



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 Board Meeting Minutes for May 17, 2023

Held @ Mill Falls, 100 William Loeb Drive, Manchester, NH

1. Call to Order, Roll Call & Welcome Public

- a. **Call to Order:** DePasse called meeting to order at 6:11.
- b. **Roll Call:**
Present: DePasse, Dalton, Wrubleski, Trombley, Bee, Bashir, Hollingworth, Levin, Corriveau.
Absent: Butterfield, Marr. **On Leave:** Connors.
- c. No public present

2. Montessori Moment: Presentation by Shannon Matthews, Lead Lower Elementary Teacher in the Glacier Room.

3. Meeting Business

- a. **Approval of Minutes** from April 2023 meeting
Motion: Bee motioned to approve April 2023 minutes; Hollingworth seconded. **Vote:** Unanimous.

4. School Reporting

a. Educational Program Director (Wrubleski)

Since last meeting, Mill Falls held Kinder Interview Day. Incoming Kinders come in to visit school and meet with teaching staff. Last week, we held our final professional development day which included the final 2022/23 school visit with our Montessori Consultant, Elizabeth Slade. She sent follow-up notes, and feedback from staff. It is always helpful to hear from staff about what is working and what is not. This will inform plans for next year and work with the consultant over the summer.

We have had some spring field trips, including: English Language Learners went to Currier Museum for a field trip today. Lower Elementary students went to the Boston Science Museum which was the first big trip in years. Both trips were successful!

Laura and her volunteer team are currently deep into the planning for Field Day, which is next Friday. We have plenty of volunteers. Animal Adventures is coming to do an animal show for the children before Field Day events begin. Activities will run from 10:00-12:00, followed by a picnic from 12:00-1:00. This year, families can order hotdogs and hamburgers served by Potato Concept food truck (a business owned by a Mill Falls Family).

Levin reminded the Board that June is very busy month for events at school. She shared a list of upcoming events (see ED Report) and encourages Board Members to attend as many as they can and would like.

b. Executive Director (Levin)

Staffing for next year: Contracts were delivered before April vacation and we are hiring – both lead and assistant teachers. Some longtime staff members are leaving at the end of the school year to explore other options or in some cases to slow down in their work life. In the big picture, this remains a trend in education. Specifically given how NH charter schools are funded, it is difficult for NH charter schools to retain teachers who want to advance in their careers. In terms of hiring, so far we hired one Lead Teacher. We met her at the SNHU job fair; she is finishing her master's degree and doing her Montessori training which is being paid for by the MFCS Foundation. We have seen a lot of Assistant Teacher applicants and Laura is working through them. We have had some internal movement with people taking on new roles, creating openings and we are looking to hire one Kinder and two Lower Elementary assistant teachers. It is challenging to find people in this environment, but all jobs are posted widely and also on our website.

Levin reminded trustees to reach out into their universe if they have people in education. So often we find great matches for staffing through word of mouth!

6th Grade Graduation is on June 7th (Wednesday) at the Derryfield School. We have 20 students graduating this year. A Mill Falls graduate is speaking at the ceremony. She is attending Yale next year and has two siblings at Mill Falls, one of whom is graduating this year. We are looking for a Board member to speak at graduation. Talk to Meryl if you are interested.

The Foundation has moved money from Treasury bonds into various other FDIC-insured deposits. The Treasury bonds yielded ~\$8,000 during the investment period.

7. Committee Reports

a: Mission & Charter Committee (Dalton & Committee Members)

Our **Night of Community is on Saturday, June 10th**. Please come!!! Parent volunteers are planning a lot of activities to make the event joyful and to help raise funds. We will have a live student art auction, silent auction items including adult art and themed baskets, and a cake raffle where one of the three beautiful cakes will have \$250 inside! Dalton noted that Trustees can contribute to the \$250 prize; there are also various sponsorship opportunities, and all Trustees are encouraged to buy tickets. Even if you can't make the event, we want to be sure staff members have tickets. So please engage! Meryl will let us know the number of staff tickets needed.

We have a new group of enthusiast and optimistic parent volunteers planning the event. Ticket sales have been slow and we recognize this is a rebuilding year (whereas past Night of Community events brought in \$10-12K, the group expects less to be raised this rebuilding year). This may well be a friend-raiser more than a fundraiser.

We are planning to bring back the **Fun Run/5K at SNHU**. We are waiting on the date, but it will be in the Fall 2023.

b: Finance Committee (Trombley & Committee Members)

Bee, who attended the Finance Committee this month, introduced ideas to connect committee and Levin w Boston Wealth Strategies to discuss employee retirement plan; with Bank of New England to discuss banking needs; and with Bank of America/ Merrill Lynch to discuss interest-bearing accounts for our cash. Bee will work with Levin to schedule meetings after the school year has ended to meet with the financial representatives from organizations noted above.

8. Program

a: FY24 Budget Discussion and Expected Vote (Levin)

Motion: Trombley motioned to go into closed session for discussion as per NH RSA 91-A:3, II a and d,. Hollingworth second. **Vote:** unanimous.

Motion: Trombley motioned to exit closed session; Bashier seconded. **Vote:** Unanimous.

The Board reviewed the draft budget as presented.

Motion: Bee motioned to approve FY24 Budget as presented with understanding that the State does not yet have a finalized their budget and there may be changes in charter school funded in the final state budget; and with awareness that the school is waiting to hear back about several grants currently in process; Dalton second.

Discussion: The Trustees understand that the State Legislature has not finalized the NH State Budget at this time and await word of potential changes to charter school funding. This will require a review of our finalized budget at the August meeting if the state budget is not approved by this Board's June meeting.

Vote: Unanimous.

b. Discussion of Safety Issue:

Motion: Trombley motioned to go into closed session for discussion as per NH RSA 91-A:3, II g.

Motion: Hollingworth motioned to leave closed session; Trombley seconded. **Vote:** unanimous.

Action: Board discussed follow-up steps needed related to safety policy violations.

Motion: Trombley made motion to write a letter to let persons related to safety violation notifying them that they are not welcome at Mill Falls or at school-related events; Bee seconded. **Vote:** unanimous.

9. Next Meeting: Scheduled for Tuesday, June 6, 2023 @ 6pm (DePasse)

10. Adjournment:

Motion: Hollingworth motioned to adjourn at 7:55pm; Trombley second. **Vote:** Unanimous

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Executive Director's Report

For the April 19, 2023
MFCS School Board Meeting
Submitted by Meryl Levin

Required Reporting

There have not been any significant reporting deadlines since our last meeting. A number of surveys and end-of-year reporting will come due as we move toward June.

Board Related

The **Mission & Charter Committee** and the **Finance Committee** met earlier this month and will be reporting out at our meeting.

An important reminder that on **April 20th**, the NH Alliance for Public Charter Schools - in partnership with the NH Dept of Education - is hosting the **Spring Charter School Leader Summit**. The event is designed to bring together NH Charter School Trustees as well as Administrators. It will be held from **5-7pm at the Puritan Backroom**. As a Board member of the Alliance, I have had a big hand in organizing the event which will feature Keynote Speaker, Ben Feit. Ben is an educational consultant and expert on school governance. There will be some time to network with other charter leaders (Board and Admin). Food and beverages will be provided. If you have not yet registered, please do so by clicking [here](#). I hope Mill Falls will have a great showing!

Facility

The team at school is loving the new key fob system (as mentioned previously, this was paid for by the federal safe school grant). We will be switching over completely to this system by the end of the school year.

Wellness Update

This message continues to be true: Illness (particularly flu, RSV, and strep and an array of misc. viruses) continues to impact our student and staff attendance. This is not unique to Mill Falls, of course, but certainly is being felt widely

Enrollment

Since last we met, we held our final **Lottery Information Tour** and the **Lottery** itself. June Trisciani was our Lottery Official this year. As you may recall, Lottery Day included a HUGE snowstorm. But that did not keep us from going forward with the planned event. Utilizing the skills developed during COVID lottery days, we each worked from our own homes connected via Zoom, and used a lottery app to generate random selections of lottery enrollees. All went off without a hitch.

Following our 2022 Lottery, we sent out **Intent to Enroll** forms to those Kinder families selected in the Lottery. With Project Manager Grace Eaton out on parental leave, we have been working with a short-term sub, Amanda Smart (who was most recently the short-term Lead Montessori sub during another parental leave) to help the Front Office manage this enrollment work. We had a few Kinders who won spots in the lottery, but their families decided not to enroll; those spots were then filled by students at the top of the Kinder wait list from Lottery Day. Additionally, we've been able to offer spots to some Lower Elementary Students from that grade's waitlist to fill spots we know we will have for next year (students not returning). That work will continue into the Upper Elementary soon. As always, some families who say they are coming back on the Intent to Return form, change their mind – so this enrollment work will run throughout the summer so we start the new school year fully enrolled.

We will hold our annual **Kinder Interview Day** on May 5th and will meet with students starting in other grades later in the month. Students currently in Kinder and 3rd grade as well as their parents/guardians will engage in 'Step Up' events in May as well.

Human Resources:

WE ARE HIRING! For the first time in a number of years, we will have some critical openings for next school year. Currently we are looking to hire both **Leads and Assistants**. It has been unusual for us to find previously trained Montessori Leads, so a reminder that we cover training costs. We are also still looking for **paraprofessionals and subs!**

Please take moment to share the link to our website page with the posting – as you may have heard in the news, hiring teachers is no small challenge these days, so we so appreciate your lending a hand! Here's the link to share:

<https://millfalls.org/about-us/employment-opportunities/>

If you know people who may be interested in working with us NEXT year, please direct them to hr@millfalls.org or to Laura and me directly. Thank you for helping to spread the word and direct people to our school!

Earlier this month, Laura and I attended the SNHU educational job fair. Laura has had a few interviews with some of those soon-to-be graduating candidates. Additionally, we have posted our job openings widely including on Linked In, School Spring, NHEDJobs, The NH Center for Nonprofits.

A reminder that each year we distribute contracts for the upcoming school year the Friday before April Vacation.

Financial

FY24 Budget Development is now underway. A draft will be shared at our April meeting. As this is a state budget year, we are waiting to learn more about an increase in charter school funding. HB2 (the NH House budget bill) moved to the senate last week and included a strong funding increase for our schools as part of an overall change to school funding. Now it must play out in the Senate before we know what any increase in funding we can expect to see for next year. The current budget draft I will share will utilize numbers put forth by the DOE (only shows a tiny increase) until the state budget is approved.

SAMS/DUNS: As required, we have completed the annual renewal in the Federal Registry which allows us to access federal funds.

Title Funds: We continue our regular flow of expense reimbursement in relation to 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. We are awaiting information about allotted funds for next school year.

Federal Charter Schools Program (CSP) Grant Update: As background, during the last administration, the state received an enormous grant of \$46million for charter expansion, replication and to open new charters. Previously, we discussed the plan for Mill Falls to apply for the most recent round of Federal CSP Grant funds. I completed our grant application in late March which details a programmatic expansion summarized in brief on our grant's cover form, this way:

The development of our Montessori Cultural Curricular Integration (MCCI) seeks to codify a robust cross-curricular integration of core subject areas resulting in hands-on projects that connect science, language, technology, design, math, and the arts within our Montessori teaching and learning model. This is the natural next phase for our public Montessori program, as we embark on our second decade of operation. The project

will establish a deliberate structure for staff to guide their students in experiencing the interconnectedness between the lessons they learn in school and how that links to the real world.

MCCI will work in support of our Montessori-forward mission to help our students reach their highest personal potential by developing transferable problem-solving skills - often through a collaborative learning model - which allows them to see larger context and applications for lessons large and small. By deliberately making space for social skill development, the MCCI will continue our practice of enabling our students to relax into their learning, and find joy in the process. The MCCI model will increase engagement and rigor and will provide opportunities for student leadership skill development. Ultimately, this will also provide additional opportunities for students to demonstrate their proficiency / mastery of subjects through creative means alongside the benchmark assessments.

Fund usage will include salaries for the project's Curriculum Coordinator and project team; acquisition of teaching and learning tools and resources and related furniture and, as necessary, training for use of those resources; professional development for the Coordinator and all staff in relation to the project goals; updating of marketing materials and outreach methods.

We are awaiting word on the DOE's decision to fund our project. The full request was for \$550,000.

Special Education: Special Education reimbursements from sending districts continue to arrive in a timely manner. We have sent Manchester the 2023/24 renewal of our standing special education service agreement.

MFCS Community Building & Volunteerism

Calendar Raffle: I am so pleased to share that our Fundraising Calendar Raffle was a HUGE success. We surpassed the goal set by the Raffle Committee and reached over \$12,500 in sales! Thanks to great prizes collected by the committee and a solid response from our school families (kiddos and adults) for making that happen. The kids were quite into it, and as you know the two top selling classrooms will get group prizes (pizza party and movie for first prize; extra recess for second prize). Additionally, each student who sold calendars were entered in a raffle and a prize given to a student at each of our program levels. The prizes were \$75 gift certificates to Scholastic so they could choose books they will enjoy.

Night of Community: Just after April Vacation, we will hold our first planning meeting for the **Night of Community** event. This end-of-year adult gathering will be held on the evening of **Saturday, June 10th at the Palace Theatre's Spotlight Room**. In the past, this event has generated funds similar in size to the Calendar Raffle through ticket sales, art auction, silent auction, and fund-a-need. All students of past committee members have graduated from Mill Falls, so we are starting with a new crew. If you enjoy event planning and would like to lend a hand, please contact me directly. I do hope that Trustees will be able to attend this event that aims to bring together ALL the adults in our community – staff, parents/guardians/grandparents, and trustees!

Laura will soon be meeting with interested parents/guardians to organize our beloved **Field Day on May 26th**. If you are interested in participating, please let her know! Additionally, in recognition of **Earth Day**, (weather permitting) staff and students will be doing a spring clean-up / trash collection on campus followed by individual classroom crafts. Again, if you are interested in joining us, please let me know!

Our weekly **Read-Ins** continue to be well attended by parents/guardians, grandparents and friends and are featured in our weekly newsletter. If any of you would like to swing by for a read in, please let us know!

Our **Grandparents & Special Friends Day** on March 23rd was also extremely well attended! We'd not held that gathering since the spring of 2019, so it was wonderful to warmly welcome guests back into our space. Light breakfast treats and tea/coffee greeted them as the group gathered, and then they spent the majority of their time in the classrooms with our students. Our guestlist included our former Board Chair,

Roland Martin, who was a guest of his nephew who is now enrolled at school. The Spring Bookfair was also going on and the intentional confluence helped to generate one of our most successful bookfairs yet!

The **final Montessori Morning Tour of 2023** took place on March 8, and once again included a great group of guests. Shout out to Sara Bee and Danielle Dalton for helping to build the tour which included people from SNHU and The Derryfield School. I continue to ask that Trustees connect me with people they feel we should bring in for Tours. Please connect me with those people via email, or call me to discuss folks you'd like to invite. Thank you!

MFCS Child Care Program:

There are currently 10 children enrolled in our Before Care Program which runs daily from 7-8:15am and is staffed by Mill Falls Staff members. We are also open for drop ins.

Foundation News: The Foundation currently holds \$546,079 in its accounts.

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