



*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 August 29, 2023 @ 6pm**

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

### **1. Call to Order, Roll Call & Welcome Public**

a. DePasse called meeting to order at 6:06pm.

b. Attendance:

**Present:** DePasse, Dalton, Trombley, Bee, Bashir, Hollingworth, Butterfield, Levin, Wrubleski, Corriveau. **On Leave:** Connors.

c. No public present.

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

### **3. Meeting Business**

#### **a. Approval of Minutes from June 2023 meeting**

**Motion:** Trombley motioned to approve April 2023 minutes, Butterfield second.

**Vote:** Unanimous (Marr abstained as she was not at the June meeting)

### **4. Admin Updates**

#### **a: Educational Program Director: Wrubleski**

It took most of the summer to hire for positions we had open due to departing staff. Some of our new leads have extensive Montessori experience; others are new to the practice. To support new staff, our returning staff members have stepped up to put together training materials, from classroom set up to planning lessons, and more. Our Upper Elementary Team sat together for several hours today during our Staff Opening Day Programming, going through the prepared training document. It's nice to see staff supporting new hires!

This year we will be rolling out of our new internal assessments. In the past, they were "old school" paper/pencil assessments. The new assessments will have 4 different components. We need to get trained on how to best use the data we will get from the internal benchmark assessments. This will allow us to have more robust conversations with all of our sending districts around dyslexia screening and other items.

#### **b: Executive Director: Levin (please see attached report)**

Levin discussed the following in addition to her written report: The state now requires that every charter and sending district with shared special education students sign a Memo of Understanding (MOU) that outlines the shared work in supporting special education students. This new MOU must be filed with the DOE by October 1<sup>st</sup>. Levin has reached out to the partner districts to get this process going. She also noted, that as of this date, the amendment to our annual Special Education contract with Manchester has still not been signed and returned despite multiple emails throughout the spring and summer. They let us know in May they plan to sign it; and later explained that staffing changes have held it up.

We are still looking to hire one paraprofessional. The other para needs are being handled by the districts who have hired a company called White Birch to provide para support to students who have para services in their IEPs.

The Annual Popsicle Party is tomorrow night at 5:30pm – the board is invited to join us for this great community gathering! Parents and families will be there.

Our Family Fun Run & 5K Road Race is returning this year! Please mark your calendars for Sept 24<sup>th</sup>. Please see full ED report for more details and opportunities to volunteer and sponsor.

Our first payroll of this school year included the staff retention bonuses (from Foundation). Staff was VERY appreciative!

## 5. Committee Updates

### Finance – update on banking options (Bee, Levin)

Bee shared that she and Levin are working with Natalie Jutras at Bank of New England and will be moving the School's checking account there from Bank of New Hampshire. The Checking and Sweep accounts have been set up, and we will move money in coming weeks. We are looking for a new credit card as our current credit card is through BNH. Bee is researching business credit cards and will work with Levin to apply.

Bee and Levin also met with Ian MacDermott of Merrill Lynch to discuss interest-bearing accounts for our cash. Unfortunately, Merrill does not allow advisors to open accounts for organizations who receive public funding. MacDermott is able to assist with accounts for the Foundation, and will work with that Board to ensure the Foundation's money is in accounts earning strong interest.

Bee has continued to investigate financial firms who can work with our public charter school to take advantage of high interest rates. She is currently in conversation with Rise Private Wealth Management in Bedford and will be in touch as we learn more.

### Mission & Charter – (Dalton)

Please come to the Fun Run/5K! In past years, the fees for the race, combined with sponsorship helped to power this fall school fundraiser which is also a great health-forward community event. A parent is helping to get prizes, bananas and drink donations, and SNHU is providing the location and food. We have sent initial communication about this to our families, and will talk about it again at the Popsicle Party. Meryl will send sponsorship package to Board. Please share with your contacts.

## 6. Program

### A: Review & Vote of Revised FY24 Budget

Levin reminded the Board that in late June, the legislature approved an increase in charter school funding to bring it up to \$9000 per student, per year. They altered some of the funding formula, which historically matched public school students in the state. Differential Aid has also changed, so we may see some changes reflected this year and certainly in FY25.

Levin led the Board through the draft budget, noting:

- The revised budget includes salaries related to our current staff (some changes made since May when the Board last reviewed the budget to better reflect actual expected costs)
- Levin has reviewed the full budget over the summer to look for areas to tighten and realistically represent need as reflected in our FY23 year.
- We are hoping to recognize more interest income, the budget is conservative in this area based on what we have been getting.

- Title Funds are included in the budget at the levels known currently (sometimes the allotted amounts increase in the fall for Title I due to rollover).
- We still have about \$17,000 of unspent ESSER (COVID) III funds and about \$80,000 that we are waiting to be reimbursed for.
- Approx \$5,000 will be coming from the Foundation to cover costs related to outdoor space improvements (these funds were raised at the Night of Community in June) and funds for the staff retention bonus was provided by the Foundation as well.

The Board then discussed the following:

- Trombley points out that this is exciting to see our budgeted deficit at such a manageable level..
- Levin reminded the Board that the budget will be posted on the website for families to see, and the state also requires that we file the state budget template by Sept 1.
- The group discussed how to represent approx. \$80,000 that will be reimbursed from ESSER III Funds that are for expenses the school had in previous fiscal years. Levin plans to write note at the bottom of the budget on website to explain that we will receive reimbursement. The group agrees that this should not be included in the FY24 Budget but is it important to note.

#### **Approval of Revised and Final FY24 Budget**

**Motion:** Trombley motioned to approve Revised FY24 Budget; Butterfield seconded. **Vote:** Dalton, Trombley, Bee, Bashir, Hollingworth, Butterfield, Corriveau approved; DePasse opposed.

#### **B: Facilities Update**

Levin shared that our building is showing its age and we have had a few water-related challenges in the last couple of weeks following a very wet and humid summer. She shared that we are working with Burke ER, a remediation company, to address the humidity and the roof leaks. The air and surfaces were also tested by a third party environmental company to be sure that our school environment was safe, and we passed with flying colors. She noted that Burke ER has given us a significant discount. Butterfield has been communicating with Landlord via email; Levin and the Admin Team have been working with Tom (facilities manager), who has been very helpful throughout these issues. Work is continuing with Burke. It is expected some of these issues will pause in winter and resume in spring (due to rain and humidity).

**Motion to move into closed session:** Butterfield motioned to move to closed session 91All subparagraph L and subparagraph A, DePasse seconded. **Vote:** Unanimous

**C: Executive Director's Renewal:** The Board discussed the Executive Director's performance.

**Actions taken during closed session:** Butterfield made a motion to contract with Bernstein Shur as legal counsel to help with facilities challenges; Hollingworth seconded. **Vote:** unanimous.

1: Motion: Trombley motioned to leave closed session 91All subparagraph L and subparagraph A, Butterfield second. **Vote:** Unanimous

2: **Motion:** Dalton moved to approve extending Meryl's contract for the 2023/24 year; Trombley seconded. **Vote:** Unanimous.

#### **7. Next Meeting:** Wednesday, September 20, 2023 @ 6pm

DePasse reminded the Board that the September Meeting will include Annual Meeting Planning (officer slate and committee assignments, including facility committee population this year)

#### **8. Adjournment:**

**Time:** 8:03pm. **Motion:** Hollingworth motioned to adjourn; Trombley seconded. **Vote:** Unanimous.



**Executive Director's Report  
For the August 29, 2023  
MFCS School Board Meeting  
Submitted by Meryl Levin**

### **Required Reporting**

The **End of Year (EOY) Report** was filed in June, immediately following the end of the school year. After that report was reviewed and processed by the DOE, the final FY23 Pupil Aid funds were deposited in our bank account over the summer.

The **2022/23 Annual Report** has been filed with the DOE as required. This report includes questions related to school programming, governance, and mission fidelity. We also report on student progress, provide an updated Accountability Plan, information on our enrollment process, information on how we support struggling students, and are asked to provide a 'best practice to share' along with several other pieces of information. Should you wish to see a copy, please let me know.

**DOE-25 for FY22:** We have requested and received approval for a filing extension of this extensive financial report. We do this annually because our payroll runs through the summer, with the final payroll each year toward the end of August. We expect to complete the DOE-25 well before the extension date of Sept 30.

There were also a small number of end-of-year reports and surveys, which have been filed, as per requirements, in the late spring and over summer.

The Field Work for our **FY22 Audit** is expected to begin in mid or late September, the final date for the start of the audit has not yet been set.

Our **2023/24 Emergency Response Plan** will be submitted to the DOE in partnership with the Homeland Security Office by the annual deadline - October 15<sup>th</sup>. The chair's signature, along with mine, Laura's and our Project Manager, Grace Eaton, as well as those of the Fire Marshall and the Police Chief are required. As noted in past years, most of the Response Plan is public, but there are some specifics to our response planning which will remain confidential and will only be sent to the Police and Fire Departments. The entire plan is available to any Board member to review and is sent annually to our Chair to sign off on.

### **Board Related**

A reminder of our plan to move to using Mill Falls email accounts for Board Work. Jen Blake, our Tech Support Person, can make herself available to you this fall to set you up. We will discuss this our August Board Meeting.

### **Facility**

Since we signed our lease renewal, we have worked hard to make the limited space continue to work for our growing needs and staff. At the end of the last school year, several offices and small workspaces were changed with a priority given to those who provide direct instruction to students. We no longer have a conference room – that now is occupied by two of our Special Educators. We have also created a much more centralized reading resource area (formerly in the conference room) and look forward to a slightly different flow in the open areas this year.

Beyond the usual carpet cleaning, school has gotten a bit of a facelift this summer with **Jen Avery**, our Office Manager, painting our walls throughout the space and **Melissa Fortin**, our Art Teacher, re-conceiving our storage room.

This summer we had our **water tested for lead** for the third and final required year to meet the state law around safe drinking water in schools. We are awaiting those results. Previous testing showed our water is safe.

**Our building is showing its age**, and this summer the building was very challenged by the high humidity and water table levels and aging of the concrete slab we are built on. We engaged with Burke ER to remove excess humidity in the air and have conducted air and surface safety tests to be sure we are healthy. We passed with flying colors. On Friday, August 25<sup>th</sup>, the roof drainage system had a failure and water pouring into our lobby, front office and first classroom. The roofers were called to identify and repair the leak, but as of this writing, no indoor work has been done to repair the damage above the ceiling. The Burke Team came back promptly yesterday to remediate the collected water. Stay tuned for more updates on this developing story.

### **MFCS Child Care Program**

Our **Before Care Program** will run again this year. It will be staffed by members of our staff and we are expected approximately 12 children.

### **Enrollment & Prep for the New School Year**

We completed the year with a clear picture of which students would be staying with us this coming year, and who would be moving to other school/educational environments. As August arrived, families on our 'watch list' made their final decisions, creating some new late summer openings. Grace Eaton, our Project Manager, has done a great job of filling those spots and we are set to begin the year with 168 students.

Our **Staff and Family Handbooks** have been updated as needed and have been posted on our website. Staff, Families, and those enrolled in Child Care are required to review these documents and return a signature page stating such.

### **Financial**

Over the summer, I worked with Sara Bee to explore new banking and financial relationships. We will provide an update at the meeting.

In June, the legislature approved an **increase in charter school funding** to bring it up to \$9000 per students, per year. IN doing so, they altered some of the funding formula which had traditionally matched all public school students in the state. We had agreed to review and approve a revised HY24 budget, and will do so at our August Board Meeting.

This year we will continue to spend our allotted ESSER III (Covid related) funds (and receive reimbursements for past expenses); we will also access our Title IIa funds for professional development (around \$9000 available to us) for Montessori Training and Staff culture/communications development. We also plan to access Title IV funds, which are available to all charter schools (\$10,000 each school year). Our Upper Elementary Interventionist is paid via Title I funds. Unfortunately, this year, the state has suspended the Title III consortium model, so we will not have access to Title III funds for our English Language Learners Program.

### **Special Education:**

**2022/23 Special Education** reimbursement payments were paid in full though by early July.

I have created new **2023/24 SpEd service contracts** for each of the non-Manchester sending districts so that we can be reimbursed for Special Education services our staff provides.

A reminder that the amendment to **our contract with Manchester** was completed last spring, as per the original agreement, but they have not yet returned the signed agreement, though in May they agreed to sign it. We have contacted them several times over the spring and summer and have been told that new staffing has held up the signing.

Additionally, the state now requires that every charter and sending district with shared special education students sign a **Memo of Understanding (MOU)** that outlines the shared work in supporting special education students. I have sent our draft of the agreement to our partner districts (beyond Manchester) and await their response. This new MOU is required to be filed with the DOE by October 1<sup>st</sup>.

As of this writing, we are **still looking to hire one paraprofessional** to serve two Manchester students in a single classroom. The other para needs are being handled by the districts who have hired a company called White Birch to find paras. Currently, in three of our classrooms, districts are sharing the para expense they pay to White Birch. We facilitate that partnership as it is based on student classroom placement. We have notified Manchester of the lack of candidates for the fourth classroom, and asked them to consider working with White Birch for this. Laura will be in touch with the impacted families to alert them of the shortage and expects to hear more from the district with regarding plans for coverage.

### **MFCs Community Building & Volunteerism**

The **2023 Night of Community** held in June at the Palace Theatre's Spotlight Room was a great success and generated about \$6,000 which is being spent to enhance our outdoor recess options. You will recall this process of outdoor improvement was led by Laura who worked directly with a committee of students to identify needs and brainstorm solutions.

As we continue to rebuild our volunteer program and parent/guardian engagement activities, we will utilize our electronic version of the 'Count Me In' form which will be shared again, on paper at our upcoming Popsicle Party. Note: this will be the first **Popsicle Party** (the event kicks off the school year) each Wednesday before the first day of school. **Please consider joining us on Wednesday, August 30<sup>st</sup> for our Annual Popsicle Party, which is held here at school from 5:30-6:30pm.** It is a great way for you to introduce yourselves to the parent and student community and give them the chance to thank you for your service!

A reminder that we hope to see all of you and your friends and family at our **Annual Fall Road Race & Family Fun Run on September 24<sup>th</sup>.** event includes sponsorship and donations and is one of our two large in-person, school-based fundraising events.

**Please contact me if you can volunteer or wish to sponsor (your family or company).**

**You can sign up for the 5K or the Family Fun Run here:**

<https://runsignup.com/millfalls>.

All proceeds go to supporting Mill Falls, our public Montessori School.

### **Human Resources**

As you are aware, we are welcoming 6 new staff members to our team – some are lead teachers and some are assistants. We are looking forward introducing them to our returning staff members during our **Annual Staff Opening Days** (Monday, August 28<sup>th</sup> – Thursday, August 31<sup>st</sup>). During the week, our Retirement and Aflac brokers will meet with staff; we will also provide First Aid/CPR training or recertification for staff who need recertification. Laura has planned 4 full days of collaboration and professional development with a staff outing on the final day to the Currier Museum and To Share Brewery – in a deliberate effort to engage with our local community as we build our school community.

Please take a moment to review our Faculty/Staff Page here:

<http://millfalls.org/education/administration-faculty/>

Once again: We are still looking to hire one more para – if you have any leads, please contact Laura directly.

### **Foundation News:**

The Foundation funded our Staff Retention Bonus which was totaled just over \$60,000. Those bonuses were sent out in our first 2023/24 payroll on 8/25/23. The Foundation hopes to meet in the early fall to focus on its work this coming School Year. **The Foundation currently has \$520,263 in its accounts.** ##