for Public Schools (Mill Falls will be getting \$33,600). She also reported that the PPP Loan Waiver paperwork has been submitted to the bank, but it may be quite some time until they issue their opinion of the loan which at most has a 1% interest rate.

Levin and Trombley finished their report, noting that the Finance Committee will be working to gather and present the school's financial big picture to the Facility Committee so that they can make plans related to facility and other potential investments.

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

- **Computer Purchase Update:** Levin shared that the back-ordered 49 Chromebooks were *finally* delivered on 11/4/20. Now all students will have school-loaned technology available to them. She noted that she had alerted the Chair and Treasurer earlier in the month that the Chromebooks were likely going to be a bit more expensive than the original bid (because of supply and demand). Chromebooks are VERY hard to come by right now given COVID and the fact that the schools across the country/world are in remote/hybrid. The acquired machines cost about \$37 more than original bid, but now we have them in house; this includes 3 extras just in case we have any malfunctions and in case our older machines break down. Chromebooks will be handed out to those students who do not have them on Monday.
- **Current COVID Levels:** Levin has been watching closely as the daily state and local case numbers rise significantly over the last few weeks. She has been in contact regularly with the Manchester Health Department during this time as well, which has worked closely with the Manchester School District to establish a metric for case load (as well as other considerations) when determining school safety during COVID. Like much of the world, Manchester is using the metric of 10 cases or more per day over an

average of 14-days to signify the need to return to remoter learning. This is becoming known as a 10% rule – 10 or more cases in 100,000 population. While Mill Falls has not yet had any cases in the building, Levin and Wrubleski feel strongly that they need to act proactively to protect our students, staff and school families from what is clearly a fast-rising caseload, showing no signs of abating.

Levin/ Wrubleski asked the Board for their support in making a move to an emergent All-School Remote Learning Period until further notice. They further noted that each illness and quarantine has an impact on our small staff. In their plan, Levin and Wrubleski noted that Monday will not be a school day for students, but that staff will take the day to further prepare for the pivot to All-School Remote Learning. Tuesday will be first day for the children of this Remote Learning Period. Levin added that Manchester, among many districts across the state are considering similar plans (MSD meets on Monday evening and this is on their agenda). During this period, staff will be expected to work at school a minimum of 2 days per week to allow for collaborative time, as long as it remains safe to do so. We will continue doing Remote Learning Packets weekly, sending home materials for at home learning. The Board voiced significant support for this proactive decision during this presentation.

- **Plans for Trimester 2:** Wrubleski shared the plan developed for an Expanded Hybrid Model once the COVID caseload is safe to do so. She noted that the initial plan was to be in All-School Remote for the start of Trimester 2 from Nov 16<sup>th</sup> – Jan 19<sup>th</sup>. However, she noted the emergent pivot to remote changes that a little, as we will already be in remote at the start of Trimester 2.

Wrubleski noted that we have learned a lot during this first trimester, and even with changes we've made to the current hybrid model, our staff is still completely burning out. We even began working with a counselor to support them/us through this time. She shared that staff have expressed that it will be both a relief going remote (especially as health concerns are intensifying due to COVID case increase), but that they also will miss having their students with them in person.

With all we have learned, Wrubleski has put together the following model for Expanded Hybrid once it is COVID-safe to do so. It is informed by the experiences of the national group of public Montessori schools in her Coaching Workshop, and her coach, Elizabeth Slade of Public Montessori in Action

- **Cohort Model:** Student Cohort A – 4 days a week in the morning and Student Cohort B – 4 days a week in the afternoon. Big Works Wednesday will be a remote day for all students, as has been our practice this year.
- **Model Benefits:** This model gives us the ability to still have pods AND have students in our Montessori setting working with hands on materials - approx. 10 kids per class. The schedule does not have students here for lunch and recess – two very difficult times to keep the kids safely distanced. We will have the students in school for about 3 hours a day for direct instruction and time with their teachers in person, then they go home and practice what they have learned. Wrubleski feels from an educational perspective this is the strongest model for our Montessori school.
- **Model Challenges:** However, she recognizes that this will be a challenging schedule for families, noting that for some, transportation may pose the biggest challenge. She reminded the Board that Manchester is only offering the hub model and there is no 'midday bus' back to the hubs. That would cost about \$117 per day, and not sure how many families would use the busing overall given the hub model.
- **Transportation:** The Board discussed that it is not legally possible for the school to lead on arranging carpools or other transportation solutions because of liability.
- **Bee asked if families will have the chance to choose morning or afternoon. Wrubleski will consider how to do that, however it presents as an "unsolvable puzzle" given the many scheduling challenges she faces when putting the cohorts together, as so many factors that go in to grouping the kids (support services, special education, Intervention, ELL, reading groups, etc.)**
- **Timing:** Wrubleski had hoped to begin this model after Martin Luther King Day on Jan 19<sup>th</sup>, however, the state's warnings about an expected very large uptick in case load and following the Board discussion about the start date, she and Levin will now rethink the start date.
- **Specials Classes:** will be remote

- **Students that are Learning Remotely once the Expanded Hybrid Program is offered:** Wrubleski noted that Classroom Teachers will only be responsible for the kids attending school in-person. This hybrid model therefore requires that there be additional hires, or, depending on the number of remote students, one of the three current teachers at the Lower or Upper Levels may only teach those remote students. She noted that the hiring part is hard to predict since the COVID levels may change people's desire to send their children in for in-person learning if/when it becomes safe enough to do so.
- **Building Access:** Staff will be expected to be in the building at least 2 days a week and are welcome to come all 5 days if they wish. Staff can still bring their children as needed, as they have been doing up to now. Building access may become stricter if COVID proves this to be too dangerous.
- **Levin noted just how much Wrubleski has put in to the planning of this expanded hybrid model** - figuring out everything from staffing to classroom schedules and more. Butterfield and several other Board members also thanked Wrubleski for her very detailed and thoughtful work on this.
- Corriveau expressed his concern that this will be very difficult for parents to have their kids in school for only 3 hours a day as opposed to going 2 full time days. He worries about the impact on the student population and on enrollment, noting that parents may unenroll their kids because they cannot do a few hours every day versus a few full days.
- Laura responded by noting that our Montessori model, specifically our multi-aged classroom makes us different from traditional schools. And that currently in the 1<sup>st</sup> trimester hybrid model, teachers are not able to give their full attention to their students, because they are responsible for those in the room, and those learning remotely. All the public Montessori schools she is in contact with through her group and her coach are either full open, remote, or split days 4 days a week. She noted that we are restricted because of facility space, busing etc, traditional hybrid models do not work for us; there is no easy or perfect solution for this moment.
- Talbot asked if there is any opportunity to run an afterschool program for kids to be there? Wrubleski replied that our facility is too small for that to take place during the learning time and that afterschool program would combine everyone and break down our intentional cohorting.
- Connors, a principal at a local NH traditional public elementary school herself, noted the importance of in-person teaching and its role in sustained student progress, and expressed support for the Expanded Hybrid Model once it is safe enough to roll it out. She notes that students need to have direct teaching and explore questions with their teachers directly, in order for most to make true educational progress. She added, it is very difficult to get students all they need, with the expected rigor, in these COVID times. Wrubleski added that she and our team can see the social/emotional and academic impact this is having on the kids. She also agreed with Corriveau that it will be hard for parents to be able to do half days.
- Getting back to the plan to move to an All-School Remote Period now, Marr noted that Manchester's Hillside Middle School tried to open, but it did not work for long because of being short staffed. She added, the reality is plan this will only be a possibility if/when the caseload numbers change again and are lower. She does not think it will be by Jan. 19<sup>th</sup>, and was one of several Trustees who strongly requested that Wrubleski and Levin wait on setting a date for the implementation of the Expanded Hybrid Model until the caseload numbers begin to move in the right direction. Connors agreed. The Board felt that it is too early to present the details of the Expanded Hybrid Plan at this time to families given the COVID levels. This will need to wait. Johnson noted that COVID demands that we keep it very fluid. 30/60/90 day plans to keep the parents in the know. Levin and Wrubleski agreed.
- Levin and Wrubleski agreed that they will adjust their target date for the Expanded Hybrid Model, and reminded the Board that there are a few weeks of planning required in order to get the plans from parents and the cohorts in place.
- Levin noted that the Expanded Hybrid Model has unavoidable challenges. Kids may not be with their teachers for the full three years – that is an enormous sacrifice for teachers and students. But, she noted, we can't have a school without teachers, the hybrid model we have now is killing them – the workload has created very negative feelings for them = an inability to work successfully or for the kids to learn successfully. The Expanded Hybrid Model may not be perfect,

but it sets up for much more positive possibility of success for all. The only other option is full remote.

- Wrubleski added most staff have responded positively to this plan which we have discussed with them earlier this week. They look forward to having the kids in their classrooms with them (once it is safe to do so), and appreciate that they will only have to be responsible for ones in-person or in remote – NOT both groups! Their concerns link to the challenge of ‘getting it all done’ in just 3 hours, student transportation, hiring remote teachers as needed.
- The Board did talk a bit about ways that families might work together once the Expanded Hybrid Model is offered - create pods/childcare at their houses, maybe carpooling, but Johnson, Talbot and the rest of the Board was clear that this must be organized by families, not by the school due to liability concerns

**Motion:** Johnson moved to accept the proactive decision to **move to emergent All-School Remote Learning Period, effective 11/10/20**, and to **accept and support the work being done on the Expanded Hybrid Model** by the administration and expects to continue to receive updates on the plan implementation. Talbot seconded.

**Vote: In favor:** Connors, Butterfield, Trombley, Bashier, Bee, Johnson, Talbot, Marr. **Opposed:** Corriveau who wished that it be noted that he fully trusts the administration, but wishes to err on the side of caution in regards to future planning.

**6. Next Meeting: Wednesday, December 16th.** (Connors)

**7. Adjournment at 7:38 pm:** Trombley motions to adjourn; Butterfield seconded. **Vote:** Unanimous.