



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 September 20, 2023 @ 6pm**

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

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

- a. DePasse) called the meeting to order at 6:11 pm
- b. Attendance:  
**Present** DePasse, Dalton, Trombley, Marr, Bashir, Hollingworth, Butterfield, Levin, Wrubleski.  
**Absent:** Bee, Corriveau.
- c. No public present.

### **2. Announcements/Updates**

2022/23 Board Chair Greg DePasse announced he would be stepping off the Board effective at the end of this meeting due to increased outside commitments;

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

### **4. Meeting Business : Approval of Minutes** from August 2023 meeting

**Motion:** Hollingsworth motioned to accept the August 2023; Marr seconded.

**Vote:** Unanimous in favor.

### **5. School Reporting**

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

Wrubleski presented a change being implemented at the school this year with parent pick up at the end of the day. Instead of having children brought out to the parking lot, parents will now come in to collect their children on the sidewalk at the exterior front doors. Discussion followed regarding pros and cons of the new process and early feedback.

This annual Open House event had a light turn out. Discussion followed regarding the possible reasons for the lower than usual numbers and regarding increasing turn out for community events.

Manchester School District is not currently providing on-site occupational or speech therapy; those students with these services in their EIPs are not currently receiving services. Wrubleski has informed their parents/guardians of this situation. The speech therapist from Manchester who provided that service to our students for the last 7 or 8 years was re-assigned by the District's new Special Education director – Wrubleski was informed of this change just days before the first day of school.

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

Levin provided updates on problems with bus availability from Manchester this fall. She updated the Board with regard to the current situation which has no busing for our Manchester students, following the very abrupt end of busing service to Manchester-located charter schools. Levin shared that the offer from the District – to have the first students picked up at 6:25am (school day starts at 8:30) and the last group of students picked up from school at the end of the day at 5pm (school day ends at 5pm) was not healthy for the students, and also created intense scheduling challenges for the organization. She shared that the school asked for a meeting related to this schedule which was highly inappropriate for our young children and staff. The school has been in ongoing touch with impacted families, sharing what they know, as they know it from the District.

The Board was notified of a staff member's participation in a Goffstown School Board event on her own time and her comments related to supporting students who identify as transgender, or are exploring their identities and the need to respect individuals' pronouns and the posting by Ann Marie Banfield on

the Mill Falls public facing Face Book page's post about our Fun Run / 5K event. Banfield has attempted to circulate her response widely, which misrepresents the Mill Falls. Discussion of same and of the school's public Face Book page which was intended to be a means for the school to post stories, notices and information about the school to the community.

**Motion:** Butterfield motioned to turn off the comment function to visitors to the School's public FB page; Dalton seconded. **Vote:** unanimous in favor.

Levin reported on the NH DOE Charter School Conference in Concord and suggested Board training on Demonstrated Success by Karen Matso, Professional Development Director of Demonstrated Success (DS). DS is one of the approved vendors by the DOE who are now contracted to provide support of all kinds to charter schools – services which are being paid for by the federal Charter School Program Grant. Levin will follow up with the Governance Committee regarding discussion and planning.

Levin reminded the Board that the Mill Falls Best of Both Worlds Fun Run/Road Race will be held Saturday, September 23, 2023.

**C: Closed Session:** At 6:32pm, Butterfield motioned to go into non-public session pursuant to RSA 91-A:3 II (I) to discuss advice from legal counsel with regard to the status of the facility and the ongoing moisture issues. Trombley seconded.

**Vote:** Unanimous in agreement.

**Vote:** Marr motioned to exit closed session; Bashier seconded.

**Action:** No action was taken during closed meeting.

## 6. Program:

### a: Annual Meeting

**1: Trustee Term Renewal:** Marr & Bashier terms expiring. Bashier was nominated to serve another term; Marr unable to renew due to other commitments so this will be her final meeting as a Trustee. The Board then engaged in a discussion regarding recruiting new Board members with the departure of Marr and DePasse, and discussed the role past Trustees and potential new Trustees may play in serving on Committees. The group discussed that Committee service for past Trustees allows them to stay involved but with lesser commitment of time and for potential members it offers an opportunity to work with the current Board and get a sense of how things work.

### 2: Officer Slate discussed and proposed as:

**Chair:** Danielle Dalton    **Vice Chair:** Sara Bee

**Treasurer:** Jeff Trombley    **Secretary:** Naomi Butterfield

**Motion:** Hollingsworth motioned to accept slate; Bashier seconded. **Vote:** Unanimous in favor

### 3: Committee Assignments discussed and formed as:

**Finance:** Trombley (chair), Corriveau, Marr (past Trustee), Levin

**Mission & Charter:** Hollingsworth (chair), Bashier, Bee, Levin, with Wrubleski as needed

**Governance:** Dalton (chair), Butterfield, Bee, with Levin as needed

*With potential ad hoc committee for Facility, as needed.*

**b: Communications:** Discussion of need to exclusively use Mill Falls E-mail going forward. Levin shared that the school's IT person, Jen Blake, is available for support.

## 7. Next Meeting: Wednesday, October 18, 2023 @ 6pm

**8. Adjournment at 7:51pm** **Motion:** Trombley motioned to adjourn; Butterfield seconded. **Vote:** Unanimous in favor.



**Executive Director's Report  
For the September 20, 2023  
MFCS School Board Meeting  
Submitted by Meryl Levin**

**Emergent Bus Issue**

On Friday, September 1<sup>st</sup>, I received a call on my cell phone from the Manchester School District's Transit Coordinator informing me that Mill Falls did not yet have busing, but she was going to be working on it all weekend, to get rosters to us, so we could send that information out to our families. Over that weekend, she sent rosters, and busing began on the first day of school, Tuesday, September 5<sup>th</sup>. The rosters the District created, had students scheduled to arrive at school basically on time, but didn't have them being picked up until after 4pm (a full hour after dismissal). In reality, we were at school with children daily that first week until 4:40 or later. We hired a staff member to be with the bus children after school. In essence we were running an aftercare program which no one was paying for, but us. This also required one admin person to stay until the final bus arrived.

During the first week of school, the Districts' new transit company worked with us to clarify routes and such and assured us daily -and as late as Friday afternoon at pickup - that they were working on getting background clearance for more drivers which would help with the late pickup. Then, on Friday September 8<sup>th</sup> at about 6:50pm, we received an email from the Manchester School District's Transit Coordinator informing us that busing for Manchester resident students enrolled in charter schools was suspended because the new company said they couldn't service the charter routes. We contacted our bus families on Saturday morning, fielded calls from media over the weekend, and worked with other Manchester Charter Schools this past week to communicate with the District, writing a joint letter with 4 of the 5 charter schools in town. To be clear, the driver shortage is a District-wide issue; during this time of suspended busing for us, the District has prioritized their schools and alongside that, several of the faith-based schools which are private, have had continued busing.

Without busing in place, many Mill Falls families and staff members leaned in to help those families who are really dependent on the bus due to work schedules and/or lack of reliable access to vehicles.

After a week of no busing, on Friday afternoon, September 15<sup>th</sup>, I received a call from the Manchester School District's Transit Coordinator and an Assistant Superintendent informing me that they had worked out a new plan. They told me that since they do not have regular-sized buses available to transport Mill Falls Students, they have put together 3 vehicles to transport our current roster of 44 students - one small bus and two vans. Because of a lack of space on those vehicles, at least one of the vehicles would be doing multiple routes in the morning and afternoon, which creates a complex schedule that does not link easily to our school day. In their plan shared that afternoon and evening (a correction was sent around 10pm), the small bus which carries 14 students, is set to have its first pick up stop at 6:20am, with an expected arrival at school at 7am. That is a full hour before our staff arrives, and for that first bus stop, it is nearly two hours before the start of the school day for our young students. While this may have looked reasonable on paper to those doing the planning, it is not healthy for our children, nor is it manageable for our organization. Dismissal buses on this plan will also require for the small bus to do two routes, resulting in the scheduled final pickup of 4:56pm (IF the bus is on time).

I wrote a letter to families on Friday night sharing all we know and wrote to the District. In both cases, we noted that this proposed plan is neither in the best interest of children many of whom would be away from home for nearly 11 hours daily if they ride the bus, nor is it sustainable for us as a small staff to manage extending our hours by an hour and a half on both ends of the school day with no compensation or provided staffing from the Manchester School District. We are awaiting reply from the District and in the meantime, we will continue to brainstorm about ways to support our bus families. We hope the District will work with us on Monday and Tuesday - Mill

Falls and the District have professional development day (no children) on Tuesday. We are trying as hard as we can to mediate this very challenging situation.

### **Required Reporting**

Our first **2022/23 Opening Day Per Pupil Aid Reporting** was filed on the first day of school. This report reflects the enrollment numbers on our first day of school, and is submitted 2 more times during the school year. We have received our first per pupil payment - \$450,900 - from the state which is based on the reported enrollment.

**DOE-25 Form:** Work on this **year-end DOE-25** (bear of a report) will be completed by Sept 30<sup>th</sup>, as per the extension we requested and received from the Education Commissioner so that our final 2021/22 payroll and related expenses could be included (reminder our payroll is spread out over 26 pay-periods, and runs thru late August).

I have connected with our auditor and await the formal start date of the Field Work for our **FY23 Audit** which they expect will be in early October. Their field work will likely be done in person this year, a practice that was suspended during the COVID years. I will soon begin working with our auditor to gather materials he needs for that process. Once completed, our audits are sent to the DOE and posted on our website.

Grace, our Project Manager, has begun collecting information from our families for our **Free & Reduced Report**. She will soon begin work on the **Immunization Report**. Additionally, Mindy our English Language Learner Coordinator, is reviewing **student language surveys** of our new students to identify our English Language Learners, and has arranged for a certified ELL assessment to be made for those who qualify. This year, there is a new law that requires **dyslexia screening**. This has long been a practice at Mill Falls, as part of our 3x per year internal assessments. Responsibility for meeting this new requirement rests with the sending districts, who are expected to partner with charters to make it happen. In late August, I sent a letter to each district where we have shared students, so that we would know who to contact should the screening suggest further actions are required. That has gone pretty smoothly, with just a few districts who have not yet responded.

The next large report will be our **Beginning of the Year (BOY)** report – the report lists information about each individual student enrolled with us as of October 1 of each year. Annually, we are required to complete the BOY and the E(end)OY. NH Charter Schools and Districts may also utilize the Anytime (A)OY report to update our student rosters in between reporting times.

The **2023/24 Emergency Response Plan (ERP)** will be filed by the new deadline – October 15<sup>th</sup>. Our filing will include the Signature pages from both the Fire and Police Departments and will be filed with the NH Homeland Security Office, as required. The **Staff Safety Committee** will begin meeting later this fall. We have already activated our annual safety schedule related to staff prep and drills; our first fire drill will be next week.

### **Board Related**

Our September Board meeting's agenda includes our Annual Meeting, which will include the Officer Slate, and Committee Assignments. Trustees have the documents that map out officer and committee roles in preparation. Once the committees are populated, each committee will establish their chairs, and a meeting schedule for the year (making sure to avoid conflicts if there is dual membership on committees).

### **Facility**

This year there is a VERY simple Fall 2023 COVID Protocol that has been sent out to all school community members via our Family and Staff Handbooks. Big picture: someone who tests positive is expected to stay home (isolate) for 5 days and can return once symptoms have improved. They are strongly encouraged to mask after they return through day 10 (can't require). People who have exposure at home are also strongly encouraged to mask at school and test – all to protect those around them. Staff members who test positive can claim 5 COVID days (isolation) that do not count against their sick/personal days. This year, full time staff have 13 paid days off – with 3 personal and 10 sick. Sick days may be to care for their immediate family members who are ill or injured. .

We continue to work with Burke and self-monitor the levels with hydrometers that are placed around the school to track the indoor humidity levels. Last week, we saw a sharp rise, and again contracted with Burke ER to help bring the humidity levels down. They brought in 4 humidifiers which ran afterschool and overnight and were highly effective in getting our space dried out. Additionally, the landlord has said he is looking to add a mechanism to the HVAC system that will help manage the humidity levels. In the meantime, we will continue to monitor and call upon Burke as needed. Additionally, I'm pleased to share that we have not seen any roof leakage since the second roof repair in late August, following that significant compromise that brought water into our front space.

We have again transformed areas of our space to prioritize small group work with students. The biggest change this year is that our conference room is now an office shared by two of our special educators. The large reading resource library was moved out of that space and lives in the back space, near the conference room. Much of this work was completed with a big lift from Brittany Plchette, our Student Support Coordinator and others who helped support her work. Laura has done an amazing job of figuring out how to adapt the space. It is VERY tight, but very well planned.

### **MFCS ChildCare Program**

This year, we are running our Before Care Program. It is staffed by Mill Falls Staff Members, and runs daily, during school days, from 7-8:15am. There are currently 12 students enrolled daily, leaving some room for drop in as needed.

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

As usual, we began the year with a full roster of 168 students. Many of our classrooms do not have any students who are newly enrolled to the school. This is the kind of consistency that we love to see and that helps students transition back from summer, and in some cases to new program levels. They are able to bring with them all they have learned in previous years / previous levels, to the new year. One new student unenrolled late last week; we hope Grace will be able to quickly fill that spot from the waitlist.

While **beginning-of-the-year assessments** are always conducted with all returning students in reading and math, the teaching staff is taking extra care to quickly get to know the academic levels of our newest enrollees. Any of the **new students who have IEPs** are also introduced to our Special Education Team who have begun observing and working with the students and communicating with their home districts and families to be sure they have appropriate supports in place.

Each year, ALL MFCS families are expected to read our **Family Handbook** and return their sign off sheets, all of which is posted on our website.

On the first Friday, in addition to our first Mill Falls Newsletter, the Front Office sent home a thick **packet of forms and information** to get families focused and enrolled on programs such as our Pizza Friday (starts this coming Friday), our Community Engagement Monthly Meetings (had our first one last Wednesday night), the After School Conditioning Club in prep for our Race Day on September 24<sup>th</sup>, Free and Reduced paper work (information we are required to file), Student Technology Use Agreement, among others. Families have been great in sending back the completed forms all of which are due by Monday.

### **Financial**

Sara Bee and I have continued our work on identifying **new partnership financial organizations**. Last week, we met with Katie Geery at Ameriprise, to discuss investment options for the funds that will live outside of our regular banking. We will be meeting with Jeff and the Finance Committee in the coming weeks and regroup with Katie thereafter. Additionally, Sara has identified a business credit card which we will apply for as we make these banking changes.

**Special Education:** We have established contracts with the current sending districts who have resident students enrolled at Mill Falls. A new challenge this year, is the new requirement that each district and charter school with shared special education students, have a **Memo of**

**Understanding** (MOU), that states who will do what in the service of these students. The state created a template that was designed to help these partners design such agreements, though we are not required to use the template. I created and sent a draft version of the MOU to each sending district in August when I sent out the contracts. Some easily worked with that to establish our agreement, others are still working on it. We are required to file the MOUs with the state in October.

**Title Funds:** As discussed previously, we will continue to access our Title Funds. Here's how it looks this year: Title I to fund our part-time Upper Elementary Interventionist; Title II to support our staff professional development work and our ongoing Montessori Audit and Planning work with Elizabeth Slade; We have not yet defined our plan for our Title IV funds. Unfortunately, the state is not offering an option for the Title III consortium which we were part of for many years, so our school, and all other member schools and districts in that consortium will not be able to access these funds in support of our ELL program.

**ESSER/CARES Funds:** ESSER II funds close this year on September 30<sup>th</sup>. We accessed, spent and were reimbursed for those funds in the year they were offered (2020/21). ESSER III funds continue to be accessible. We have re-designed some of our initial planning from 2021 to better reflect our growing and changing needs. The grant information uploaded to the DOE site over the summer will serve us well this year as we request reimbursement for past allowable expenses, and work through our plan of fund usage this year. ESSER III in total for us at \$160,005.12. This grant closes out on Sept 30, 2024.

### **MFCS Community Building & Volunteerism**

In late June, the Admin Team assembled a robust family engagement calendar, motivated by everyone's desire to build off of our great end-of-year Night of Community event, and work hard to rebuild our strong sense of community which COVID broke down. As part of that work, our Office Manager and I will be hosting monthly **Family Engagement Meetings**, which will include some Volunteer Training, time for people to get to know one another, and a lot of event-organizing. For community building to work, we need people to sign up to events, of course, but ALSO need organizers who know and trust one another. The first meeting was fabulous. Jen and I am hopeful this will continue.

The '**Count Me In**' form (shared it on paper and digitally including in the newsletter) is being filled out by many of our families and this will be another way we can build our volunteer squads for work inside school and events outside of the school day.

Please stay tuned for more information about upcoming events. As we've discussed, it is our hope that **Board Members will find ways to join us at some of this year's family social and curricular events.**

Speaking of which...

### **FUN RUN / 5K is NEXT Sunday!!!**

Huge thanks to our own **Danielle** for helping to organize some community volunteers for the day of our **Fun Run/5K next Sunday, September 24<sup>th</sup> morning at SNHU**. And a HUGE thanks to **Amy and Jeff** and our former treasurer **Michelle**, for lending their sponsorship to Race Day.

If you've not signed up yet and are free that morning, please join Danielle, Jeff (and his fam), Amy and her Fam, Hind and her fam and join us! Keep in mind, plenty of people walk the 5K route and come to enjoy the morning and show support for our school and healthy living! We are also looking for past graduates to join us... know any? Here's the link to sign up, please use it and share it!

<https://runsignup.com/Race/NH/Hooksett/4thAnnualMillFallsCharterSchoolRoadRaceFunRun>

Even if you can't make it, you might consider making a donation.

### **Human Resources**

Our Staff Opening Days were especially full this year. Laura did an incredible job of organizing each day – balancing the need for information sharing, schedule building with quiet collaborative time for the teams. We have a new title-funded position this year, our Staff SEL Coach (SEL stands for social emotional learning). This position is designed to lead staff in

engaging SEL activates for staff engagement and connection AND so that they may use the practice with their students. Her planned activities kicked off the year on a very positive and fun note. She will work all year to organize events and activities to engage staff in connecting with one another and in practicing sound healthy work/life balance. Beyond that, our Opening Days Included: **Review of Duties, COVID Protocol, Communication/System Improvements, Emergency Response Protocols** and meetings with our **Aflac** Rep and our **Retirement** Program Manager and our **Annual CPR/First Aid Training** led by Len Agnelli – the Opening Day Schedule also featured: **Discussion of Events** for the full-school year; presentation of the **full Professional Development Calendar; review of student assessment data and other collaborative planning**. On our final day, staff headed to the Currier Museum, followed by an end of day gathering at the To Share Brewery.

On the housekeeping front, all HR details have been attended to by me, from new files and related paperwork for our 6 new staff members, to meetings with our Retirement and Aflac Representatives. I ran our first payroll of FY23 on Aug 25, and our second on the 8<sup>th</sup> of September. Each year, ALL MFCS staff are expected to read our Family Handbook and are also expected to review the Staff Handbook.

Please take a moment to familiarize yourselves with our staff by visiting our website:  
<https://millfalls.org/education/administration-faculty/>

**Foundation News:**

The Foundation will soon be moving its holdings to a higher interest bearing account, managed by Merrill Lynch, and will roll the current treasury bonds into the new account as well, later this fall when they come due.

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