



# 2017 Charter Renewal Application

## Mill Falls Charter School

### *Bringing Montessori Public*

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# **Mill Falls Charter School: Bringing Montessori Public**

*Originally Proposed by 10 Founding Parents and The Manchester Montessori Charter School Foundation in January 2011; Approved by the NH Board of Education on March 9, 2011; Doors opened August 2012. First 5-year Operational Period: 2012-2017.*

*The following pages contain Mill Falls Charter School's application for a 5-year renewal of its charter to continue the operation of this Public Montessori School Program. This document follows the format of the New Hampshire Charter School Application.*

## **Reflection on Start Up**

In early 2011, the Board of Education approved *Mill Falls Charter School* - New Hampshire's first public Montessori school. At that time, *Mill Falls* was also the first urban charter school approved in the state. These firsts were exciting, and also forged new roads – highlighting some new challenges and opportunities for the state's charter program, which at that time was still being piloted.

Since then, the Mill Falls Staff, School Board and Foundation, have worked tirelessly, more than realizing the vision mapped out by the School's Founders. During our first four years, we grew from the initial K-3 Program to the full K-6 Program outlined in our founding charter. In that time, our student body grew steadily from 93 students to 168, adding a grade each year as our original 3<sup>rd</sup> graders aged through the Program. That 3<sup>rd</sup> grade cohort graduated last spring.

We have fulfilled our core value of building a diverse learning community, cultivated deep and long-lasting community support for our public Montessori model, and supported our teaching staff who have so generously shared their expertise and nurturing approach to education with *Mill Falls* students, their families, and one another. With further support from the School Board Trustees, the Foundation Board, as well as Parents/Guardians, *Mill Falls* students have had the opportunity to achieve positive academic and social/emotional outcomes while enrolled at the School. Our story has been shared privately, family-to-family, and more publically in the media, and this has led to tremendous interest in *Mill Falls'* Program. Each year, including the founding year, the Enrollment Lottery has included well over 200 applicants.

The following pages articulate the programming at *Mill Falls*. Viewed together with the School's reports to the state, Board minutes, school policies, annual financial audits, and other official documents, this charter application celebrates *Mill Falls'* growth successes during the first charter period, maps out the School's practices, and explores some of the School's plans for the future.

Because the Montessori tradition is still unfamiliar to many, this document also provides some detailed information about the pedagogy's history and contemporary application alongside the educational goals and plans for the *Mill Falls Charter School*.

## **Montessori: An Early Inner-City Pedagogy**

The Montessori method is a world-renowned technique that was developed in the early 1900's by Dr. Maria Montessori, who sought to deliver high quality education to the very poorest of children living in Rome, Italy. Through her medical and scientific training and keen observation skills, Dr. Montessori recognized that children acquire knowledge directly from life experiences. She found that children cannot help but learn, that they are born to learn, but what they learn depends greatly on their teachers, their experiences and their environments. Dr. Montessori designed curricula, unique materials and an individualized approach to education based on the academic, developmental and psychological needs of the children she served. She was twice nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, in part for the *Education for Peace* work she did later while living in India during World War II.

Dr. Montessori established her first school, *Casa dei Bambini* (The Children's House) in 1907. Soon after, there was great enthusiasm for her work by many, including Alexander Graham Bell and Thomas Edison. But World War II impeded collaboration and it was not until 1960 that the method was re-introduced and embraced. Today the Montessori method is used worldwide in both public and private settings, educating children from pre-K through high school. There are over 6,000 Montessori schools in the United States; nearly 400 of those are public.

Dr. Montessori created a powerful individualized pedagogy aimed at reaching and impacting students as they move from early childhood into adolescence. The method engages students' powers of reasoning, imagination and creativity, supporting them as their minds shift from a focus on the concrete towards the abstract concepts involved in elementary education and beyond.

## **Why Charter?**

As we carry forward the intent of the School's founders, we remain committed to offering a high quality Montessori program within the public school system. We are a public charter school - tuition free with open admission – and we welcome and support a diverse learning community. The charter model as currently defined by the New Hampshire Department of Education continues to provide us with a structure to achieve our goals<sup>1</sup>, and positions us differently than the private Montessori schools, independent and parochial schools in the area, none of which are tuition free, nor are they required to meet the educational standards set forth for public schools like ours.

Additionally, charter schools are organized around a particular pedagogy, discipline or theme and offer the potential for research and development within public school setting. Dissemination of successful practices is a key element of a strong charter program. The Montessori method, with its individualized approach, proven experiential learning methods, and careful development of deliberate culture, provides a rich opportunity for us

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<sup>1</sup> A study conducted by Angeline Lillard and Nicole Else-Quest, comparing outcomes of children at a public inner city Montessori school with children who

to share best practices as a complement to what is currently being explored in traditional classrooms. Since 2012, we have met with several Manchester School District administrators and employees and members of its School Board, as well as students of education at state universities, and many community leaders and educators from other District and Charter schools in the region. *Mill Falls* is a place for observation, and stands to be a place for training opportunities for colleagues and parents/guardians. We bridge economic and cultural differences on a daily basis, and bring together disparate groups from within Manchester and across the state via our open door approach.

### **Why Manchester?**

Manchester's diverse population continues to benefit from our charter school, because we address the multifaceted needs of this growing city and its surrounding areas. While the Manchester community has strong generational roots, the changing face of southern New Hampshire continues to manifest itself in many ways. Young professionals have moved to or returned to Manchester and its surrounding cities. Some of the newest Americans in the country have made Manchester their home as part of the refugee relocation program. All residents — returning, new and long-term residents — have the same desire for high quality public education for their children. That is exactly what we aim to provide at *Mill Falls*.

In New Hampshire's Merrimack Valley area there are currently over 15 private Montessori preschool-through-kindergarten and/or elementary programs (though just one within the city limits of Manchester). Since those schools are private, they are only available to children from families who can afford the tuition. This stands in strong contrast to the philosophic origins of Montessori education (as an urban school for poor children). The hands-on nature of Montessori makes it an excellent vehicle for children of different backgrounds, experiences and learning styles.

The 168 public Montessori students at *Mill Falls* reflect the diversity in the region. Currently, there are 11 languages other than English spoken in the homes of our families. Approximately 20% of our families live at or below the poverty line (current data suggests that about 33% of all Manchester families are living in such poverty). About 24% of our students require Special Education supports. Many of these statistics reflect far greater diversity than is seen in most neighborhood schools in the city because they largely serve the neighborhood in which they are located. But these numbers do reflect our deep-held priority of building and supporting a richly diverse student body.

### **Sustainability**

New Hampshire charter schools are public schools. As such, *Mill Falls Charter School*, offers our public Montessori programming, tuition free. However, as has been painfully clear during the first charter period, funding for New Hampshire Charter Schools is insufficient to maintain programming and meet the evolving needs of our diverse student body. In fact, public funds provided to state-issued charter schools, are far less than half of the state average of funds provided to neighborhood/traditional public school students. With no access to property taxes that fund our state's public schools, charter schools must build sustainability plans.

From the very start of this project, we have understood the significant need for building a sustainability and development plan that includes fundraising large and small, and the importance of crafting an effort that will garner support from families, community members and businesses.

In order to maximize our ability to build a strong and lasting project, after the School was established, the original body which brought the charter proposal forward - *Manchester Montessori Charter School Foundation* - was renamed and solely purposed as an independent, non-profit organization separate from the School. The *Mill Falls Charter School Foundation* received its 501c3 status from the IRS in January 2014 and is focused only on the economic sustainability of the *Mill Falls Charter School*. The fundraising efforts which began before we even opened our doors, has resulted in significant support to assist with both startup, operating costs, and facility fit up costs. To date, the Foundation has raised close to \$400,000.

Through our commitment to the city of Manchester and the State of New Hampshire, we have created an economically sustainable, high quality charter school. The *Mill Falls Charter School* will proudly continue to bring Montessori public for years to come.

## Mill Falls Charter School: *Bringing Montessori Public*

### A: Mill Falls' Educational MISSION:

*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.

### Educational Philosophy

- Provide an academic experience above and beyond the *Common Core Curriculum*, delivered through the *Montessori Curriculum and Approach*.
- Fully embrace the Montessori practice in all aspects of the School's operation.
- Build and support a strong school community led by qualified and nurturing educators, a professionalized Board of Trustees, and supported by engaged parents/guardians.
- Provide classrooms populated with materials and resources developed for the Montessori approach to help learners of all kinds reach their highest potential.
- Provide mixed-age classrooms where peer-to-peer teaching and modeling is fully supported to enable the sharing of experience and knowledge, as well as the social and academic development of *Mill Falls* students.
- Provide an integrated learning environment that encourages connections across academic disciplines.
- Foster creativity and curiosity, leading to the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills.
- Provide individualized, student-directed learning, leading to engaged, empowered and self-directed students.
- Practice the Montessori approach of educating the *whole child*, leading to the development self-confidence, and inner-discipline among students.
- Develop 21st century learners through the use of creative problem solving, Montessori materials and technology leading to responsible and knowledgeable global citizens.
- Provide a peaceful, safe and secure environment for personal development with constructive conflict resolution.
- Foster a culture of respect, individuality and celebration of diversity of all kinds.

### Key Goals & Expected Outcomes

- **High Academic Achievement and Standards** are established through the integration of the *Common Core Curriculum* and the *Montessori Curriculum and Approach*. With an emphasis on the mastery of materials across all areas of academic focus, *Mill Falls* students are expected to advance at least one grade level

per year and take both standardized tests as per state/federal requirements as well as internal assessments to demonstrate progress. Faculty utilizes a variety of internal assessment methods in order to measure student growth, assess program efficacy, and plan appropriately for individualized student instruction. The academic program integrates the development of community and responsible global citizenship; peaceful approach to conflict resolution; and when possible, the integration of curriculum partners in areas of the arts, service and the natural world.

- **Individualized Learning** inspires *Mill Falls* students to seek their highest potential. Through the Montessori methods of observation and evaluation, as well as required standardized tests, each student's instruction is tailored to his or her ability and needs. *Mill Falls* teachers work closely with students and their parents/guardians to establish and continually evaluate goals and progress.
- **Respect** develops and flourishes through the Montessori practice of grace and courtesy among students, faculty and parents/guardians.
- **Celebration of Diversity** ensures that students, families and faculty of all means, needs and backgrounds are welcomed into the school setting.
- **Service-Learning Opportunities** for students of all ages ensures connection to community and the development of responsible and engaged citizens.
- **Personal Growth and Development** flourishes alongside the academic values of the Montessori method through the Practical Life and Service curricula. Students gathered in this safe and peaceful environment become engaged and empowered learners, many able to articulate their educational needs and learning styles as they journey through the *Mill Falls* Program, and beyond.
- **Successful Montessori Programming** defines every aspect of the School. Classrooms are populated by Montessori-trained Lead Teachers who utilize the Montessori approach to curriculum development and presentation, thus meeting students' academic, social and emotional needs and expectations. Supporting the Lead Teachers are Assistant Teachers, themselves committed to the Montessori method. Additional support staff such as Interventionists, and English Language Learner Coordinators, Specialists and Special Educators, are chosen in part for their ability to model core Montessori values. Ongoing team and professional development is provided throughout each school year to aid in high teacher retention, ongoing programmatic success and growth of the Mission.
- **Parent/Guardian Commitment** to the School's Mission and success is an important element in building and maintaining the *Mill Falls* Community. Opportunities for Parents/Guardians are integrated into the School's approach, thereby fostering a connection to the education and social development of their children and to the success of the School.
- **Strong & Comprehensive Governance by the Board of Trustees** is key to successful School operation. Oversight of fiscally responsible actions and policies, as well as oversight of strong educational program planning and execution dictate the roles and responsibilities of the School's Governing Body.

## **B: GOVERNANCE & ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND PLAN**

### **The Founding Board**

In the days after the Chair of the Board of Education struck his gavel, marking the true establishment of *Mill Falls*, the School's Founders began the process of building the first Board of Trustees. The Founding Board of Trustees was populated by both Parent and Community Members. That group worked their hearts out to take the ideas mapped out in the approved charter and bring it to life. That work included looking at over 36 sites before landing the School's current home at 100 William Loeb Drive. It included building the student body by holding ten Information Sessions in multiple languages during that establishment year. Those sessions were held in all corners of Manchester – including church basements, Girls Inc. and Libraries – and were conducted in multiple languages. The Founding Board created bylaws, policies, learned about charter law, served as ambassadors for the School, launched fundraising efforts in advance of the School's opening, applied for and obtained the Federal Start Up Grant, and hired the first staff. The Founding Board also created all enrollment forms and oversaw the build-out of the School space – transforming an office space to a school. It was an exhausting and extremely difficult undertaking, fit in between full-time jobs, and other obligations and done on an all-volunteer basis. But the Founders felt tremendous pride in accomplishing these tasks.

The Board's work continued to be extremely labor intensive during the School's first few years – not uncommon for any start up. It took some time to establish the right Administrative structure – balancing the many operational duties required of New Hampshire's state-issued Charter Schools with the intensive programming management. As noted in the *Mill Falls Organizational Flow Chart (please see Appendix A)*, the Board settled on a traditional non-profit model - an Executive Director who partners and supports the Educational Program Director whose position is most like a School Principal. Both the Executive Director and the Educational Program Director serve as non-voting members of the School Board.

These days, the Board functions as a strong governing body. It meets monthly and has populated committees as discussed below.

*Brief biographical information of the Current Board Trustees and a list of past Trustees – appears in Appendix B.*

### **Board Structure, Roles & Responsibilities of the Mill Falls Board of Trustees**

The Board of Trustees governs *Mill Falls Charter School* with statutory responsibilities pursuant to RSA 194-B: 5 for “general supervisory control and authority over operations of the charter school”. As part of Board governance, in the School's fourth year of operation, the MFCS Board of Trustees amended its Bylaws, to reflect the following Board Structure (*please also see Appendix C for the full and current bylaws*):

*The Board shall have a maximum of thirteen Trustees, voting and non-voting, but shall have no fewer than 7 voting Trustees. The Board shall include at least two parents of pupils currently enrolled at the School. The Board shall also include at least four Trustees who shall be community members.*

The *Mill Falls Charter School's* Board of Trustees is the guardian of the School's Mission,

charged, by definition, to establish the School, monitor its health and viability, advocate for the School and its students whenever possible, and assess, with regularity the Mission's relevance and vitality.

**Selection:** Trustee selection is based on Board needs, personal and professional background as well as a commitment to the School's Mission, support and sustainability. By design, the Board's makeup includes a diversity of voices, experiences and expertise. The Board reserves the right to alter the makeup of its governing body as per the School's needs. The Board of Trustees has established a policy whereby past Board Chairs may serve as ex officio board members and/or advisors and as such are non-voting. Maintaining the connections to those who have been so supportive and generous to the School continues to serve Mill Falls as the organization grows and matures. New Trustees may be added at any time during the year; at the Board's Annual Meeting, Trustees vote on the Officer Slate. It is a goal of the Board going forward, to better reflect the diversity seen among School families.

**Officers:** Chair, Vice Chair, Treasurer and Secretary. Descriptions for Board Officers were developed by the Board's Governance Committee (Committee on Trustees), and reviewed at the time the bylaws were revised and approved by the full Board.

**Committees:** Current Board Committees are: Finance, Facility, Governance (Committee on Trustees), and Charter. From time-to-time, the Board has employed ad hoc Committees/Working Groups, most notably to hire the Executive Director position and complete the bylaw revisions.

**Roles & Responsibilities:** The Board of Trustees establishes governing policies and maintains its bylaws, including policies that establish subcommittees and standing committees of the Board as well as those that impact Board behavior/expectation and those of the staff, student and members of the School Community. Procedures related to the implementation of those policies are most often established by the School Administration, and reviewed by Board officers as needed. At this time in the School's growth, most policies being considered by the Board are brought forward by the School's Administration and relate to evolving requirements of Charter Schools.

The Board is charged with hiring and overseeing the Executive Director; Board Officers work most directly with the Executive Director. The Executive Director is empowered to direct and implement the operational decisions of the Board and to manage all day-to-day functions. The Executive Director works in tandem with the Educational Program Director in areas including but not limited to: curriculum, personnel, and daily school business and organization. However, the Executive Director is directly responsible to the Board. The Executive Director and the Educational Program Director provide monthly reports to the Board as part of the monthly meeting packets. The Executive Director meets regularly with the Finance Committee and is in regular contact with the Board Chair and Treasurer and other officers as needed. These methods of clear and ongoing communication have helped to establish a successful and productive relationship between the Board and the School Administration.

The roles reserved for the Board include, at a minimum:

- Hiring/supervision of the Executive Director;
- Approval & oversight of annual budget & related fund-raising programs/opportunities;
- Setting policy;
- Appointment of Board advisory members (*not currently in operation*);
- Approval of educational priorities;
- Approval for the School's growth plan;
- Approval of a professional salary and compensation program;
- Review & Approval of significant contracts (e.g., for facilities and benefit programs);
- Any other matters prescribed in statute or rule.

**Governance:** The Board of Trustees meets monthly during the school year (except in July or due to extreme weather cancellations) to discuss School operations, Administration reports, and take action as per its governance functions. The Officers and full Board have occasionally been called upon to meet more frequently when urgent/timely matters have presented themselves (lease signing, hiring of the Executive Director, etc.). A simple majority of Trustees qualified to vote shall constitute a quorum to convene a meeting, and a vote by a simple majority of Trustees present and eligible to participate at any meeting and voting shall be sufficient to adopt any lawful resolution or take any lawful action. "Present" will apply not only to those physically present but also to those who hear and participate through alternative means (e.g. conference call or video) only after public meeting protocol has been established at each meeting for those participating by conference. The Board has occasionally obtained contracted services to assist in its work (e.g. consultants/experts in governance, curriculum development, setting of benchmarks, development and board training), often securing these as pro-bono services.

The following principles of good practice for *Mill Falls Charter School* are based on guidelines from the National Association of Independent Schools. The Board and the Executive Director (in collaboration with the Educational Program Director) shall continue to work in partnership in their aim to fulfill these principles:

1. The Board shall oversee the *Mill Falls Charter School's* Mission and objectives.
2. The Board shall assure compliance with applicable laws and regulations and minimize exposure to legal action.
3. The Board shall be accountable for the financial well being of the School, including capital assets, operating budgets, and fund-raising/income opportunities.
4. The Board shall review and maintain bylaws, and establish policies and plans consistent with the Mission.
5. The composition of the Board shall reflect a balance of expertise and perspectives needed to achieve the Mission of the School.
6. The Board shall work to ensure that all of its members are actively involved in the work of the Board and its committees.
7. The Board shall develop itself through ongoing education, new trustee orientation and leadership succession planning.
8. The Board shall keep full and accurate records of its meetings, committees, and policies, and make them available as per public meeting law.
9. The Board shall evaluate itself annually and establish goals for the following year.
10. The Board shall select and support the Executive Director.

11. The Board, or a committee of the Board, shall conduct a written annual evaluation of the performance of the Executive Director and work with the Executive Director to establish goals for the following year.

### **C: RECRUITING TRUSTEES & DEFINED TERMS of SERVICE**

The Board of Trustees is charged with recruiting Trustees and in its bylaws has defined the service terms. The overarching goal in selecting Trustees is finding members who support the School's Mission and goals and have talents, wisdom and expertise he/she will bring to the table to continue to uphold the Board's high level of professionalism. Ideally, candidates will have done some work with the Board or School administration, but at a minimum nominees are required to attend a Board meeting, meet with members of the Governance Committee and other Trustees who may wish to join, in order to get a full picture of what is required as a Trustee/Trust-Keeper of the organization. Trustees serve without compensation for service, though may be reimbursed for previously approved expenses related to school business.

New Trustees shall be elected by a majority of Trustees present at a Board meeting provided there is a quorum. Trustees of *Mill Falls Charter School* have terms of three (3) years. The initial Board had staggered terms; that initial timing model continues to facilitate Trustee transition. Terms may be renewed by nomination and majority vote of the Board. All Trustees are required to undergo a Criminal Records Check.

As a Board of a public School, the *Mill Falls* Board is subject to New Hampshire Right to Know Law, RSA 91-A. For purposes of lawful meetings, a quorum is defined as a majority of Trustees who must be physically present or participating through video or voice communication systems. Records and minutes of meetings are kept in accordance with statutory guidelines.

Board members are expected to regularly attend board meetings. The Board considers regular participation to be crucial in order to ensure success of the Board's effort and the School overall. Board members who miss more than one fourth of meetings (beyond an agreed upon leave) may be replaced. Openings on the Board are filled via the Governance Committee which seeks recommendations, and then after positive results from the Committee's research may bring forth nominations.

**Trustee Resignations:** A Trustee may resign by giving written notice to the Board Chair or Secretary. That notice shall include the effective date of resignation.

**Removal of Trustees:** A Board member may be terminated from the Board due to excessive absences, defined as being absent without excuse from the Chair from more than one-fourth of official meetings. A Board member may be terminated from the Board for other reasons upon a vote in favor of termination by three-fourths of the remaining Trustees provided that notice of intention to remove such Trustee is set forth in the meeting notice seven calendar days prior to that meeting. Any such Trustee shall be entitled to appear before the full Board and be heard at such meeting.

## **D: GENERAL DESCRIPTION & LOCATION OF SCHOOL FACILITY**

In the spring of 2012, *Mill Falls Charter School's* Board of Trustees signed a 5-year agreement with 2 options to renew with its current landlord, the Union Leader Corporation. Construction to transform the initial 10,000 square foot space from office space to a school began in the late spring of 2012, and was completed at the end of that summer. That established 6 classrooms, some small offices, as well as a common space, which housed the library. It also brought water into the space for bathrooms, water fountains, and a modest staff kitchen. The lease allowed for staged growth, and in the summer of 2014, the School expanded into the full 14,000 it now occupies, renovating the newly acquired space. The School space now includes two common spaces, 7 classrooms, and 1 multipurpose room (all classrooms are approximately 1,000 square feet), multiple bathrooms, a small kitchen, as well as multiple offices, small meeting/work spaces and an extensive storage area. There is no gym or cafeteria. The space is fully accessible, and sits on a concrete slab. It has a full HVAC system with heating and A/C. There is a fenced in play area, as well as several other areas utilized for recess and fitness programming. Earlier this year, the School signed a 5-year lease extension.

## **E: GRADES / AGE LEVELS AND, AS APPLICABLE, OTHER INFORMATION ABOUT PUPILS BEING SERVED**

### **Growth During the First Charter Period**

*Mill Falls Charter School* opened its doors in September 2012, serving 93 students in grades K-3. At that time, the School had one single-aged Kindergarten Classroom, and three Lower Elementary Classrooms which each had 8 first graders, 8 second graders and 8 third graders. As the 3<sup>rd</sup> graders grew, *Mill Falls* expanded its programming. In the second year (2013/14) the School added its first Upper Elementary Classroom that served 24 fourth graders. The next year (2014/15), the School added a second Upper Elementary Classroom and at that point each Upper Elementary classroom had twelve 4<sup>th</sup> graders and twelve 5<sup>th</sup> graders. And according to the School's original growth plan, in the 4<sup>th</sup> year of operation, *Mill Falls* reached its full K-6 Programming, and populated its third Upper Elementary Classroom such that all Upper Elementary rooms had 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade students.

A few related growth notes from the First Charter Period:

- 1: *Revised Growth Plan Before Opening*: Just before *Mill Falls's* first Enrollment Lottery, the Board of Education informed School Leaders that they had to come back to Board for approval to have 93 students in the first year because it was higher than projected in the original charter. That request for a revised growth plan was approved several weeks after the Lottery was held, and only after that was the School able to inform Lottery Enrollees of their enrollment status at the new school.
- 2: *The addition of Kinder in Year One*: The Founding School Board included two long-time public Montessori experts: Kate Callahan and Jonnie Lyn Evans. It was determined through their previous experience at other public Montessori schools that *Mill Falls* needed to offer Kinder in its first year, rather than wait until year two, as had been outlined in the original charter.

3: *2013/14 Board Decision on Growth*: The initial plan by the Founders had been to have one single-age Kinder Classroom and grow to include 4 Lower and 4 Upper Elementary Classrooms. At the close of the first year, the Board of Trustees – with input from the School Administration – decided not to add a 4<sup>th</sup> Lower and/or 4<sup>th</sup> Upper Elementary Classroom at that time in the School’s growth. That decision was based largely on space within the facility and bandwidth of the School’s skeletal administration whose size is restricted by the limits of NH Charter School funding. *Mill Falls* has put its resources into its model of having a Lead and Assistant Teacher in each classroom, as well as the hiring of other student support staff positions needed to meet our students’ needs. Reports to the DOE for the Governor’s budgets during the School’s first charter period, have reflected that revised growth plan.

### **Enrollment During the First Charter Period**

*Mill Falls* held its first public, blind Enrollment Lottery in March of 2012. At that time, the School received 269 applicants for the 93 approved spots. Every year since, the School has received over 200 applicants during the Lottery Enrollment Period, which runs annually from early-January through mid-March. At this point, the main entry point into the *Mill Falls* Program is via Kindergarten. Occasionally, spots become available over the summer in the Upper Elementary Program.

Over the years, *Mill Falls* has seen very few students exit from the program mid-year. Given the School’s extensive wait lists the School’s Administration has had little trouble quickly filling those spots to maintain full enrollment. As a state-issued charter, *Mill Falls Charter School* is able to continue to meet the needs of our student’s who may relocate, as long as they reside in New Hampshire. In Manchester, there is considerable movement of students from school to school. While transportation can sometimes be a challenge when these families move, *Mill Falls* has not seen that as an issue, as those students who move within the city limits are able to continue to access Manchester Transit for busing to *Mill Falls*. This has made all the difference for so many *Mill Falls* families who in previous situations had to move their children from school to school. (*Also see Transportation, Section L*)

However, *Mill Falls* has experienced a repeated challenge related to its Upper Elementary Program. Since the School began offering 6<sup>th</sup> grade in 2015/16, it has noted a repeated trend showing a large number of enrolled families choosing to move their 6<sup>th</sup> graders to a new school to begin their Middle School experience, rather than keep them at *Mill Falls* for their 6<sup>th</sup> grade year. Some move for social issues, others make the move because they feel applying to schools in 6<sup>th</sup> grade is the only way they can get in to a new program. Families are often leaving *Mill Falls* in 5<sup>th</sup> grade reluctantly, expressing that they have little choice but to move to a full Middle School Program. (*Survey results are included in the Charter Renewal Package*)

Montessori pedagogy is built upon a series of 3-year cycles. It builds on students’ Montessori-specific experience year after year. The trend of students leaving the program *before* the 6<sup>th</sup> grade year is certainly impacting programming. The Montessori Model is compromised when *Mill Falls* classrooms don’t have sufficient 6<sup>th</sup> graders to create a

cohort. Educational groupings in the small-group / differentiated teaching model are impacted, as is the opportunity for student leadership which is fostered in 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grades and then fully realized in the students' 6<sup>th</sup> year. The new additions to the Upper Elementary Program are most usually students who are not familiar with the *Montessori Method and Approach*.

### **Mill Falls Students: Drawn Together from Many Corners**

We have met and exceeded the Founder's plan to create *Mill Falls Charter School* as an option for *all* families interested in a Montessori education. It remains true that only a small percentage of New Hampshire families have the resources necessary to send their children to the many private Montessori programs in the state. As New Hampshire's first public and urban Montessori school, we remain committed to bringing Montessori public.

*Mill Falls Charter School* is a welcoming community with a diverse student body as noted earlier in this document. To be successful, we have continually addressed the needs of our students and their families. With this diversity has come the need for supports beyond our Montessori classrooms so that each of our students can reach their highest potential.

### **Shape & Size of Mill Falls' Classrooms**

The Kinder, Lower and Upper Elementary Classrooms each have twenty-four (24) students. Each classroom has one (1) Lead Teacher and one (1) Assistant Teacher. This class size allows *Mill Falls* Teachers to provide individualized attention to their students and to observe each child, each day. It also enables small-group work, as well as full-group work and projects. *Mill Falls* students remain together with the same teachers and classmates as they progress through each 3-year block (grades 1-3 and grades 4-6).

### **Additional Student Supports**

After the School's start up year, the Administration began introducing support staff to further assist in supporting the School's diverse community of learners. In 2013/14 a Reading Interventionist and an English Language Learners (ELL) Coordinator were added. In 2014/15 the hours of the Reading Interventionist were extended so that she could expand her work with *Mill Falls* most struggling readers. A Student Services Coordinator was also added in 2014/15 to manage the fast-growing list of enrolled students receiving Special Education supports. In 2015/16 a Math Interventionist and Reading Coach were added. The Math Interventionist works with students in need of extra math support and works with staff to integrate additional approaches to help some of our struggling students. The Reading Coach supports the School's Reading Group model at all program levels. In 2017/18 both Interventionists will be full-time positions.

In 2016/17 two Special Educators were added to the *Mill Falls* Faculty largely in response to the Manchester School District's decision to utilize the reimbursement-for-services model rather than send their own Special Educators to *Mill Falls* to provide for academic supports for the District's Special Education students enrolled at *Mill Falls*; 62% of the *current* Special Education students at *Mill Falls* come from Manchester, the others come from 6 other towns. Related to the Special Education Programming, in 2016/17 the School

hired all but one of the Paraprofessionals working with *Mill Falls* students (there is just one district which sends its own Paraprofessional at this time).

### **Future Growth Opportunities:**

With this significant Upper Elementary challenge in mind, as well as with the intense interest in the program overall as shown by the size of each Lottery Applicant pool, School leaders recognize that there is community interest in expanding the school size and considering program additions.

The Mill Falls Board of Trustees, in partnership with the School Administration, is currently studying paths for responsible expansion. The study involves careful consideration of the addition of a Middle School, and serious consideration of additional classrooms in the Kinder/Lower Elementary Program. As part of the research phase, the Administration has circulated parent surveys to get a better sense of what *Mill Falls* families would like to see. Also an important consideration is the restrictive New Hampshire charter school funding model and the projected costs of adding Middle School to *Mill Falls'* Public Montessori Model. It is hard to say "No" to so many who apply to join the School Community, but simply end up on its wait list. However, School Leaders must keep the organization's best interest in the fore as they plot an intelligent growth plan.

Were *Mill Falls* to add a Middle School Program, it would likely include an additional 48 students. It would most likely begin with a single group of twenty-four 7<sup>th</sup> Year Students, and then grow in the second year to include twenty-four 7<sup>th</sup> Year Students and twenty-four 8<sup>th</sup> Year Students. Growth of the Lower Elementary Program would likely include an additional Kinder Room as well as an additional Lower Elementary Room, again here that growth would come in steps – year one would have Kinder growth and year two would add in the Lower Elementary Room.

As was observed in *Mill Falls'* first growth period, School Leaders will keep the following in mind:

- The need to grow at a reasonable and responsible rate to best serve and support *Mill Falls* Students, their Families and School Faculty.
- The reality that growth, especially if a Middle School was added, will mean integration of students with and without Montessori experience.
- The need to establish programming for the younger students that includes multi-aged classrooms, led by highly qualified Montessori educators and/or programming for Middle School students that would reflect the Montessori culture and approach to individualized/small group learning structures

## **F: CURRICULUM**

To bring the *Mill Falls* Public Montessori Program into full view, this section begins with an explanation of the Montessori classroom, roles of Montessori teachers and then provides the overarching goals of the program.

## **The Montessori Classroom: A Prepared Environment**

Dr. Montessori believed that children learn best in what she termed a “prepared environment,” one that makes learning materials and experiences available to children in an organized fashion. Today this is described widely as child-centered education and active learning. The beautiful classrooms are filled with manipulatives — hands-on learning materials developed by Dr. Montessori, as well as other supplementary resources, all of which encourage even the youngest students to use all five senses to address concepts they will come to master. Teachers present these materials to their students, individually and in small or large group settings. Through order, repetition/practice, exploration, manipulation and communication, students begin to master concepts large and small, and get sense of their place in the world. Many of the materials used by students as they progress are self-correcting and begin with basic concepts, and then move toward more complicated principles. At each stage, Montessori students naturally move away from the materials toward abstraction, realizing that their mental processes are faster than the manipulative.

In the Montessori classroom the Teacher does not stand at the front of the room expecting that everyone *will* be or *can* be learning the same thing at the same time. Students progress at their own pace with a clear, personal learning plan, and individualized attention is built into the methodology. The child’s independence is nurtured, respected and celebrated.

Students are allowed and encouraged to move freely in their environment, moving through the curricular expectations by working with particular materials, or working on projects and academic challenges. Dr. Montessori believed strongly that movement is far more productive for students than a sedentary approach where children are expected to remain in their seats. A visitor to a Montessori classroom might observe many subjects — math, language, science, history, geography, art, music, etc. — simultaneously being studied by individual students or small groups of learners, independently and with their teachers.

Of course there are ground rules for the learning community and clear expectations on the part of the children and educators. The Montessori method fosters freedom of choice — what students want to learn — but also insists on the development of well-balanced learners. Children and their teachers develop a work contract and chart progress to ensure growth and success in all areas.

Traditionally, the Montessori workday is divided into multiple work blocks, which at *Mill Falls* are about 2.5 hours long. These extended work periods allow students to explore materials and concepts deeply and independently. It is here where children develop concentration, focus and inner-discipline.

The multi-age classrooms further assist in solidifying the learning process — the older children help teach the younger children, and what better way is there to build maturity, nurturing, leadership skills and mastery of subject than by classmates educating one another. Students model work habits, social and language skills and a shared culture of

positivism and support develops for all. Ideally, to be competitive later in life, children need to develop a strong sense of self and an ability to work with others.

### **The Teacher's Role: Observer & Guide**

The job of the Montessori teacher is to follow each child's progress, to create an environment where materials are made available and presented to the students when they are ready to progress, and to encourage children to complete each phase of their work. Montessori teachers are charged with meeting the students' physical, mental and emotional needs, with designing individual and group learning opportunities, and with creating extensive documentation of the progress and activity of all those in the classroom. Ultimately, Montessori teachers support their students in ways that lead the children toward their own successes.

These educators know when to step in, and when to take themselves away. They trust and respect the child, so that the children come to trust and respect themselves and others around them. Social responsibility is part of every aspect of the Montessori method, grace and courtesy part of school culture. Because most of the Montessori materials are self-correcting, they afford children the ability to learn on their own initiatives, thus enabling teachers to have one-to-one contact with children when the students require more assistance.

Traditionally, there are no grades or other forms of extrinsic reward or punishment, subtle or overt, in the Montessori model. But the public Montessori school must merge the Montessori methods of assessment — the teacher's observation, record keeping, portfolios and a growing selection of Montessori-oriented assessment materials — with standardized testing, to meet state and national requirements. Dr. Montessori did not believe in academic testing for children. However, she believed that children should learn to be a part of their national culture. Standardized testing is now a central component of our national educational culture. Like all public schools, *Mill Falls Charter School* incorporates the required standardized testing into its approach and curriculum. In addition, staff work with regular internal assessment to carefully follow and track students' progress and to improve on *Mill Falls'* Program by addressing gaps revealed in those assessments.

### **Montessori: Guiding Children Toward Their Full Potential**

The primary goal of a Montessori program is to help each child reach his/her full potential in all areas of life. The overarching effect of this *whole child* approach is that Montessori children become independent, lifelong learners, who take responsibility for themselves, for their classmates and for their environment. Montessori students experience learning as something to be loved and cherished, something that is beautiful, and something they are doing for themselves. While not every day is a perfect one for all of the students at *Mill Falls*, the reality is that *Mill Falls* students enthusiastically engage with their classroom materials, Teachers and peers, supporting the curiosity that helps them progress.

## **G: ACADEMIC & OTHER LEARNING GOALS & OBJECTIVES**

The following is a broad description, by subject, of *Mill Falls'* goals and the School's approach to the K-6 grade curriculum. It represents a merging of the *Common Core Curriculum and NH-specific requirements by grade* with *Montessori Curriculum & Approach*. During *Mill Falls'* first years of operation, the Educational Program Director led the Teaching Staff through curriculum development creating what the School refers to as 'The Best of Both Worlds.' This gave teachers and supporting staff voice in the process of curriculum development, and provided an important opportunity for team building, consensus building, and the incorporation of a wide selection of ideas put forth by experienced team members. The Teaching Staff has mapped the very specific *Montessori Scope & Sequence* to the *Common Core Curriculum* at all program levels.

*Please see Appendix D, the Mill Falls Curriculum & Approach Chart, which relates to the following narrative.*

### **Language Arts**

Goals:

- Students will read at or above grade level with fluency, accuracy and enjoyment in a way that makes meaning clear.
- Students will write effectively and creatively for a variety of purposes and audiences.
- Students will practice oral presentation across all curriculum areas to develop purposeful and articulate communication skills.

Curriculum:

Through use of manipulatives and a classroom environment rich in reading materials, *Mill Falls* students will develop both encoding and decoding skills. Phonics, grammar, punctuation, word study, etymology, reference/research skills and daily writing are introduced as spelling skills develop. Students will obtain a rich vocabulary and sophisticated oral and written skills. Children will learn to be reflective about what they read and write and to make connections between literary themes, genres and their everyday lives.

### **Mathematics**

Goals:

- Students will demonstrate solid and applicable understanding of key concepts and principles central to the study of numbers, geometry, algebra and problem solving.
- Students will gain an appreciation for and understanding of the history of mathematics and its applications.
- Students will participate in peer teaching to enable mastery of concepts at each level.

Curriculum:

Utilizing the Montessori method, an extensive set of manipulatives and the study of the history of math, *Mill Falls* students' understanding of mathematics will move from the very concrete to the abstract understanding of numbers, geometry, algebra and problem solving. Through individualized and group lessons, students will learn both static and dynamic addition, subtraction, multiplication and division in the development of sound

arithmetic skills. They will learn and manipulate fractions and decimals, explore concepts of equality and equivalence, geometric and algebraic concepts and principles, often utilizing self-correcting Montessori materials as well as group teaching and peer teaching in order to master their skills.

## **History**

Goals:

- Students will achieve comprehension of time and its passage.
- Students will develop a core understanding of the relationships between time, people and history.
- Students will have an understanding of, and appreciation for diversity and its role in societal development, locally and globally.

Curriculum:

*Mill Falls'* Montessori curriculum is grounded in cultural studies and awareness through the stories of time, life and civilization. The study of history begins with the concept of the passage of time, then geologic time and the study of civilization throughout history. Through use of the *Great Lessons* developed by Dr. Montessori, children will attain a grasp of the formation of the universe and celestial bodies, including our sun and Earth. Later, with the use of timelines for these areas of study, as well as other materials and student research, *Mill Falls* learners will come to understand how life developed on Earth and the role history plays in the development of culture and the impact of one's personal history on one's own development and civilization as a whole.

## **Geography & Culture**

Goals:

- Students will experience the earth as a globe, one made of sandpaper to distinguish land and water, and later one made smooth with colored continents. They will experience the continents as puzzle maps after making the transition from globes to flat maps.
- Students will study basic principles of mapping of the earth through simple map making, puzzles and other materials.
- Students will demonstrate knowledge of landforms by building topographical maps.
- Students will explore the relationships between basic human needs and resources and the development of cultures, states and countries.
- Students will conduct an in-depth study of one of the seven continents to demonstrate their understanding of this area of study (this is conducted on a 3-year cycle at *Mill Falls*)
- Students will draw flat maps of the continents using templates of the puzzle maps and in the upper grades display geographical knowledge by creating flat maps without guides or templates.
- Students will create personal timelines developed with the understanding of civilization's timeline.
- Students will study the United States and capitals, with a focus on New Hampshire with a focus on government study, in the 4th grade year.

**Curriculum:**

Utilizing the Montessori approach to integration of geography and culture, *Mill Falls* students will see and understand the relationship between human labor and economic development. By examining “fundamental needs” — food, shelter, transportation, clothing, art, religion, friendship and character — children come to appreciate how all humans are united through our common, fundamental needs. This area of study explores the interconnection between physical boundaries (through the study of maps, land forms, earth features, etc.) and the development of countries, capitals, language, economics, government and culture.

**Science****Goals:**

- Students will experience the distinction between Life Sciences and Physical Sciences.
- Students will explore Life Science through the study of humans, animals and plants.
- Students will experience Physical Science through experiments with liquids, solids and gases and in the various states they can manifest.
- Students will learn and practice the Scientific Method.
- Students will study the history of science and how it impacts our world.
- Students will follow the development of the earth and earth materials.
- Students will learn and practice the scientific method.

**Curriculum:**

Students will begin their study of science with botany, zoology, biology, and earth science through the exploration of history, discovery and the use of categorization and naming. They will employ the Scientific Method as they move through these lessons and into the more advanced areas of life science, earth science, physics, chemistry, human biology and the plant and animal kingdoms. These concepts are reinforced by the use of experiments and Montessori impressionistic charts designed to help children grasp complex/abstract phenomena. Additionally, the approach will integrate hands-on study, by focusing on process and techniques of discovery.

**Practical Life****Goals:**

- Students will experience concentration and greater skill through self-chosen work.
- Students will develop fine and gross motor skills and the fundamental movements we make as they learn to care for themselves and others.
- Students will develop executive functioning skills by experiencing tasks that require motor planning and have a beginning, middle and end.
- Students will care daily for their school environment, both inside and outside of the classroom.
- Students and Faculty will work collaboratively to establish green practices within the school setting.
- Students will work collaboratively to establish a caring community by developing and demonstrating grace and courtesy skills and respect for all members of the community.

### Curriculum:

A unique element in the Montessori tradition is the area of Practical Life where skills pertaining to care of one's self, the environment and all living things are taught with the goal that students become fully capable and responsible adults. It is in Practical Life where the youngest *Mill Falls* students develop their fine and gross motor skills learning to dress, pour, sort, wash and dry dishes and prepare simple foods, among other basic activities. As they mature, students will also aid in maintaining their School both inside and out, all with an emphasis on being stewards of their community and surroundings. Students and Faculty will develop Green practices within the school setting to foster an understanding of how to minimize our impact on the natural world. Practical Life activities encourage independence, responsibility, self-discipline and self-reliance, and aid in the development of concentration and cooperation, thus expanding students' social and emotional education and growth. It is also here where students develop and practice skills of grace and courtesy. By establishing a school-wide atmosphere of kindness and respect, children will work cooperatively with Faculty and parents to create a safe and secure learning environment where differences can be recognized and valued, and diversity celebrated. This prepares the students for the experience of community service.

### **Civics & Service**

#### Goals:

- Students will practice core values of kindness and consideration in the classroom and beyond.
- Students will study the history of service and community building.
- Students will understand, appreciate and participate in community service.
- Students will understand and appreciate diversity of all kinds and its impact on *Mill Falls Charter School*, as well as the greater local and global communities.
- Students will participate in community service and service learning programs and reflect upon those experiences.
- Students will participate in community projects that reinforce their understanding of the importance of caring deeply for our environment.
- This study culminates in the sixth year when students lead programs in school and – with research – arrange and complete service projects outside of the school setting.

### Curriculum:

Service and responsibility for others is a core Montessori value and as such will play a key role at the *Mill Falls Charter School*. *Mill Falls* Lower Elementary students will have ample opportunity to volunteer both within the school community and beyond. As they mature, the students will integrate service learning across areas of their curriculum. Students will be encouraged and supported as they serve their community in ways directly related to their studies. Those service experiences will then be brought back into the classroom through reflection — discussion, oral and visual presentations. The Civics and Service curriculum will teach students to appreciate diversity of all kinds and helps to build leadership skills.

## **Integrated Arts Programming: Technology, Music, Art, & Fitness/Wellness**

### ***Technology:***

#### Goals:

- Students will become familiar and comfortable with existing technologies leading to use in research and communication across all disciplines.
- Students will understand the history and impact of technology on human society.
- Students will become proficient in information and source management via the use of the Internet, databases, spreadsheets, graphing and word processing, etc.
- Students will use appropriate technology for research and communication.
- Students will be taught to be responsible and safe technology citizens.

#### Curriculum:

*Mill Falls'* technology curriculum will enable students to work confidently with existing and developing technologies given the interconnectedness of our 21st century world. Computers and software will be used as tools to aid in the students' educational needs and development in areas such as research and communication projects. Students will learn to utilize the Internet; organize data via databases, spreadsheets and graphing tools; and master word processing skills. Additionally, some of the supplementary, self-correcting software developed from within the Montessori community may be used by students in support of their studies. The availability of computers and technological study within the school setting will enhance students' ability to explore, discover and problem solve. This element of the curriculum is especially important, as we recognize that many of the students may not have access to appropriate computer literacy development at home. Technology is the backbone of our new economy and evolving culture and all students must be taught to be informed and responsible consumers.

### ***Visual & Performing Arts***

*Mill Falls'* Integrated Arts Program features an Art Curriculum and a Music Curriculum. In addition, visual arts and performing arts are integrated into classroom study and after school activities. Below is a broad overview of the goals of this curricular area.

#### Goals:

- Students and their teachers will integrate arts education across the curriculum, enhancing all areas of study.
- As part of the Integrated Arts Programming, students will understand the historical development and context of the visual and performing arts.
- Students will use visual and performing arts to explore and enhance story-telling skills alongside the development of their creativity, communication and technology skills.

#### Curriculum:

We will integrate the arts across the curriculum, enhancing all areas of study. The role of visual and performing arts will be integral for *Mill Falls* students as it is for Montessori students around the world. Story telling through words, visuals, music and performance will be utilized as teaching tools by Faculty. It will also be used creatively by students as a means of articulating their understanding of civilization and culture, reading, writing,

math, and science. The history of visual and performing arts will also be integrated into the curriculum. In addition, students will have the opportunity to explore their individual interests in each of these areas through research, individual and group projects. While developing their artistic communication skills, students will be expected to utilize technology in the study, practice and production of their creative work.

### ***Physical Education & Health***

Goals:

- Students will participate in a basic physical education program aimed at meeting the health needs of children and early adolescents.
- Students will understand human development through an age appropriate approach, exploring and promoting healthy sense of self.
- Students will understand the value of teamwork and sportsmanship via cooperative games and team sports.

Curriculum:

While building a healthy sense of self through physical activity and fitness, *Mill Falls* students will also have the opportunity to learn the importance of team building and teamwork through cooperative games and group sports. The fitness program is geared toward building physical strength and coordination to the best of each student's abilities, rather than competitive play. *Mill Falls* students will be given a physically enhanced and rewarding experience that contributes to a lifetime of healthy and active living. In addition to the weekly fitness program, and daily recess time, there are clubs, which include running (for all ages), soccer, Girls on the Run, among others.

The age appropriate Health Curriculum is integrated into classrooms activities and lessons. It explores human development including friendship, adolescent development, peer pressure, safe behaviors, mindfulness, nutrition, stress reduction and balanced, healthy living.

### **H: ACHIEVEMENT TESTS TO BE USED TO MEASURE PUPIL ACADEMIC AND OTHER GOAL ACHIEVEMENT INCLUDING, BUT NOT LIMITED TO OBJECTIVE AND AGE-APPROPRIATE MEASURES OF LITERACY AND NUMERACY SKILLS, INCLUDING SPELLING, READING, EXPOSITORY WRITING, HISTORY, GEOGRAPHY, SCIENCE, AND MATHEMATICS**

**Individualized Student Instruction & Progress Assessments:** While *Mill Falls'* youngest children play a very modest role in developing their individualized instruction plans, as students mature through the program, their role becomes significantly more meaningful. Older students and their teachers work together to ensure that the set goals are met. Three times per year, progress reports are issued for student and parent review. Additionally, teacher conferences are held twice each year, in November and March. The fall conferences focus on academic, personal and social growth goals; the spring meeting allows for review of student progress and plans for students' summer activities as needed. Going forward, the School aims to include the older students in the parent/teacher

conferences. In addition to the conferences, teachers also regularly email, call or meet with Parents/Guardians as required/requested based on each student's situation and needs.

Throughout the year, students at all levels are shown many ways to present and reflect on their accomplishments. Older students write weekly in their reflective with a focus on their practice of mindfulness. They reflect on their evolving feelings and in issues related to social interactions.

### **Forms of Assessment**

**Observation:** In *Mill Falls'* Montessori classrooms, the children are observed every day. Those observations are recorded by the classroom teachers and serve as a core reference for developing lesson plans and progress assessment and reports.

**Assessments:** In *Mill Falls' public* Montessori setting, staff utilizes additional means of formal and informal assessment both to satisfy national and state requirements, and to quantitatively measure each child's progress and the School's program's efficacy. *Mill Falls Charter School* uses assessment methods that correlate with skill areas across the curriculum. The results are used to make important educational decisions and adjustments to the individualized learning plans, thereby ensuring academic success. As per 194-B:8, V, "At least annually, and near the end of each school year, a chartered public school shall evaluate the educational progress of each pupil, as specified in RSA 194-B:3 II(h). Such evaluation shall include, but not be limited, to the New Hampshire statewide education improvement and assessment program, as provided in RSA 193-C. The cost of the state assessment program shall be borne by the state."

Since the School's opening year, the *Mill Falls* teaching staff has measured student level and improvement internally several times throughout the year. Using DIBELS, Fountas & Pinnell Benchmarks, and the rubric of the 6-Traits Writing Program, staff determines the reading, comprehension and writing levels of students. To date, Math levels are determined through the use of in-house assessments prepared or selected by the Educational Program Director, though she plans to move to a third-party on-line assessment program. Both Math and Reading/Comprehension/Writing assessments are done at the start of the school year for leveling, in the winter for progress measures, and again in the late spring to reveal the end of year progress. (*The Charter Renewal Binder includes the 2016/17 Assessment Schedule and sample assessments used K-6*).

**Collaborative Study:** The *Mill Falls* Teaching Teams from all three levels of this Public Montessori Elementary School (Kinder, Lower Elementary – mixed aged classrooms of grades 1-3; and the Upper Elementary – mixed aged classrooms of grades 4-6) regularly come together to discuss the gaps in their students' achievements and meaningful ways to improve upon comprehension in all content areas. This is a practice that is led by the Educational Program Director during which the Teaching Staff identifies particular areas of common weakness seen across classrooms and within the Program Levels.

### **Addressing *Mill Falls* Students' Needs in Reading, Writing & Arithmetic**

The student population at any charter school changes somewhat, as it does at most public schools - families move, circumstances change. While *Mill Falls* has not had enormous shifts in the student body, there has been a dramatic uptick in the numbers of students enrolling at *Mill Falls* who require special education supports in order to succeed.

The Administration has committed funds each year to the student support positions and related tool kits as outlined in previous sections. The full teaching team strongly believes that meaningful student improvements require collaboration with Math & Reading Interventionists and the Reading Coach along with the Special Educators. To that end, and beyond the classroom Montessori Materials, the School has purchased: Leveled Literacy Intervention Program (LLI) produced by Fountas & Pinnell, Foundations (produced by Wilson); Tools for the Upper Elementary Program (4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> graders), like *Just Words* and the *Wilson Reading System* help to round out *Mill Falls*' Tier 2 Reading Supports. All Lead Teachers have attended a series of professional development workshops with Fred Wolff who introduced the entire teaching staff to the *6-Traits Writing Program*. Teachers at all levels have woven the 6-Traits into classroom curriculum. Mr. Wolf has also taught a small group of *Mill Falls* educators how to teach *6-Trait Program* to their colleagues at the School. The Math Interventionist has been trained by Mahesh Sharma and has shared his approach with the Teaching Team. These resources have provided important complements to the Montessori approach.

### **I: FOR SCHOOLS OFFERING HIGH SCHOOL GRADE LEVELS, GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS SUFFICIENT TO ENSURE THAT THE SCHOOL HAS PROVIDED AN ADEQUATE EDUCATION FOR ITS PUPILS.**

Not Applicable.

### **J: STAFFING OVERVIEW, INCLUDING QUALIFICATIONS SOUGHT FOR PROFESSIONALS AND PARAPROFESSIONALS**

All *Mill Falls* Staff Members serve as leaders, guides and role models, and challenge our children to challenge themselves. The following maps out the Administration, followed by the Teaching Faculty.

#### **The *Mill Falls* Administration:**

The **Executive Director** is responsible for the School's Operations including but not limited to: Business, Budget Development, HR, Facility & Safety, Fundraising/Grant Writing, State and Federal Reporting, Board and Foundation Liaison, Outward Face of *Mill Falls*.

The **Educational Program Director**, most closely resembles a school principal. This person is responsible for the Educational Program including but not limited to: Supervision of the teaching staff, Curriculum and Assessment Development and Planning, Scheduling,

Program Enhancement, Hiring of Teaching Staff, Oversight of all Program Areas, Student Behavior/Parent Concerns beyond the classroom.

The **Office Project Manager** manages the Lottery and related enrollment, Free and Reduced Data Collection and Reporting, Health Records of all Enrolled Students, Billing for the Child Care Program, Management of the Food Pantry, Technology Oversight, and many other smaller projects.

The **Office Assistant** works at the School's front desk, answering phones, office emails, assisting visitors and parents, and processing the mail. The Office Assistant also oversees those children who are feeling ill. She keeps the physical and electronic student files up to date, and facilitates many communications between the School and the enrolled families, among many other smaller projects.

The **Bookkeeper** works closely with the Executive Director to manage the financial records and prepare payments, deposits and required financial reporting.

*Both the Office Assistant and the Project Manager support the Executive Director and the Educational Program Director who in turn work in support of the Educational Program.*

### **The Mill Falls Teaching Faculty**

To ensure that students at *Mill Falls Charter School* are supported in their academic endeavors and personal growth, the School seeks highly qualified, nurturing educators who treat the students with dignity and respect all the while challenging them to reach their highest potential. As a result, *Mill Falls* students feel safe and encouraged and are thereby free to mature, develop and reach their full potential. As noted below, far more than the required 50% of our Lead Teachers are NH Certified.

The School's K-6 classrooms are populated as follows: One (1) Lead Teacher and one (1) Assistant Teacher per classroom.

*Mill Falls' Lead Teachers* (currently 7 teachers) must hold, at minimum, 4-year liberal arts degrees and have been Montessori trained. They understand and believe in the Montessori philosophy and materials and are familiar with individualized observation and record keeping. They are also able to adapt Montessori methods and curriculum to the *Common Core Curriculum* and visa versa. *Mill Falls Charter School* teachers are inquisitive, reflective, creative problem solvers, committed to the School's Mission.

*Mill Falls' Assistant Teachers* (currently 7 assistants) must demonstrate their ability to embrace the Montessori approach and are expected to fully support the *Mill Falls Charter School* Mission. Over the years *Mill Falls' Assistant Teachers* have brought a vast array of educational experiences to the School. This has helped enrich the school environment and expand the staff's knowledge base. During *Mill Falls' first five years*, several of the Assistant Teachers have acquired Montessori training and when possible they have been hired to fill Lead Teacher positions.

**The Support Staff & Paraprofessionals**, as noted on page 13 consists of: Reading Interventionist, Math Interventionist, English Language Learner Coordinator, Reading Coach, Student Services Coordinator, Two Special Educators and 7 Paraprofessionals.

**Certification & Training:** As per New Hampshire's charter school statute, RSA 194-B:14. IV, 50% of the School's Lead Teachers are required to hold New Hampshire teaching certificates or have at least three years of teaching experience. The School has met and exceeded this requirement each operational year. The support staff members are all trained in their areas of expertise and continue to enhance their knowledge of their focus area through professional development and in some cases additional degrees or certificates. All of them, including the Paraprofessionals, are expected to fully support the *Mill Falls Charter School Mission*. (*The Charter Renewal Binder includes a list of current staff and their certifications and experience.*)

**Professional development** is a core element at *Mill Falls Charter School*, aiding in high teacher retention, furthering their educational growth and supporting the creation and maintenance of a positive atmosphere. This has also enabled ongoing support, assessment and improvement of the School's Mission and goals.

Each month during the school year features a half-day of professional development for staff built into the school calendar to make time and space for *Mill Falls'* exceptional educators to further enhance their skills and understanding and to provide critical collaborative planning time. Each year the School's budget includes professional development funds for staff members, at rates that reflect their position/responsibilities on staff.

**Administrative Staff Supports:** The Educational Program Director meets with all teaching staff at least once or twice per month as part of her supervision model. She has also created a Teacher Mentor Program for Lead Teachers who are new to the School's staff. There are also Program Level Leaders who are Lead Teachers who over see curricular development and challenges at their Program Levels. The Mentors and the Program Level Leaders receive small stipends for their leadership work in these areas.

## **K: PERSONNEL COMPENSATION PLANS, INCLUDING PROVISION FOR LEAVES AND OTHER BENEFITS, IF ANY.**

The *Mill Falls Staff Handbook* clearly outlines all staff related issues including compensation, leaves and benefits. (*A copy of that Handbook is included in the Renewal Binder*).

### **Payroll**

All staff is paid bi-weekly. All Teaching staff is paid based on salary, while Administrative Support staff and Paraprofessionals are paid hourly based on timesheets. Additionally,

those salaried staff working in the After School and/or Before/AfterCare Programs are paid hourly. All members of the staff are provided with contracts that note the salary or hourly rate, and any benefits and leave.

### **Vacation**

*Mill Falls Charter School* publishes an annual calendar of holidays and vacations during which the School will officially be closed. Contracts with each staff member outline the expected work schedules and related vacation time.

### **Leave**

Sick and Personal leave is stated in each contract when applicable, and information regarding additional leave information is included in the *Mill Falls Staff Handbook*. Each year, Lead Teachers and other full time professional staff may roll over unused sick leave into the Sick Day Bank, which was established in the 2016/17 school year (the procedure is included in the Staff Handbook).

### **Health Insurance & Short Term Disability**

Since 2012, *Mill Falls Charter School* has provided its full-time professional staff with a health insurance benefit of \$5100 toward the cost of the health insurance plans offered by the School. In 2016/17 the School began a partnership with Aflac and offers its full-time professional staff up to \$10 per week toward an Aflac Short Term Disability Plan. All staff may access the Aflac group rates for the various programs offered by Aflac.

### **Retirement**

In 2012 *Mill Falls Charter School* established a self-financed retirement option for all staff. Currently, those accounts are self-managed IRA Accounts. While the School is not able to provide matching funds, anyone on staff may chose to self-fund his/her retirement by having funds pulled from their paychecks. *Mill Falls* does not participate in the New Hampshire State Retirement Program for public school teachers.

### **Other Benefits**

*For a complete list of current benefits, please see Appendix E*

### **Unemployment**

Since its establishment, *Mill Falls* has been registered as a self-funding entity. To date, the School has had one unemployment claim filed by a staff member who was not given a contract following that employees first year of work at the School. A budget line item funds those payments, and all unused funds are held aside at year's end to pay for future claims, should that be required.

### **General Provisions**

*Mill Falls Charter School* complies with all federal, state, and local laws and rules related to pre-employment screening, hiring, employment compensation and leave, and reserves the right to amend the above personnel provisions as necessary to comply with applicable laws and rules, and as otherwise necessary.

**L: PUPIL TRANSPORTATION PLAN, INCLUDING REASONABLE PROVISION FROM THE CHARTER SCHOOL'S OWN RESOURCES FOR TRANSPORTATION OF PUPILS RESIDING OUTSIDE THE DISTRICT IN WHICH THE CHARTER SCHOOL IS PHYSICALLY LOCATED**

*Mill Falls* is located on the east side of Manchester, close to exit 6 off of I93, and near to city bus stops.

For purposes of transportation, *Mill Falls Charter School* follows the guidelines of 194-B:2,V (amended in the Spring of 2016) which states: "Pupils who reside in the school district in which the chartered public school is located shall be provided transportation to that school by the district on the same terms and conditions as provided for in RSA 189:6 and RSA 189:8 and that transportation is provided to pupils attending other public schools within that district." As a result, students attending *Mill Falls Charter School* who reside in Manchester may choose to ride the MTA buses.

For students attending the *Mill Falls Charter School* from outside the host district, we serve as an open enrollment school under RSA 194-B:1,VI. Students who reside outside of Manchester, must either request their assigned districts to transport them, or arrange for their own transportation. *Mill Falls Charter School* aims to assist in facilitating ride sharing between families of students from outside Manchester, through access to a *Mill Falls* Carpooling Google Group, as well as mentions of ride sharing needs in the School's weekly newsletter.

**M: STATEMENT OF ASSURANCES RELATED TO COMMITMENT TO NONDISCRIMINATION**

The Montessori method embraces diversity and *Mill Falls Charter School* celebrates diversity in all its forms. The School does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, national or ethnic origin, age, sex, sexual orientation, disability, or marital status in the selection of students or staff or in the administration of the School or in any other way that is prohibited by state and federal law. The Board of Trustees and School Administration has developed and continues to adopt policies and administrative procedures to address any concerns.

**N: METHOD OF COORDINATING WITH PUPIL'S LOCAL EDUCATION AGENCY (LEA) FOR MATTERS PERTAINING TO ANY REQUIRED SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS OR SERVICES, INCLUDING METHOD OF COMPLIANCE WITH ALL FEDERAL AND STATE LAWS PERTAINING TO EDUCATIONALLY DISABLED PUPILS.**

*Mill Falls Charter School* complies with all federal and state special education laws and rules applicable to a New Hampshire charter school setting. In *Mill Falls'* first year, there were less than 5 enrolled students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) related to their disabilities. As the School's program has grown, so has its Special Education

population. As of this writing, 24% of *Mill Falls* students receive some type of special education supports.

### **Public Charter Schools & Special Education**

As an open enrollment school, the *Mill Falls Charter School* accepts applications from any child who is a New Hampshire resident and will discuss the School with any interested parent. In accordance with New Hampshire law (RSA 194-B:8), *Mill Falls Charter School* will not discriminate against any child with a disability as defined in RSA 186-C. Under New Hampshire's charter school statute, RSA 194-B:11, III, when a child with disabilities attends a chartered public school, all current options available to the parent and the school district are retained.

### **School Districts' Special Education Responsibility for Evaluation Process**

ED 1104.01, effective 6/28/08, sets forth the following sequence of the special education process:

- (a) Referral;
- (b) Evaluation;
- (c) Determination of eligibility;
- (d) Development and approval of the IEP;
- (e) Placement;
- (f) Implementation and Monitoring of the IEP; and
- (g) Annual review of the IEP.

As per RSA 194-B:11, III, responsibility for the special education process for children with disabilities attending a public charter school remains with the child's sending school district. Once the student is enrolled at the School, the charter school shares in the process. In addition, RSA 194-B:11, III provides that the sending school district remains responsible for the funding for children with disabilities attending a chartered public school. Any federal funding or other funding available to a sending district related to special education, to the extent and in a manner acceptable to the funding source, shall also be directed to the receiving chartered public school on an eligible per pupil basis pursuant to RSA 194-B:11, IV. These important provisions allow the responsible sending district and *Mill Falls Charter School* to cooperate creatively to meet a student's special education needs. The sending district is required to provide *Mill Falls Charter School* with a complete copy of each student's IEP for implementation and monitoring purposes.

### **Charter School's Responsibility & Method of Coordinating with Student's Sending School District**

As a public school, *Mill Falls Charter School* takes seriously its responsibility to make a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) available to all students with disabilities under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Further, *Mill Falls* respects the hybrid model which that New Hampshire has adapted where by the students sending district is responsible for ensuring the provision of a FAPE; providing and funding special education and related services to children with disabilities from their school district who are attending chartered public schools. As such, the primary responsibility of a public chartered school with regard to special education is coordination with the student's

sending school district and, in cases involving services provided during the school day, oversight of the implementation of the IEP on a day-to-day basis.

Special education services for *Mill Falls* students with IEP's have been delivered at the School, except in a very few instances where the child's disability required that they go to an entirely different facility for a portion of the day to support his/her access to the general curriculum.

In nearly all cases, the School has worked very productively with the sending districts (annually 6-7 different districts). *Mill Falls* employs a Student Services Coordinator whose role it is to act as the liaison with the sending districts and to insure that all services are delivered appropriately in the *Mill Falls* public Montessori setting.

As per 193-B:11, III, sending districts may chose from 6 methods of service delivery. In most cases, sending districts working with *Mill Falls* now prefer the reimbursement model (option 5 listed in 193-B:11,III) whereby the *Mill Falls* contracts with the sending district and hires the Academic Service Provider(s) and/or Paraprofessionals and then charges the sending districts an agreed upon hourly fee for those delivered services and related planning/meeting time during the School Year. Based on the 2016/17 caseload, the School now employs two Special Educators on a near full-time bases who provide small group and in some cases individualized instructions, following exactly the services set forth in each child's IEP. Related services for all current Special Education students at *Mill Falls* are provided by staff from the sending districts or organizations with whom the districts have contracted.

Current law, while not perfect, provides an excellent opportunity for the charter school to collaborate with the sending school districts on individual students' special education matters and implementation of the IEPs of students who attend the School.

The responsibilities of the *Mill Falls Charter School* Student Services Coordinator, who is supervised by the Educational Program Director, include:

1. Notifying districts about any newly enrolled student with an IEP.
2. Providing information about the *Mill Falls Charter School* to the sending district and parents or legal guardians of children entitled to special education.
3. Attending meetings as part of the *Mill Falls* Teaching Team.
4. Receiving a copy of the current IEP from the sending school district, and reviewing it with each teacher and any staff involved in its implementation.
5. Contacting special education administrators or their designees at each sending district to establish the best way to coordinate the services for a particular student (e.g. determining who should be contacted, and the best way to reach them).
6. Maintaining an informational record of the current contact person from each sending district responsible for special education and making contact with such people as needed.
7. Alerting the sending district to any individual student issues that rise to a level of

- concern needing district attention and/or necessitating a referral.
8. Assisting the sending school district in developing/updating the IEP when requested.
  9. Overseeing the implementation of the IEP as it is written.
  10. Notifying the sending school district of concerns about a current IEP and requesting a review of the IEP when necessary.
  11. Making recommendations for services or accommodations based upon the School's observations of an individual student and continuing to dialogue about concerns until they are reviewed.
  12. Being available to the sending district to review the student's progress under the current IEP and to make recommendations.
  13. Working with the sending district to develop procedures designed to ensure that individualized education programs are monitored in a regular and systematic manner.

## **0: ADMISSIONS PROCEDURES**

*Mill Falls* is founded on a commitment to building and supporting a diverse community of learners and their families who embrace the Montessori approach to education and recognize the unique journey that this opportunity provides and requires. Admission to *Mill Falls Charter School* is open to any student who resides in the State of New Hampshire. Methods of admission shall not be designed, intended or used to discriminate or violate individual rights in any manner prohibited by law.

### **Admission Procedures:**

The *Mill Falls Charter School* follows the basic method of admissions that defines charter schools nationwide:

- Admission shall be blind.
- Should the number of applicants exceed capacity, students will be chosen by a lottery system, with a wait list developed from the lottery overflow.

As per charter law, each year a Lottery Official with no connection to the School volunteers to pull the numbers of every family enrolled in the Lottery. Officials have included (in order) Sally Ward, the then-Acting Dean of University of New Hampshire at Manchester; Chris Dolloff, Owner and CEO of City Side Management; Judy Reardon the then-Council to Senator Jeanne Shaheen; Mark Connolly Investment Manager and former Commissioner of Securities, and former NH Gubernatorial candidate; Joyce Craig, former School Board and Alderperson in Manchester, current and former Candidate for Mayor of Manchester. This year's Lottery was officiated by New Hampshire Senator Dan Feltes.

At a minimum, the admissions process includes the following:

- 1: Prospective students and their families are strongly encouraged to attend an Information Session to learn about the specifics of *Mill Falls'* Public Montessori Program. Such Sessions are held during the Lottery Enrollment Period, which generally runs between early-January and mid-March.

- 2: In addition to the materials shared at the Information Sessions, interested families are encouraged to explore the School's extensive website which has both links to information about the Montessori approach and many specifics about the School's Programming - its philosophy, daily schedule, expectations of attending students and their families, etc.
- 3: Interested families must submit one Lottery Enrollment Application for each child being enrolled in the Lottery and that must be received before the stated Lottery Enrollment Deadline.
- 4: As part of the admission process, Parents/Guardians are required to sign an agreement indicating their understanding of the School's Mission and expectations.
- 5: Once received, all applications are reviewed for accuracy by School Staff and families are sent a communication from *Mill Falls* noting that their application(s) has/have been received.
- 6: Each year thus far, the number of applicants has far exceeded the number of available spots, and following NH Charter Law (RSA 194-B:9, the School has held a formal lottery each spring. As per the law, the Lottery is held at the School, officiated by a member of the community who is unaffiliated with *Mill Falls*. The Lottery is organized by grade. Each family who enrolls a child or multiple children is assigned a Family Lottery Number (found to be the fairest way to run the lottery). On Lottery Day, each Family Lottery Number is pulled. Those children who gain entry to *Mill Falls* via the Lottery are placed at their grade level if openings exist, all others are placed on the wait list, which is organized by grade.
- 7: All accepted students are notified immediately following the annual Lottery by phone. All those who entered the Lottery but did not secure a spot, are notified of their wait list status in writing in the days after the Lottery.
- 8: Soon after the admission process is complete, *Mill Falls Charter School* holds meetings for admitted students and their families.

The Board of Trustees of *Mill Falls Charter School* has established and regularly reviews the School's Enrollment and Admissions Policy and Administrative Procedures. *Please see Appendix F for the current Enrollment Policy.*

### **Enrollment Provisions**

- *Mill Falls Charter School* offers automatic re-enrollment to its students. Each winter, Families are asked to complete an Intent to Continue Form by a stated date preceding the Annual Lottery, so there is clarity about available spaces.
- *Mill Falls Charter School* admits students from the wait list as spaces become available after the Lottery and/or throughout the year.
- Siblings of children already enrolled at the School receive preference in enrollment, but must be enrolled in the Lottery in order to be considered candidates for sibling placement.
- The Enrollment Policy provides for preference in enrollment to children of School Faculty as part of the employee benefits package.

- Children of the Founders<sup>2</sup> of *Mill Falls Charter School* receive priority for placement, as a means of recognition of their sweat equity in establishing *Mill Falls Charter School*.

**P: PHILOSOPHY OF STUDENT GOVERNANCE AND DISCIPLINE AND AGE APPROPRIATE DUE-PROCESS PROCEDURES TO BE USED FOR DISCIPLINARY MATTERS, INCLUDING SUSPENSION AND EXPULSION.**

The physical and emotional safety and well-being of *Mill Falls Charter School* students is top priority for School Administration, Faculty and the Board of Trustees.

Inherent in the Montessori approach, and a core value of *Mill Falls Charter School*, is the development of student leadership skills within the classroom environments and schoolwide. In multi-age classrooms, *Mill Falls Charter School* students learn from and lead one another as they progress academically, and develop socially. Individual students have means of communicating their concerns within their classrooms to their peers and if needed to adults. Should issues develop beyond the confines of the classroom (recess, field trips, etc.), students may employ those same means of conflict resolution developed and supported in each classroom and program level.

Each year, each classroom works together to establish classroom rules, which all students agree to uphold. These focus on the basics of safety and respect, and create clear and meaningful methods of problem solving. And while the Montessori approach offers tools to support's priority of safety-first, *Mill Falls* has also established multiple student-safety related policies and procedures. Those include everything from an overarching Child Safety Policy to Bus Safety Agreements and Safe Technology Usage Agreements, among others. (*Please note, all Mill Falls policies are included the School's Renewal Binder.*)

Through extensive preparation of the classroom environment and the Grace and Courtesy curriculum, Dr. Montessori achieved an extraordinarily positive and peaceful environment in her classrooms. *Mill Falls* follows the Montessori approach to behavioral expectations, leading children towards self-discipline. Faculty aims to avoid spending unnecessary time responding and reacting to behavior problems. Instead, we proactively teach and model expected behavior. Discipline is more a learning experience and less a punitive experience.

To facilitate communication skills, even the youngest *Mill Falls* students are taught to utilize the classroom resources to mitigate conflict and also to celebrate kindness. Developmentally appropriate programs are utilized throughout the year to establish and emphasize mindfulness, kindness and peaceful resolutions. Many of the tools provide students with a means of monitoring their own behavior. Additionally, there are opportunities for mediation conducted by teachers when needed. *Mill Falls* children learn

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<sup>2</sup> Defined as persons who have volunteered 200 hours or more toward the upstart of *Mill Falls Charter School* between Sept. 2010 and Dec. 2011.

to problem solve and achieve resolution in the context of the School's safe and peaceful environment with the goal of establishing such skills for lifetime use.

It is important that each child clearly understands the rules and possible consequences for those times he or she may violate the rules. The Family Handbook details behavior-related procedures and policies that are adopted when expected behavior is not maintained in the School Community (*and is part of the School's Renewal Binder*). Disrespectful or continually disruptive behaviors are not accepted. Conflicts are typically dealt with in the classroom and only when the issue is significant or an action seriously egregious, does it come to the Educational Program Director for an intervention. Consequences for disrespectful or continually disruptive behavior will depend on the severity of the offense, and may include parental involvement and, at its most severe, removal from the School Community.

**Q: METHOD OF ADMINISTERING FISCAL ACCOUNTS AND REPORTING, INCLUDING A PROVISION REQUIRING FISCAL AUDITS AND REPORTS TO BE PERFORMED BY AN INDEPENDENT CERTIFIED PUBLIC ACCOUNTANT**

*Mill Falls Charter School* follows New Hampshire public school accounting guidelines and utilizes internal accounting controls necessary to safeguard its assets. The School maintains accurate financial records in accordance with Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP) for non-profit corporations. An annual financial audit is conducted by an independent certified public accountant and is reported to the Department of Education, as per charter law. *Mill Falls* also posts its audits on the School's website.

The School Board's Treasurer with support from the Finance Committee provides the oversight necessary for monitoring the financial status of the School. The Treasurer reports the financial status of the School to the Board at least monthly via a budget-to-actual report. The Board has adopted and shall continue to adopt policies necessary for the sound financial management of the School, including policies on Conflicts of Interest and Whistle Blower Protections for Board members and Faculty. Accounting activities consist primarily of the bi-weekly payroll paid to school personnel, the payment and recording/tracking all operational expenses, which are tracked to the operating budget.

A general account exists for the administration of funds, the Executive Director, the Treasurer and named members of the Board have check-writing authority. A fidelity bond in accordance with the guidelines of the New Hampshire Department of Revenue Administration will cover each individual with check-writing authority.

*Mill Falls Charter School* complies with all requirements specified in the law pertaining to reporting requirements (RSA 194-B:10, I-V). The School complies with all required reporting, including but not limited to: an annual program report provided to the DOE, quarterly and annual financial reporting, pupil count, an annual audit completed by an independent firm, and establishment and approval by the Board of an annual school budget, among many other reports.

The overarching Fiscal policies established by the Board address all the working principals set out above. The Board, by way of the Finance Committee, regularly reviews those policies in accordance with its governance responsibilities.

## **R: ANNUAL BUDGET, INCLUDING SOURCES OF FUNDING**

*Please see Appendix G for the 2016/17 Budget.*

Each spring, the *Mill Falls* Board of Trustees reviews and approves an annual budget for the next operating year. The budget is developed by the Executive Director, with input from staff, and then brought to the Finance Committee for discussion. Once approved by the Finance Committee, the budget is then presented to the full Board for approval. It is then shared publically (currently on the School's website). The main section of the budget reflects the operating costs – noting both the expected per-pupil aid as well as the budgeted expense areas. Income and expenses outside of that operational budget are tracked separately as these costs and income sources are variable (such as School Fundraising and the Child Care Program). In addition, the School aims to continue to access appropriate Title Funds and other Federal Grants to support programming. School-based fundraising includes annual events and smaller projects, aimed at financial gain and the solidifying of the School Community and Mission.

As mentioned in the introductory section of this document, the *Mill Falls Charter School Foundation*, also works annually to raise significant funds to complement the per-pupil funding, facilitating the School's ability to reach it's full goals and mission and guarantee long-term sustainability. The School, in partnership with the Foundation, continues to offset the costs of operating a New Hampshire public charter school with the current funding levels, through a variety of means, including securing grant monies, curriculum partnerships, as well as private and corporate contributions. Supplementary fundraising is critical to the long-term viability and success of the School. The Foundation has been able to cultivate an informed and committed community of supporters for *Mill Falls Charter School*. All donations are tax deductible to the extent permitted by law. *Please also see Appendix H, for brief biographical information of the Foundation Board.*

## **S: SCHOOL CALENDAR ARRANGEMENT AND THE NUMBER AND DURATION OF DAYS PUPILS ARE TO BE SERVED PURSUANT TO RSA 194-B: 8, III.**

The *Mill Falls Charter School* Calendar consists of 175 days, and includes near-monthly Professional Development days for staff when our students are released early. All other school days are 6.5 hours. In total, the School's Calendar meets and exceeds RSA 194-B:8, III in terms of required number of attendance hours. Each year, the School bases its calendar on that of the host district – Manchester - in order to best coordinate transportation services. *Please also see the 2016/17 School Calendar, Appendix I.*

Currently, *Mill Falls* opens its doors at 8:15 with an 8:30am start, and the official school day ends at 3pm. It is understood that some flexibility may be required in future years to meet the host district's bus route schedule.

## **T: PROVISION FOR PROVIDING CONTINUING EVIDENCE OF ADEQUATE INSURANCE COVERAGE**

Pursuant to RSA 194-B:1, III, *Mill Falls Charter School* is a public school afforded the same protections as all other public schools under RSA 507(b), which provides for limited general liability for the charter school and its agents. The School annually purchases adequate insurance coverage as required by the State, including but not limited to general liability for the School. *Mill Falls* currently contracts with Hanover Insurance for comprehensive coverage including building liability, board and personnel general liability, and civil rights coverage. The School contracts with AmTrust for its worker's compensation insurance. The *Mill Falls* Administration seeks to get the best coverage for the organization, and annually researches insurance options. The School provides proof of coverage to the DOE as part of its required annual reporting.

## **U: IDENTITY OF CONSULTANTS, PARTNERS & FRIENDS OF THE SCHOOL**

Since the School's establishment, there have been many consultants and friends of the project who have worked with School Administration, the Board and the Faculty. Many of these experts have willingly shared their wisdom and experience at various phases of *Mill Falls'* growth in areas such as curricular development, professional development, operational questions and challenges. Below is a partial list:

- **Charles Terranova, Montessorian Educator & Consultant:** Charles has over 40 years of experience as a Montessori teacher, consultant, teacher-trainer and school evaluator. He is Montessori trained from toddler through upper elementary and has experience at every level of school functioning. Earlier in his career he owned and operated a Montessori school in Massachusetts. More recently, he was the lead Montessorian at the *Tobin School* in Cambridge, MA, during the district school's changeover from a traditional elementary to a Montessori school. Charles develops and adapts Montessori materials for his classrooms and other schools, and specializes in curriculum development, student evaluation and professional development for staff. He also consults in areas of board education and training. Charles works worldwide with communities, educators and parents committed to the Montessori approach. Charles worked with us during the charter development and over the last 4 years, has met with parents/guardians to deepen their understanding and appreciation of the Montessori approach.

- **Fred Wolf, Writing Consultant:** Fred spent nineteen of his twenty-four years in education as a classroom teacher, working with students in grades 5-12. While some of Fred's work with students was more traditional in nature, he always worked to find innovative methods to motivate students. He has trained teachers across the United States

and in over a dozen different countries on four continents on the Six Traits of Writing. Fred has worked with *Mill Falls* staff over the last several years first to integrate the Six Traits Program and related bench mark measurements of writing. Last year, he trained generously *Mill Falls* staff members in the method so that they can now train other *Mill Falls* staff.

- **River Valley Charter School: Director, Andy Willemsen & Assistant Director Jonnie Lyn Evans & Staff.** *River Valley* has been an educational partner and friend to *Mill Falls* since the School's planning/founding. Jonnie Lyn, who has been involved with two public Montessori just over the border in Massachusetts, served on the Board for a few years before landing her current job at River Valley. The *Mill Falls* Administration is working closely with Jonnie Lyn and Andy to establish a regional one-day conference of public Montessori school staff; the first conference is scheduled for January 2018.

- **Elizabeth Slade, Sarah Suchman & the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector (NCMPS).** This organization grew out of the long established American Montessori Society. Now it's own independent organization, Elizabeth, Sarah and others associated with this new undertaking, aim to nurture and support the growing movement of public Montessori schools across the country. **Elizabeth Slade** is a Montessori educator and consultant and worked in both the private and public sectors over the last 24 years. Elizabeth has expertise in the development of benchmark standards and merging *Montessori Scope & Sequence* with public school curricula, among many other areas. **Sara Suchman** is the Director of Coaching & School Services at NCMPS. She has been both an educator and an administrator at schools across the country. In her current role, Sara directly supports schools and practitioners in areas of school start-up, on-going leadership and instructional coaching, a full array of professional development offerings, school evaluation, improvement and strategic planning. We look forward to continuing the growing relationship with the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector.

- **Seacoast Center for Education, Inc.** in Stratham, NH and the **Montessori Educator Teacher Training Collaborative** in Lexington, MA, are Montessori elementary teacher education programs in the region. Both sites have provided training for *Mill Falls'* Teaching Staff and we hope to continue to access their programs going forward.

- **Mary Health, Educator & Legislator:** Mary is a committed life-long educator who has served as Deputy Education Commissioner of NH, Dean of the School of Education at Southern New Hampshire University, and is currently a NH State Legislature with a focus on issues related to education. Mary has been a friend of *Mill Falls* from the start, bridging conversations and relationships with educators and law-makers from across the state and sharing her wisdom with us as well.

- **MaryAnn Manoogian, Director of the Center for Women's Business Advancement at Southern New Hampshire University.** MaryAnn has over thirty years of leadership and nonprofit management experience in various sectors. She has generously shared her expertise with school leadership and worked carefully with the Board of Trustees during its most recent Executive Director Search. Her unique skills and expertise in the realm of

nonprofit management and leadership have made her an important resource for our still-growing public non profit organization.

- **Probono Legal Representation by Bernstein Shur.** Since 2013, the law firm of Bernstein Shur has provided *Mill Falls* with pro bono legal support. The firm has advised us in areas of employment, including aiding in the development of contracts and staff handbook, and has helped us navigate challenging staffing and parenting issues that have arisen over the years. We look forward to a continued relationship with the firm going forward.
- **Susan Grodman, Assistant Head for External Affairs at the Derryfield School.** Susan has been a friend of *Mill Falls* since the School's founding. In the first year of operation, she paired her 10<sup>th</sup> grade students with 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students at *Mill Falls* to establish a mentoring program. Nearly every year since 2012, *Mill Falls* students have been invited to *Derryfield* to experience their incredible theater productions. Twice now, graduating seniors have worked with *Mill Falls* staff and students on theatrical productions. *Derryfield* also hosts *Mill Falls'* annual 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Graduation.
- **Renee Lecaine, Special Educator.** Renee is the founder and owner of *The Language, Literacy & Learning Center, LLC* where two of our current students receive highly specialized reading support services as per their IEPs. Renee is a licensed Speech-Language Pathologist, Certified Special Educator and reading clinician. She has just begun working with *Mill Falls'* Educational Program Director to review the School's Programming with an aim toward strengthening curricular supports to more effectively reach and teach *Mill Falls* students.
- **University of New Hampshire, Manchester, STEM Lab.** In 2013, *Mill Falls* partnered with the then-new STEM at UNH to launch their elementary program. While other participating schools created after school programs, the *Mill Falls* partnership was the only school-day endeavor. *Mill Falls'* 4<sup>th</sup> graders were bused weekly to the UNH-Manchester campus and were instructed by UNH teaching staff. They worked with cutting edge technology and programming linked to NASA. This partnership lasted for just one year.

It is the Administration's hope and expectation that there will be additional opportunities to develop curricular partnerships with area universities, music and art schools, as well as the Currier Museum of Art.

## **V: PHILOSOPHY OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT AND RELATED PLANS AND PROCEDURES**

The students of *Mill Falls Charter School* achieve the greatest success when teachers and families work together. *Mill Falls* sees parents/guardians as key participants in the building of the School Community and the success of the Program. The regular presence of parents/guardians at the School is part of the landscape of *Mill Falls Charter School*, not an exception.

Parent/guardian involvement begins even before admission. As part of the enrollment process, parents/guardians are asked to sign an agreement indicating their understanding of the Mission and expectations of the students and their families. The School regularly asks parents/guardians participate in school activities as their schedules allow. These activities include, but are not limited to: reading for fluency with children, organizing the library, offering special presentations about parents/guardians work, cultures, etc., running after school clubs, acting as school ambassadors, chaperoning field trips or other activities, helping to teach handwriting, caring for classroom pets over vacations, helping to assemble classroom materials, running fundraising or friend-raising programs, among many others. They are asked to volunteer approximately 10-15 hours per family over the course of each school year. As noted in Section B (page 7) there are spots on the *Mill Falls* School Board for Trustees who are parents/guardians of enrolled students; parents are also encouraged to attend Board meetings.

*Mill Falls Charter School* works to accommodate the different needs and situations of families and values the variety of ways the School families contribute to the education of their children and the School overall. We have established parent committees including: the Hospitality Committee, Family Events Committee, School-Based Fundraising Committee, Teacher/Staff Support Committee and the Ambassador Committee to facilitate activities. It is a goal during the School's second charter period to further strengthen the structure of a *Mill Falls* Parent Group and expand the variety of family events.

Parent/Guardian participation in their children's educational journey is also a key to success. Parents/guardians of children at *Mill Falls Charter School* receive regular reports on their children's academic and emotional growth (see *Assessment, Section H*). There are also several opportunities during the course of the year, when families are invited in to the *Mill Falls* classrooms. Once a month, they can come to read with their children on Fridays. In the fall they are invited to 'Bring Your Parent to School Night' when the children lead their parents/guardians through a mini Montessori work cycle to explore the classroom Materials. Each fall, the Upper Elementary Students present their research projects about famous people in history in a Wax Museum presentation, which is open to all families and friends. These programs, and others aim to involve and engage parents/guardians in their children's life at school and their overall education. The Montessori approach empowers both parents and their children to become advocates for their education, while encouraging respectful and thoughtful dialogue. *Mill Falls* expects that parents/guardians will work with the Faculty and the School Administration to ensure that communication is two-way, by offering a variety of means for that communication to take place (e.g. written feedback, surveys, and meetings).

*Mill Falls Charter School* is committed to the education of everyone in our community — our students, our teachers and our parents/guardians. The School seeks to offer a variety of educational opportunities and aims to shape the School as a place where people from within and beyond the School Community come together to engage, experience, and grow. Professional and family education helps to deepen the understanding of the Montessori approach, highlight issues faced by our students, and facilitate ways families can enhance the work done at school.

**W: PLAN TO DISSEMINATE INFORMATION TO PARENTS AND PUPILS**

*Mill Falls Charter School* employs many forms of outreach both in recruiting new families, communicating with enrolled families.

For recruiting purposes and general parent education, the School has established an informative and in-depth website which offers a great deal of information to families interested in learning more about the *Mill Falls* Program. Additionally, at least four Informational Tours are scheduled annually during the Lottery Process. Each Lottery Season since the first in 2012, the School Administration reaches out to Manchester area non profits that provide a variety of services to families who might not otherwise hear about *Mill Falls’* Lottery Enrollment Schedule.

Once enrolled, parents/guardians receive regular communication from the School. Teachers are in touch with their classroom families on a regular basis. Sharing information about special events or curricular activities and on an individual bases as needed. The School has a well-established weekly *Mill Falls News*, an electronic newsletter, which shares important deadlines, and information on student work in *Mill Falls’* public Montessori setting. Additionally, the newsletter provides links to interesting articles, local activities and more. A small parent/guardian library with books that may be helpful to School families is located in the School’s front office area. (*The Renewal Binder includes some examples.*)

**X: GLOBAL HOLD HARMLESS CLAUSE**

*In accordance with RSA 194-B:3, II(x), Mill Falls Charter School, its successors and assigns, covenants and agrees at all times to indemnify and hold harmless any school district which sends its students to the charter School, and their school boards, officers, directors, agents, employees, all funding districts and sources, and their successors and assigns, (the “Indemnified Parties”)* from any and all claims, demands actions and causes of action, whether in law or in equity, and all damages, costs, losses, and expenses, including but not limited to reasonable attorneys’ fees and legal costs, for any action or inaction of the charter School, its board, officers, employees, agents, representatives, contractors, guests and invitees, or pupils. The School shall have no obligation to hold harmless the Indemnified Parties for any claims, damages, losses, or expenses resulting from the Indemnified Parties’ own acts or omissions.

**Y: SEVERABILITY PROVISIONS & STATEMENT OF ASSURANCE**

If any part of the charter contract is determined to be invalid or illegal by a court of competent jurisdiction, such invalidation or illegality shall not affect the remaining portions of the charter contract, which shall remain in full force and effect. Any provision of the charter school contract found by competent authority to be contrary to applicable law, rule, or regulation shall not be enforceable.

## **Z: PROVISION FOR DISSOLUTIONS**

If *Mill Falls Charter School* ceases operation, the School's Board of Trustees shall consult with an attorney and the Department of Education to assure that contractual and financial obligations are met.

Upon the dissolution of the School, the assets remaining after the payment of all its liabilities, and the return of any loaned items to rightful owners, shall be distributed to such organization or organizations operated exclusively for charitable or educational purposes that qualify as an exempt organization within the meaning of 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue code of 1986, or any corresponding section of any future federal tax code, or shall be distributed to the federal government, or to state or local government, for a public educational purpose.

## **AA: IN THE CASE OF THE CONVERSION OF A PUBLIC SCHOOL TO A CHARTER CONVERSION SCHOOL, PROVISION FOR ALTERNATIVE ARRANGEMENTS FOR PUPILS WHO CHOOSE NOT TO ATTEND AND TEACHERS WHO CHOOSE NOT TO TEACH AT THE CHARTER SCHOOL**

Not Applicable.

## **BB: A PLAN FOR THE EDUCATION OF THE SCHOOL'S PUPILS AFTER THE CHARTER SCHOOL MAY CEASE OPERATION**

In the event that *Mill Falls Charter School* shall have cause to cease operation, the School's Administration will work with the School's Board to develop a student transfer process and advise all parents/guardians, Staff and Faculty of the process to be followed. To complete each student's personal file, parents/guardians shall be asked to provide a statement of intent regarding their children's education, moving forward. *Mill Falls Charter School* will obtain parent/guardian permission for release of information in order to notify the new schools of the impending transfers. *Mill Falls Charter School* Staff, Faculty and Board will make every effort to be available for consultation, sharing students' work, learning plans and other relevant materials with the receiving school. It is important to remember that *Mill Falls* students' public Montessori experience is linked inextricably to the *Common Core Standards* and to the specific NH curricular elements including Next Generation Science and Social Studies Frameworks, and so though they may be more practiced in independent work and have developed other Montessori-related skills, it is expected that these children will easily matriculate into other schools.

Each family will also receive notice by mail, in a timely fashion, advising them of the dissolution of the School and the plan for student transition. *Mill Falls Charter School* will also help guide families toward options that may best match their needs and abilities academically, and if appropriate, geographically.

**CC: IN ADDITION TO AN APPLICATION, EACH CHARTER SCHOOL APPLICANT, IN CONSULTATION WITH THE LOCAL SCHOOL BOARD, SHALL PREPARE A PROPOSED CONTRACT.**

Not Applicable.

**DD: AN OUTLINE OF THE ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN:**

*Mill Falls Charter School* provides the New Hampshire State Department of Education with reports on its programs and progress annually. Utilizing a variety of assessment tools and data collected from its students, Faculty/Staff and parents/guardians, the School shares information about its educational impact, parental involvement, outreach methodology and an overall analysis of School goals. In addition, and as per annual reporting requirements, the School informs the Department about student enrollment, financial operations and governance. Based on current annual reporting requirements the School annually responds to the following questions:

- 1: Is the School making progress toward achieving its Mission?
- 2: Is the School responsibly using public funds?
- 3: Is the School promoting student attainment of expected knowledge and skills?
- 4: Is the School sustainable.