



## An Update on our Strategic Planning for MFCS Community

Shared by Naomi Butterfield, MFCS Board Chair &  
Meryl Levin, MFSCS Executive Director

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Dear MFCS Community Members,

Last school year marked our 6<sup>th</sup> year of operation. We are thrilled to report that since opening our doors in 2012, we have met each of our benchmarks sent forth in our first charter – the agreement made with the State Board of Education to launch and operate NH’s first public Montessori school. In 2017, our charter was renewed by the State of NH for the next 5 years of continued operation.

As we continue to mature as an organization, we remain committed to regularly reflecting and thinking critically about our mission and objectives. That commitment drives our work, and helps us improve our practices and procedures as needed.

To build a vision for our organization’s next phase, the Mill Falls Board of Trustees held a number of strategic planning sessions over the past 8 months. As part of that process, we solicited input from all stakeholders of our organization - staff, families, students and both our governing and foundation boards - to better understand where we have come and where we need to focus going forward. With input from all sectors, we will create a Strategic Plan to guide us over the next two to three years.

Mill Fall’s first strategic plan was rolled into our charter document when the school was first approved by the NH Board of Education in March of 2011. At that early stage, the strategic goals set forth were to build the school and get it up and running over the course of 5 years. We succeeded! We are now a thriving community of engaged students led by talented and nurturing staff. With those accomplishments in tow, we have undertaken the next stage of planning for our future.

We are writing to thank you for sharing your voices and your ideas during this process and to let you know what has been done thus far and what comes next.

### **MFCS Strategic Planning Steps:**

Our strategic planning began last January. Led by our own Maryclare Heffernan, who is our Student Services Coordinator and also a professional facilitator, the school administration and the Board of Trustees started the research phase of our work by conducting a SWOT (Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, Threat) Survey. We gathered information from faculty parents, trustees and students about what they saw as the strengths and opportunities as well as weaknesses and potential threats. From the ideas of all of those who responded, we determined three areas of focus for the Strategic Plan.

The results of those months of information gathering reflected the following trends:

- Determination by all stakeholder groups to both protect and deepen our **Commitment to our Public Montessori Program.**

- Emphasis on expanding and enhancing our **Communication Toolkit and Methods** so that families, staff, community partners, and funders have clarity about our public Montessori Program and its needs and goals. And so that we can further engage our currently enrolled Mill Falls Families;
- Explore **Ideas for Program & Facility Growth & Expansion** in the coming years.

We will be drafting a written Strategic Plan over the next couple of months. But why wait until the Plan is written? We have already begun to test drive and, in some cases, implement some of the ideas.

**Here is what we are doing NOW:**

- **Commitment to our Public Montessori Program:** Our Staff Opening Days (held before the students return to school) included an increased focus on the Montessori practice providing an uptick in professional learning related to the Montessori approach. Additionally, we held discussions about special education service delivery models and methods in our public Montessori setting and are now integrating some new practices into our program. Once the school year began, our teaching staff implemented weekly collaboration time within their program levels during school hours; our early release days have a majority focus on the Montessori Philosophy. There are many other small and large projects underway which we will continue to share as they evolve.
- Our **Communication Tools and Methods** are also being studied and enhanced. At the school level we have focused on parent engagement. We consciously began the year with a plan for family events focused on community, service, and fundraising. Our first event, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Best of Both Worlds Fun Run/Road Race saw a larger crowd than years past. Other fall events included the Corn Maze and the Pancake Breakfast. We are looking forward to winter events including the Spaghetti Dinner, and more!

It's working! Many more families than in past years have completed our recently improved 'Count Me In' form, which helps us get to know the interests, skills and talents of the adult members of our Mill Falls Community. There is always room to grow parent/guardian engagement! Please join us as we continue to work with parent organizers and staff to create even more opportunities to bring the adult members of our community together, and at the school level to engage more parents/guardians in volunteer roles and opportunities. You are welcome and encouraged to get involved!

We are actively seeking new partners and community connections ahead our 2019 Lottery and in an ongoing way to for program support to expand our reach and create more diversity among lottery applicants. We are looking to identify organizations and communities where Mill Falls may not be as well known, so that we can continue to attract new families, partners and potential funders in support of our public Montessori school.

In support of that effort, we are working to insert "Montessori" into the school's name for more immediate recognition of the unique educational approach that is employed here at Mill Falls.

- **Ideas for Program & Facility Growth & Expansion** are still being collected. We are currently in year 3 of our 5-year lease, with the option to renew for another 5 years thereafter. We dream of more space for our current student body and have drafted tentative plans for expansion. However, we are cost conscious as well and aware that all of these ideas are tightly linked to development of a carefully measured plan. Our funding comes in large part from the state funding per student, and that remains at a level that is less than half of the state average for

public school students, state-wide. While our program costs are partially covered by fundraising, significant, sustainable and responsible program growth is tightly linked to state funding levels. Our expansion plans will consistent with our primary goal of providing an exceptional public education and must include responsible fiscal planning.

**What is Next?**

We are now ready to now put 'pen to paper' and capture our ideas in a Strategic Plan that is innovative, measurable, and achievable. We look forward to sharing the written Plan with you soon.

Thank you, our Mill Falls Family, for helping us bring Montessori public!

Sincerely,



Naomi Butterfield  
MFCS Board Chair



& Meryl Levin  
MFCS Executive Director