*Proposed* Massachusetts Wildflower Montessori Public Charter School: Haverhill Executive Summary

*This was prepared by the Massachusetts Wildflower Montessori Public Charter School: Haverhill applicant group.*

**Mission Statement**

Massachusetts Wildflower Montessori Public Charter School: Haverhill (MAWF:H) will offer Montessori micro-schools—tiny educational environments integrated within the community and led by teachers operating as social entrepreneurs—in which children have the tools and freedom to do the great work of constructing themselves. Our students will develop a strong academic foundation and skills in the areas of critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and communication and grow into curious, capable contributors to their communities and the world.

Our School serves Haverhill students in grades 1 through 8 and their families. The School serves *all students*, including English learners and students with diverse abilities.

**School Opening and Projected Student Enrollment**

MAWF:H will open in late August 2019 with 30 first-grade students, and it will expand by one grade level each year until it reaches maximum enrollment of 240 students in 2026.

**Our Core Beliefs and Values**

At Wildflower, we believe that everyone and everything, everywhere, is connected—that we are, as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote in his famous letter from a Birmingham jail, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny.

We believe that children are naturally good, peaceful, and curious and that in the context of a supportive environment, all children engage instinctively in the work of self-construction. With appropriate freedoms and the right support, children follow their interests to create rich learning experiences, form peaceful communities, and support and learn from one another.

We believe that every human spirit contains an inner essence and that our individual and shared purpose in life is to become what we are meant to be. We believe this is true of children and adults, and we honor the potential in all people and the journey of becoming.

We believe that human beings are whole and integral, that every facet of ourselves—physical, intellectual, social, and emotional—is interrelated, and that human development depends on the balanced evolution of each.

These beliefs shape our values:

* Connectedness with all things and between all facets of oneself: We value and cultivate our connectedness with the world around us and the world within us as the pathway to peace.
* Growth along one’s own evolutionary path, the blossoming of one’s inner essence: We value and cultivate growth for children, teachers, families, all of our partners, and for the whole world.

Our beliefs and values are the basis of our operating norms of:

* Awareness: We cultivate our capacity to be authentically present, observe reality, and seek the truth, free from preconception and without judgment.
* Kindness: We act compassionately toward ourselves and others.
* Autonomy and Support: We foster independence in ourselves and others, and we help each other non-coercively.

**Education Approach and School Design**

MAWF:H will follow the Wildflower school model—a research-backed, innovative approach that aligns to our core beliefs, values, and norms. The core design elements of the model, described in depth in Section I. B, are: 1) the Montessori method; 2) a focus on scientific pedagogy; 3) Montessori instruction in an enriched environment; 4) schools interconnected with the community beyond the classroom; and 5) small learning communities led by teachers. These design elements—including the role of Teacher Leaders as social entrepreneurs—are discussed at length in Section I. B. Scientific pedagogy, specifically, is discussed in Sections I. B, I. C, and II. A.

**Haverhill, MA: Challenges and Opportunities**

Haverhill is a proud, storied community in Essex County that has featured prominently in every phase of Massachusetts’ history. Today, Haverhill is a diverse and dynamic city. At 35 square miles, it is the largest city or town in Essex County and home to a commercial downtown district that attracts artists, restaurants, and other small businesses; Northern Essex Community College; public, open outdoor space and parks; and small New England farms. The walkable urban neighborhoods of Haverhill offer many appealing possibilities to locate Wildflower-model schools—which are made up of small, shopfront, Montessori learning environments—or sites.

Haverhill’s diversity is also reflected in its residents. The racial and ethnic diversity of Essex County has increased significantly over the last two decades, with the population of white residents remaining stable while the percentage of Latino, Asian, and African American residents increased. The population of Latino residents grew the fastest, increasing by 87% between 2000 and 2015.[[1]](#endnote-1) Haverhill’s population of 63,000 is now 18% Latino;[[2]](#endnote-2) more than a third (35%)[[3]](#endnote-3) of the 7,500 students in the Haverhill Public Schools identify as Hispanic. According to U.S. Census data, 20% of residents ages five years or older speak a language other than English at home.[[4]](#endnote-4)  This diversity is a key asset of the community.

In addition to its considerable assets, however, the city also faces significant challenges. Haverhill, like its 25 sister Gateway cities in MA, suffered significant economic decline when manufacturing jobs left in the mid-20th century. This left the city with persistent social and economic challenges; Haverhill has struggled to rebuild its economy to previous levels and raise the quality of life for all residents.

The diversity within Haverhill comes hand in hand with deep inequities and disparities between neighborhoods and areas of the city and between residents of different socioeconomic and racial backgrounds. While the overall percent of persons in poverty in Haverhill is slightly higher than in Essex County as a whole (12.8% in Haverhill versus 10.7% in Essex County), there is a striking difference between the high percentage of Hispanic children in poverty in Haverhill (37%) compared with 18% of white children. The median household income for white Haverhill residents from 2012 to 2016 was $65,175, which is *35% higher*than the median household income for Hispanic Haverhill residents ($42,151).

Two neighborhoods in particular struggle with poor educational and economic outcomes for residents: Mt. Washington and Acre. The Mt. Washington neighborhood has been the focus of a city-wide collaborative effort, funded through a Working Cities Challenge grant from the Boston Federal Reserve Bank, to improve residents’ outcomes. In both Mt. Washington and the Acre, MAWF:H will increase educational options for families and lessen the opportunity gaps that exist between these neighborhoods and others in Haverhill.  By locating MAWF:H in shopfront spaces that are street-facing and embedded in the community, the children and Teacher Leaders will create a fundamentally different and more positive relationship between school and the community.

**Need for Massachusetts Wildflower Montessori Public Charter School: Haverhill**

Haverhill Public Schools (HPS) serve over 7,000 students. MAWF:H intends to serve 240 first through eighth graders with a population that is representative of the overall student population of HPS, including similar percentages of students identified as economically disadvantaged (ED) per eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch (47%), students with disabilities (23%), and English learners (10%).

HPS academic results are among the lowest 10% in MA. Traditional educational methods are not working for HPS students: achievement levels for students throughout the district—including students of every race and socioeconomic background—continue to lag far behind statewide averages in every academic area. MAWF:H’s model will offer a research-based, effective alternative. Recent studies have compared student outcomes in Montessori and non-Montessori settings, and the evidence is promising both in terms of improved student performance on traditional measures of success such as math and literacy, as well as on other student measures such as executive function, creativity, and teacher retention, among others. These results were obtained in settings where students were racially diverse and from low-income households (Culclasure et al., 2018; Lillard, 2016; Lillard, 2017).

Families who have young children enrolled at two existing Wildflower-model early education centers and others (for example, the families of the nearly 300 students who are on the waitlist for Hill View Montessori Charter Public School) are supportive of increased educational choice and quality for their children. We know this from information sessions held at the Wildflower-model early education centers and through input we have received from families in community settings as diverse as the Haverhill Farmers Market, the annual Kids Fest, and city-wide Martin Luther King, Jr. celebrations. All parents and families want their children to develop into capable, curious, independent adults and lifelong learners.

**Founding Team: Diverse, Deeply Experienced, and Connected to Haverhill**

Our founding team is a diverse and innovative group of nine professionals and parents who have strong ties to Haverhill and a deep commitment to improving educational outcomes for children. This team consists of six proposed Trustees, one prospective Teacher Leader, one prospective ELE service provider, and the project manager for the application process. Six applicant members and four of the six proposed Trustees live in Haverhill, and several have raised or are raising children here. In terms of professional experience, the proposed Board of Trustees will include a retired senior executive from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) who brings extensive finance, operations, and professional development experience to the Board; a senior education policy and evaluation consultant; a fundraising executive and attorney who teaches at the Harvard School of Education, a marketer with local and national experience; a former charter school administrator and teacher; and a leading Haverhill education and social justice activist and former candidate for the Haverhill School Committee. Three of the six proposed Trustees identify as people of color.

**Strategies for District Collaboration**

Unfortunately, the charter school movement has been a source of tension in Haverhill, most recently in the de-chartering of Silver Hill Horace Mann Charter School this year. Pro-labor groups see the non-union structure of most charter schools as incompatible with equity and opportunity. With Dr. Marotta’s recent appointment as the new Superintendent of Haverhill Public Schools, we are hopeful that we can collaborate with the district. An initial meeting with Dr. Marotta included an open dialog about the needs we see in the city and our plans to address them. We also look to other organizations working with HPS such as Northern Essex Community College to support collaboration across public education providers.

1. Impact Essex County (n.d.). *Diversity:* *Population by Race/Ethnicity.* Retrieved from http://impactessexcounty.org/demographics/diversity/population-by-race-ethnicity [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. United States Census Bureau (2017, July 1). *QuickFacts: Haverhill city, Massachusetts.* Retrieved from https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/haverhillcitymassachusetts/PST045217 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2018). *School and District Profiles: Haverhill: Enrollment Data (2017-18).* Retrieved from http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/profiles/student.aspx?orgcode=01280000&orgtypecode=5&leftNavId=300& [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. *QuickFacts: Haverhill city, Massachusetts.* [↑](#endnote-ref-4)