



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 January 20, 2021

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, Levin, DePasse, Wrubleski, Bee, Marr, Bashir, Trombley, Butterfield.

Absent: Corriveau, Johnson, Talbot

Call to Order: Connors called the meeting to order at 5:49pm under Gov Exec #12; the Board met remotely - no members physically present. For Meeting access, public was instructed to contact office@millfalls.org. One member of the public contacted her for access before or during the meeting.

2. Announcements/Updates:

Connors: Reminded Committees to meet in order to plan goals and action items. She asked that the chairs of committees please schedule meetings and email them to her. Levin reminded Trustees that she is on many of the committees and asked that she be included in the meeting planning time.

3. Public Comment: no public comment.

4. Meeting Business

a. Approval of Minutes from December 16, 2020 meeting.

Motion: Butterfield moved to approve the December 16th meeting minutes; Connors seconded.

Vote: Unanimous

b. Agenda Review: Levin noted that there is a non-public portion on the agenda; Connors moved that to the end of the agenda so the public could remain on the Zoom call for all other parts of the meeting without having to re-join.

5. School Reporting

Educational Program Director (Wrubleski)

Wrubleski talked about the work that she and staff have been doing in relation to the **sequencing of curriculum** in this challenging year. They are also working creatively to **monitor and assess** while the children are in remote. This is quite different from the usual Montessori model that includes observation in the classroom on a daily/weekly basis. The last assessment was done at the start of the year, and the next is coming up over the next few weeks in reading, writing, and math. Normally these observations tie in with classroom observation and teacher progress notes. In these challenging times of learning during COVID, Wrubleski stressed that she and the staff are constantly reflecting on practice and improving instruction as they go. Teachers still looking for the best ways to incorporate observations and are adding in one-on-one or very small group time.

Butterfield asked how its working for kids and teachers now, Wrubleski shared that when the children first returned to school after December break, there were some challenges in terms of behavior and focus. The transition was tough for some but not all. K-1 kids starting to show more frustration with being in the same situation as 'last year' (2020). That age child usually just goes with the flow, but she reminded the Board that some of our kids have not been in the school for almost a year.

* The public comment section of our agenda is an opportunity for community members to comment on the work of the Board. School Board Trustees are interested in hearing views from individuals, but will be unable to respond to comments immediately in this forum. The comments/questions will, however, receive serious consideration, and may warrant discussion at a later date. Please limit your comments to 2 minutes to allow time for others to speak. For lengthier comments, please feel free to submit a letter to the board.

Connors said she will be curious to see if there was growth for kids while learning in remote. In response, Wrubleski noted that we will learn a lot with our internal assessments and noted that the State Assessments, which for our 5th years include science, will include science lab – but they have not been in school this year and have not done classroom lab work. The circumstances of learning have changed, Wrubleski said, but that is not reflected in the standards.

Executive Director (Levin, *please also see attached report*)

Levin highlighted the **2021 Lottery** and related Information Sessions and asked Trustees to help share the word and invite people with elementary-aged children to attend/learn more/enroll in the Lottery. She noted that she and Grace Eaton (MFCS Project Manager) speak at the sessions, which are held virtually.

She also touched on the **COVID-related Supplement Federal Funding**. The December relief package has some additional school funding, but NH does not yet know the exact amounts each school will get. She also speculated that the next round of COVID relief may also include additional funds. These will be used by us to continue to offset the unexpected COVID-related expenses we are incurring this year.

She noted that we have been making **Montessori Materials** and sending them home to students. She concluded highlighting the success of the **Foundation's Annual Appeal** which raised over \$14,000 and reminded Trustees if they had not yet contributed to the appeal, it is still open!

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

- **Current COVID Situational Awareness:** While the hospitalization rate is dropping in NH, case load and positivity rate is steady. First round of vaccines in place though they are still ONLY working in the group they call 1a. Teachers will not be part of Phase 1 (a or b); NH is sticking (currently) with its plan to have teachers in 2a which is said to be several months away according to the NH HHS. She noted that as the caretakers of sick children at school (there is no school nurse/it is not required of NH charter schools), she and Jen Avery (MFCS Office Manager) have received their first round of vaccines.
- **Future Expanded Hybrid Learning Plan Update:**
 - **Levin thanked** Marr for her help in crafting the non-binding Parent Survey sent out last week inquiring about interest in Hybrid vs. Remote and ability to participate in a ½ day model if that were to be what was made available. We have had about a 77% response rate thus far and we are still collecting data from those who have not yet responded. She noted that more people are interested in returning to hybrid than they were in September. She added it is unclear if that may change given what we are hearing about the arrival of the new and more infectious strains of COVID.
 - Laura continues her weekly meetings with Montessori Coaches around the country and with her Montessori Coach, Elizabeth Slade of Public Montessori in Action.
 - The Admin Team has been working with staff. Wrubleski first shared the ½ day plan with teachers back in October, but there was not a lot of engagement with the details at that time when they were still working in both hybrid and remote teaching/learning. She continued to work on it and shared a more complete draft after December Break. Staff is now more engaged and interested in being part of the process. Thus far we have had that Initial early January meeting with staff and 3 follow-up meetings. Wrubleski has worked on schedules for various models. This week we have taken a break from that meeting schedule to review past meeting notes and parent survey data.
 - When asked how staff is feeling about all this, it was noted that in an overall way, staff is weary and wary of more change. We have been problem solving for almost a year on the fly, and often without all the needed resources. Then, once we get the resources, we must learn how to implement and work with them. This has certainly taken a toll.
 - Any hybrid model we develop is dependent on our ability to hire remote teacher(s) and additional paraprofessionals – up to 5 more people in total! We have posted, reached out to people in the education world for assistance and ideas and connection. We do have the

opportunity for our remote teachers to consider people who do not live here – it can be a national search, given the remote learning.

- In terms of safety and health, Levin reminded the Board of the idea of pinning re-opening to in-person learning to when teachers are able to get the vaccination. But that seems unhelpful in the current timeline that NH has set forth (many months away).
- She also noted the new metrics that the District of Manchester has adopted which is a reflection of the state suggestions, moving away from much of what the District developed with the City Health Department.
- She concluded by noting that while we work on the hybrid model development, we are also trying to monitor how the kids are doing. This is very important to all the decisions that must be made. Laura and staff are working to monitor social and emotional aspects as well as academic progress.

Connors asked: Are we only looking at other states' guidelines for health safety, or also NH? And will that be a board vote? Levin noted that the School Re-Opening Plan originally was approved by the Board. It did not include a metric because at that time, those had not been widely understood or created in the state, or elsewhere. People are looking at different statistics to choose their metric plan. Cases per 100,000, infection rate, cases in schools, morbidity and hospitalization rates. Levin noted that despite the Board Approved Re-Opening Plan, Board discussion and support of whatever is decided remains very important.

Butterfield noted: We looked at all alternatives of various learning models and she is comfortable with previous discussions. However, she noted that whatever is decided must provide equitable access to the learning models, in as much as we can. Transportation may not be within our control and that is complicated (since Manchester/MTA controls that piece).

Levin responded: Transportation is a big component. That is why these surveys are important to help us understand how much flexibility our families have. Does not matter what plan we decide on, if our families cannot make it work. Thus far, the large majority seem to be ready to make Hybrid work.

DePasse added: Just being realistic, he does not see major improvements in the COVID picture this year. Large corporations, like his employer, are currently looking to continue in remote through next Winter possibly. He thinks/hopes a September opening will look a lot better than this spring may. Summer will be a game changer.

Levin added that being a smaller school makes us agile – the charter advantage – but also being so small has disadvantages. For example, we have run out of people we can re-orient/re-assign in terms of their role/job this year. We just have less people to draw from.

Connors returned to the concerns related to the virus variants which we are being told to expect in March. She wants our teachers to always feel safe, even in hybrid, so that we have some agreed upon level that is consistent with a clear point that moves us back to remote if required based on virus levels.

Wrubleski noted that this is exactly what we did in the fall and that staff has expressed feeling safe throughout this process. She then returned to hiring as being the key piece to our being able to move forward with hybrid. She noted how few applicants she has gotten ALL year long. When asked why? Levin noted that there are many reasons – reluctance to work in a school in the midst of the pandemic; it being mid-year and an unusual time to be hiring for a school position; the reduction of women in the workforce. Many pieces to the puzzle.

7. Next Meeting: Wednesday, February 17th, 2021 @ 5:45

8. Public Comment

MFCS Parent, Sandra Jin: Laura, is the para position also remote?

Wrubleski: hiring for hybrid model includes 1 remote para, others will be in person.

Sandra Jin: You had said staff was wary? Is that about half-day hybrid, or just going back in general?

Wrubleski: A combination - hybrid in general, the constant change we are faced with. So much to think about.

Following her questions, Ms. Jin left the Zoom meeting after thanking the Board, who also thanked her for taking the time to attend.

9: Closed portion of the Meeting

Motion: Butterfield motioned to go non-public session permitted by RSA 91-A: 3, IIa; DePasse seconded.

Vote: Unanimous.

Motion: Butterfield motioned to come out of non-public; DePasse seconded. **Vote:** Unanimous.

Action: While in close session, the Trustees discussed the contract of the Student Services Coordinator.

Motion: DePasse moved to make the Student Services Coordinator from a 2.5 day per week to a 3 day per week position retroactive to the start of the year in recognition of the increased workload linked to Special Education case management during the COVID pandemic in the 2020/21 School Year with a budgetary impact of this adjustment of \$6300.

Trombley seconded. **Vote:** Unanimous. the motion – motion was made due to increase days to work, and salary.

Following the vote, Levin noted that the additional cost may be able to be drawn from the COVID relief funds. Trombley added another option - the additional funds could be drawn from the rollover funds being from previous years Unemployment Expense budget line. Those funds are kept in our school's savings account. Levin and Trombley will review all options along with our bookkeeper. Levin will complete an amendment to the current contract and adjust the bi-weekly payroll amounts accordingly.

9. Adjournment @ 7:17pm

Motion: DePasse motioned to Adjourn; Connors seconded. **Vote:** Unanimous.



**Executive Director Report
December 20, 2021
Submitted by Meryl Levin**

Required Reporting

There have not been any reports due since our last meeting.

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

While in remote, staff members are expected to work from school at least one day, taking wellness checks before entering the building, observing all established COVID safety protocol, including quarantine requirements based on exposure, travel or positive COVID diagnosis. We have created a spreadsheet to limit the number of staff in the building at any one time; and we have an online wellness check that is required.

When the Office Manager is working remotely, she takes calls through a call-forwarding system.

Teaching staff is utilizing our Weekend Material Distribution Plan for sharing materials with their students.

As noted in earlier reports, access to the building is still restricted to staff, approved service providers or emergency personnel.

Enrollment

January 4th was the opening day of our 10th(!) Enrollment Lottery. Later that week, we held our first of four Virtual Lottery Information Sessions. As of this writing, we have received over 60 applications. In a usual year, we receive anywhere between 175-250+. It will be interesting to see how this strange year does, or doesn't, impact our lottery enrollment. Meanwhile, we have sent out and are receiving back the annual Intent to Continue Forms from our currently enrolled families.

We hope that you are able to help us spread the word about our Lottery Enrollment Period (Jan 4- March 8th). Please direct people to our website that has all the info about our Lottery and our program: www.millfalls.org/enroll. You can also share it in your social media outlets.

Please encourage friends, neighbors and colleagues with young children to consider applying to Mill Falls. The website also hosts the Lottery Enrollment Application.

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.

Additional Federal Funding to Support Us During COVID: I look forward to learning more from our state's Department of Education about the newest round of funding. They informed us that they are awaiting more information and will share what they know, as soon as they have information.

The Field Work for our **FY20 Audit** is being handled remotely due to COVID. Our auditor expects this will be done by the end of the month. A reminder that as part of our annual audit the same firm does the 990 for the MFCS Foundation.

We learned earlier this month that our PPP Loan has been forgiven in full. While there is a second round of PPP funding available, we do not feel we meet the requirements related to income loss (20% or more) of total expected income this time around, and we will not be applying for this second round.

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.

Our work on the Expanded Hybrid Learning Model has dominate most of our staff meeting time this month. We are working with staff in the development of sustainable models and structures. This week we sent out a no-biding parent survey (thank you Heather Marr for yours assist!). to get a sense of interest in returning to in-person learning and the possibility of the 4-day/ half day model. That data and the data being collected in our staff meetings will inform our next steps. We do not yet have clarity about health measures in terms of health/COVID safety. We will discuss this at our meeting.

MFCS Community Building & Volunteerism

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. Info about the Teas are in our newsletter, we'd love to have you join us if you can! Stay tuned for information about our next one (not yet scheduled).

Human Resources

Following the December Vacation, Lauren Kolbe rejoined our staff. Lauren has been on maternity leave this fall, as she welcomed her second child. She is now working part-time as our Upper Elementary Interventionist, a Title 1 funded position. Christine Bisson (also our Fitness Instructor, filled this role during the fall.

As Laura has shared, we have been short one Assistant Teacher this year – the Zion Classroom has been singly led in this remote work by Colleen Costa. Beginning next week, Eli Kacavas will move from his current position as Paraprofessional to the Zion Assistant Teacher. Eli is currently on leave from NYU due to COVID where he studies acting in the Tisch School of the Arts. Angelica Kashulines, who has been with us as a para for the last several years will pick up his paraprofessional work during this remote period.

We are reaching out to many sources in our search for remote teacher(s) as we plan for our eventual return to Hybrid/In-person Learning. We will also need additional paraprofessionals for in-person learning. If you have any leads or would like information to share with your social networks PLEASE contact me directly!

Foundation News:

The Foundation's Annual Appeal has raised just over \$14,000 dollars as of this writing through contributions from 32 donors. Thank you so much to all of those who have donated to support Mill Falls. If you have not made your year-end gift, contributions are still being accepted! **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!**

The Foundation currently holds \$435,482.60 in its accounts.

#