

STARTING A WILDFLOWER HUB IN NORTHERN MICHIGAN

THE EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION SHORTAGE

Our community is facing an early care and education (ECE) shortage for children ages birth-three years of age-there is simply not enough care available at any price. According to a recent survey of ECE availability in our region, only one in three infants and toddlers are able to find a space at an ECE provider. The cost of market-rate care is unaffordable for many families, yet the need for high-quality ECE is critical. Well-established science shows that the ages birth-3 are crucial years in a person's life for cognitive and social-emotional development that impacts future income, health, and well-being. The shortage of ECE has significant short-and long-term effects for our community-namely our ability to attract and retain working-age families in our community.

A PROPOSED SOLUTION

We will continue to advocate for government support of parental leave and public education for early learning, but we also propose the following solution-to build six Wildflower Montessori Schools that provide high-quality and affordable education for children ages birth through three.

The first Wildflower school will open in the Commongrounds building in January 2022 and provide a learning environment with 8 spaces for infants (birth-15 months) and 8 spaces for toddlers (15-36 months). Commongrounds is a community-owned development focusing on supporting and integrating organizations developing family, food, arts, and wellness in our community. It is a perfect location for the first classroom because it can serve as a hub supporting the future network of classrooms by providing activities and classes for families (parent/caregiver education), as well teacher training and talent attraction. It is through strong, supportive partnerships that Wildflower sites will be able to grow and thrive.



ABOUT MONTESSORI

Montessori at its core is an educational approach that views children as naturally eager and capable of pursuing learning, guided by their own interests. To support the natural developmental needs of the individual, Montessori schools provide thoughtfully prepared environments that nurture “the whole child” and support a child’s cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development. Montessori allows children to learn at their own pace, and both honors the strengths and supports the challenges of each learner.

Montessori schools come in many different shapes and sizes, independent, private, public, charter, and faith-based. In each of these models there are five core components that organizations like AMS and AMI have determined critical to high-fidelity implementation of the Montessori Method.

1. Trained Montessori Teachers-A properly credentialed Montessori teacher has the skills and expertise to implement high-fidelity Montessori.

2. Multi-Aged Classrooms-Classes with 3-year age spans facilitate mentorship among the students and encourage leadership development
 3. Using Montessori Materials-A hallmark of Montessori is specially designed materials that provide a hands-on approach to learning.
 4. Child-Directed Work-Students are given agency to self-select work, leading to intrinsic motivation and sustained attention.
 5. Uninterrupted Work Periods-An extended period of “free choice” enables students to work at their own pace and without interruption
- Familiar with the Wildflower model, I recommended to the Advisory Group that we put our energy to further exploring this model above the others.



ABOUT WILDFLOWER SCHOOLS

Wildflower Schools are teacher-led and offer beautiful, child-centered learning environments that support children and families from diverse backgrounds as they follow life’s unfolding journey. The model combines time-tested, research-supported Montessori methods in one-room, neighborhood-nested shopfronts with promising new ideas in parent engagement, intentional student diversity, teacher empowerment, and data-driven instruction. Wildflower aspires to give all children and families the opportunity to choose high quality, nurturing learning environments for their children.

The Wildflower Foundation, which supports over 30 Wildflower schools nationwide, has received funding from the Chan Zuckerberg Foundation and the Walton Family Foundation. They provide a model for best practices as well as an extensive backbone support for teachers and local hubs.

Wildflower schools use the following nine principles to define the model:

- An authentic Montessori environment
- Teacher-led school
- Shopfront setting
- Laboratory for innovation
- Seamless learning community
- A commitment to equity
- An attention to beauty
- A focus on nature
- A decentralized network



We hope to work collaboratively with local Montessori programs to create pathways for families in Wildflower schools to transition to continue their Montessori education in public, private, and charter programs in the area.

In an effort to make Wildflower schools affordable for families, we hope to build a Northern Michigan Birth to Three Scholarship fund that all families with young children can access to make their family choice for early care and learning more affordable.

BENEFITS OF WILDFLOWER

Wildflower Montessori Schools bring many potential benefits to our community, including:

- Start Up Financial Advising for teacher/leaders
- Start Up Connection to other teacher/leaders
- Start Up Classroom setup grant from Wildflower Foundation (furniture, materials, etc)
- Shared services from Wildflower such as marketing, software, and technology
- Ongoing technical assistance from Site Entrepreneur
- Ongoing professional development opportunities from Site Entrepreneur
- Ongoing connection to other Wildflower Hubs



NEXT STEPS

We have received a seed grant from Rotary Charities to fund our feasibility study that will gauge our community interest and ability to support the growth of Wildflower Schools in Northern Michigan. The feasibility study will assess the following criteria:

- 1) Family interest
- 2) Community partnerships
- 3) Revenue streams
- 4) Teacher interest
- 5) Available, affordable real estate in strategic locations

The feasibility study will be reviewed by the Wildflower Foundation and after we are approved as a site, our first team of teacher-leaders would then begin to bring their vision for their school to life (16 seats total). We would plan to add at least one new school each year for the next five years, eventually building at least 96 high-quality and cost-accessible early childhood seats in the five county area.

GET INVOLVED

Please contact Jen Harris, Montessori Consultant at jen@schoolwardconsulting.com to get involved. We are looking for support in the following ways:

- Advisory/nonprofit board members
- Community organizations interested in working collaboratively to address the ECE shortage, build partnerships, strengthen existing ECE network, and grow Wildflower schools
- Creative thinkers and doers who are willing to share time and talent
- Donors or Investors who can bring these ideas to life
- Montessorians or early childhood educators interested in growing a Wildflower school in Northern Michigan
- Families interested in learning more about the affordable, high-quality early childhood education of Wildflower schools and how to grow them in Northern Michigan



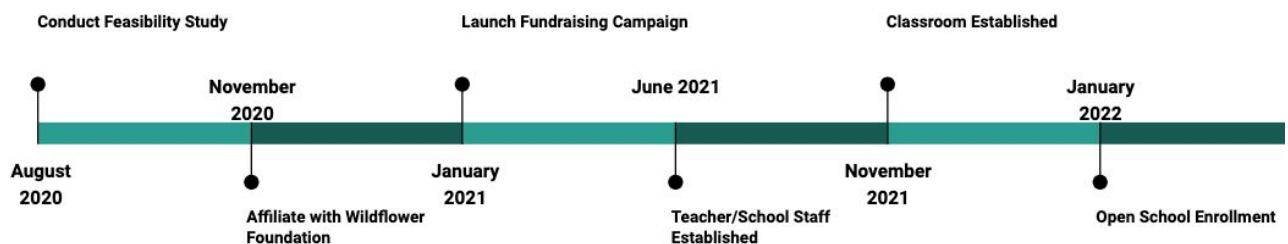


WHO WE ARE

The Michigan Wildflower Hub Advisory Group is made up of parents, teachers, school administrators, and other community professionals who are dedicated to growing high-quality early childhood education opportunities in Northern Michigan. Our members include:

1. Kate Redman, Commongrounds Cooperative Developer
2. Mary Manner, Great Start Collaborative Coordinator/5toONE Project Manager
3. Cheryl Bloomquist, Professor, NMC Early Childhood Education Program
4. Meg Ackerman, Montessori Consultant
5. Jen Harris, Montessori Consultant & Owner of Schoolward Consulting
6. Lisa Thauvette, Tilt Think Owner & Montessori Consultant
7. Marie Voss, AMS Infant Toddler Montessori Guide
8. Britny Tollstam, Montessori Consultant & Owner of Wild Child Consulting
9. Lisa VanLoo, Principal at TCAPS Montessori (Public)
10. Michele Shane, Head of School at The Children's House (Private)
11. Arden Wilson, Head of School at Leelanau Montessori Public School (Charter)
12. Katherine Kwiatkowski, Collaborative and EHS Center-Based Manager at NMCAA
13. Woody Smith, President of Avenue ISR
14. Diana Milock, Early Childhood Education Advocate
15. Joanie Abbott, Early Childhood Education Advocate
16. Freya Bradford, Community Member

TIMELINE FOR OPENING THE FIRST WILDFLOWER SCHOOL LOCATION: THE COMMONGROUNDS BUILDING



CONTACT

Please contact Jen Harris, Montessori Consultant, for more information at jen@schoolwardconsulting.com.

For more information on the ECE shortage in Northern Michigan, please click here for the [IFF study](#).

For more information on Montessori, search www.amshq.org and www.amiusa.org

For more information on Wildflower, search www.wildflowerschools.org