Deepening roots and sprouting new growth:

Wildflower’s Year in Review

Wildflower schools offer beautiful, child-centered learning environments that foster the growth and connectedness of teachers, children and families as they follow life’s unfolding journey. Our schools use time-tested, research-supported Montessori methods in one-room, neighborhood-nested shopfronts combined with promising new ideas in parent engagement, intentional student diversity, teacher empowerment and data-driven instruction. Like wildflowers, these schools spread naturally, taking root in a variety of settings and reflecting the uniqueness of their surroundings. We aspire to give all children and families the opportunity to choose a school like Wildflower.
Overview

With the start of the new school year behind us but most of the year still to come, the late fall offers us an opportunity to reflect on our progress and lessons learned over the past year and take stock of our plans for the future. The biggest theme of the past year has been making it easier for students from all backgrounds to attend Wildflower schools. You can see that theme in the new schools we’ve opened as well as the growth we have on the horizon.

We believe in the power of an authentic Montessori education. But our goal was never to create a network of beautiful schools that were available only to families who could afford them. Making sure a greater number of students have access to high-quality, child-centered learning is critical to Wildflower’s mission and it’s gratifying and inspiring to see the seeds of our efforts beginning to bear fruit.

One of the beautiful things about Wildflower is that our model can adapt to the needs and assets of a given community. Among the new schools that opened in the last year are the first three Wildflower schools in Minnesota, where the Foundation is based. Two of the three are the first Wildflower charter schools.

In Massachusetts, where Wildflower started, three new schools opened over the last year, one in Haverhill in January and two in Cambridge in September. Two others have been preparing over the last year and plan to launch in Haverhill and in the Watertown/Waltham area in the coming months. Both of these schools are led by graduates of last year’s inaugural fellowship cohort. Additionally, our existing schools in Puerto Rico have not only rebuilt since Hurricane Maria, but new programs there are in the process of opening.

You’ll read in this report about Rhode Island’s first Wildflower school. Indiana is also a new state for the network, with Alyssum Montessori opening in Ft. Wayne, and new possibilities emerging in Indianapolis.

In short, we’ve got more schools, in more places, serving a greater number of children, from a wider array of family backgrounds. And we couldn’t be more pleased.

We are also exploring new ways to more fully live into our principles, on our own and through partnerships with complementary organizations. In this report, we share stories of Equity, Innovation and our decentralized Network in action, and these stories, in turn, have led to expanded partnerships and promising new blooms.
Our Network’s Numbers for the 2017-2018 School Year

Earlier this year, we completed a network-wide survey. As part of the parent survey, we calculated our first Net Promoter Score, which is a number often used to gauge loyalty to a product or service offering. Across industries, a score of 50 percent is considered strong, and 70 percent is exceptional. Wildflower received a network-wide score of 82 percent!

- Total students enrolled: 288
- Ages: 6 weeks to 17 years
- Locations: Kentucky, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Puerto Rico, and Rhode Island (with Indiana starting in fall 2018)

Diversity:
- 51 percent students of color, 46 percent white, 3 percent identify in another way.
- 31 percent of Wildflower students are low-income, and 30 percent speak a language other than English as their first language.
Deepening roots and sprouting new growth

Giving greater access to more students
Our Schools
Learn more about each of our 21 schools across five states and Puerto Rico.
Check out some of the media coverage of our new schools:

Send your kids to school in downtown Fort Wayne
New Montessori school opening in downtown Fort Wayne
Teachers opening Montessori, language-immersion school at Sabathani
This network of Montessori ‘micro-schools’ is bringing a new charter concept to Indiana
What happens when student-tracking technology meets Montessori’s century-old teaching style?
Wildflower to Bring Montessori Microschools to Indianapolis After Winning Charter Design Challenge From The Mind Trust
With big-name backers, Wildflower Foundation and its tech-savvy schools sprout in Twin Cities
The Wildflower network grows in two ways, always in response to community need. Some schools emerge organically when potential teacher-leaders hear about the Wildflower model and become interested in opening their own school. Here we share such a story: Tiger Lily, in Providence, Rhode Island. Other schools sprout when Wildflower and community leadership decide together to intentionally nurture the conditions for growth, after using our Community Exploration Tool to determine if the time is right. That’s the backstory behind Lirio, a new public charter school in Minneapolis.

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Tiger Lily Montessori: Bringing Southern Roots to New England

The following is excerpted from a Q&A with Tiger Lily teacher-leaders Alexandra Theris and Brittney Powell.

What does a Montessori program look like for infants and toddlers?

Brittney: Think about what infants are doing. What is their job? Their work is to grow and develop. My role is to make sure their environment is conducive to their growth. Are they encouraged to roll their body over? Are they reaching across the midline? As adults, we’re often so eager to help them do things, but it’s about preparing an environment that encourages independence and autonomy. An important facet of an authentic Montessori environment is mealtime routines. Mealtime encourages fine motor development and over time leads to independent use of utensils, a successful transition from a bottle to an open cup, and eventually to self-care and independence during daily routines. They develop this freedom and a sense of confidence which encourages independent exploration while maintaining a relationship of trust and security with the adult guide in their environment.

Read more about Tiger Lily.
Lirio Montessori: Dismantling Inequity While Helping a Minneapolis Neighborhood Rebuild

In September, teacher-leaders Maya Soriano and Susana Rodriguez opened Lirio Montessori, a two-way dual-language immersion school in Minneapolis. Teacher-leaders speak exclusively to their students in Spanish. Here, Maya talks about Lirio’s equity-focused mission.

What is the driving force behind your work at Lirio?

When I worked in a public dual-immersion elementary school, even though we were speaking Spanish a greater percentage the time, I still found that the native English speakers, most of whom came from more affluent backgrounds, were progressing faster in both English and Spanish. The achievement gap was growing because those native Spanish speakers hadn’t been getting the support they needed during their early childhood education.

In order to dismantle that inequity and make Montessori accessible to the community, 64 percent of our families are fully subsidized and do not pay tuition. We do this by stretching our limited tuition dollars as far as we can and through public funding. Our preschool students are part of a tuition-based program, subsidized by public and private scholarships for families who request the support, and our kindergarten class is part of public charter school in Minnesota, which means we receive funding through the state public education system.

Both Susana and I feel very strongly that this combination of dual-immersion and Montessori is a game-changer for educational inequity. There is inherently a social justice and anti-racism component to what we do. Authentic Montessori supports children, and it works. Having access to something like that is critical, particularly for historically underserved students.

Read more about Lirio.
Cultivating the soil

Living our values and principles through intentional groundbreaking

Wildflower is growing into new communities and cultivating growth in new types of schools. During this exciting time, it is important for us to check ourselves against the ideas that started it all. What binds our network of independently operated schools are nine principles: authentic Montessori, teacher-led, shopfront, innovation, home, equity, beauty, nature, and decentralized network. We’re always moving forward, but our principles keep us grounded and ensure we stay true to who we are.
Network
Rebuilding and looking to the future in Puerto Rico

Following the devastation of Hurricane Maria in 2017, all three Wildflower schools in Puerto Rico are back up and running. Ahleli was the first of the three Wildflower Schools on the island to reopen after the storm, in November 2017, thanks to a generator (and food, clothes, batteries, and toys) from the Wildflower family. Flamboyan, a primary school for students ages 3-6, just reopened this school year in an unused space at another public Montessori school. And students at Girasol, the network’s first high school program, are back in classes at the Juan Domingo Community Center after standing up to local officials for that right. There are plans for a brand-new space, which we are hoping will be ready by fall 2019.

Despite all the energy they have spent on rebuilding, the Wildflower teacher-leaders in Puerto Rico have their sights set on future growth. Ruth Melian is a Montessori school leader in Puerto Rico who is in the process of converting her two classrooms, one for toddlers and the other for primary students, to a Wildflower school for next fall. She also will be completing the Wildflower fellowship in summer 2019 and plans to open an elementary school afterward where her current students can attend. All three schools are focused on serving the needs of children in Puerto Rico’s foster care system.

Hurricane Maria dealt the Wildflower family a painful blow, but the rebuilding process has been a beautiful example of the power of local decision-making that is central to our model. We saw each school recover in very different ways, driven by the decision-making of teacher-leaders, families and students.
In summer 2017, we kicked off our inaugural cohort of the Wildflower Montessori Diversity Initiative fellowship for aspiring teacher-leaders from historically underrepresented or disadvantaged socio-economic and racial backgrounds. From the first cohort, fellows have created two new schools and a parent education program. This fall, we started our second cohort and we’re excited to work with our new fellows as they learn more about Wildflower and prepare to lead Wildflower schools in the future.

Last fall, we launched a cohort-based online learning opportunity for people in the Wildflower network and across the Montessori community, in which participants were able to reflect on their own racial identity and make the choice to embrace equity. That program generated so much demand that we are supporting our partner Daisy Han to set it up as an independent program, Embracing Equity, so that it can serve many more people. Wildflower teacher-leaders, partners and families are leaning into this important work - and sharing reflections as they do.
Network & Innovation
Learning through technology

To minimize time spent on school administrative duties, Wildflower is working on apps to make starting and running a school easier. Our first effort is the “School Startup Journey” app, which is an online platform that allows emerging teacher-leaders to start a Wildflower school, including going through the advice process, recording all their “albums” - or collections of school startup materials - in one place, for teams to work on collaboratively and share with people throughout the advice process.

We plan to add additional features, including giving teacher-leaders a quick way to secure a logo and school name, as well as register for 501(c)(3) status.

We are also continuing to explore ways in which technology can support and improve the Montessori observation and record-keeping practices of our teachers to give them more of the rigorous information they need to guide the development of their students without sliding toward a more teacher-centered classroom. This work has three main branches: tools to gather information automatically and invisibly using embedded sensors in the environment, tools to help teachers to more easily capture their own observations, and better systems for viewing and making meaning of all of the information.

Through careful experimentation in the classroom, we have learned a lot about both the technical and human aspects of these challenges and we are looking forward to our next round of experiments, which include the use of radio sensors and computer vision to capture interactions between students, teachers, and educational materials and the deployment of tools like smart pens and scannable forms to automatically capture and organize teachers’ notes and observation forms. Looking over the horizon, we are planning to collaborate with educational researchers to see if we can extend these capabilities even further, capturing important information like student concentration and verbal language fluency.
Future blooms
Growing our reach and
watching our network bloom
We continue to support the start of new Wildflower schools in our existing communities, and at the same time support exploration of Wildflower in new communities in response to interest from stakeholders across the United States, in Native Nations and internationally. Once local energy passes a certain threshold, we select someone to be the on-the-ground coordinator of the exploration - which we have done in New Jersey, Denver, New York City, the San Francisco Bay Area, and Asheville, N.C. We’ve also hit the ground running in Indianapolis by hiring a site entrepreneur to begin laying the groundwork for a charter school there. Jumpstarting the work in Indianapolis is a $250,000 planning award that Wildflower won from Indianapolis-based education nonprofit The Mind Trust. We’re so grateful for the generous support; great things are in store in Indianapolis.

We’re also working to fill a similar position in Washington, D.C., with the help of public school incubator CityBridge. CityBridge will help identify and then work with our D.C. partner to launch Wildflower’s expansion into Washington. That partner will seed the growth of Wildflowers in the District and we could not be more excited to find someone fantastic for this initial site entrepreneur role.

In addition to growth in new communities, read below to see how we’re innovating and finding new ways to reach a greater number of students.
Wildflower Seeds Spread to a School District’s Classrooms

With a long history of Montessori in her own life, as a student, a teacher, and a parent, Lisa Kuh, director of early education for Somerville Public Schools, was always looking for ways to incorporate Montessori approaches to curriculum into professional development for the teachers she supports.

Two years ago, on her way to give a presentation in Philadelphia on the concept of beauty in Montessori, Lisa ended up on the same airplane flight as a group of teacher-leaders from Wildflower, and a budding partnership began. After hitting it off with the Wildflower team, Lisa observed in several Wildflower schools.

“Because of my background, I had been offering professional development at the district that had a Montessori influence, and early grades teachers were starting to show up in greater numbers,” she said. “I felt like the time was right to be intentional about incorporating Montessori into our practice.”

Read more about the partnership between Dandelion and Somerville Public Schools.
Making Wildflower accessible to a greater number of students

Our Massachusetts hub has made strong progress in supporting existing schools to access state and local grants that support children from low-income backgrounds. Each of our Cambridge and Somerville schools that serve children ages 3 and up was accepted into the district’s Birth to 3rd Grade Partnership and together received funding to serve a total of 16 participating students for the 2018-19 school year. In Haverhill, Marigold and Zinnia, which primarily rely on state childcare subsidies to make their programs economically accessible, also accessed a city grant program that allowed them to serve an additional 10 low-income students this year and next.

Parents On Participating in the Birth to 3rd Partnership with Wildflower:

“It’s heartwarming to know that my child will be safe and loved in his school.”

“I’m grateful to look at equity and justice in the context of the work with children. I see pockets of it everywhere and I see Wildflower really embracing it. I’m grateful for having a space for my girl to be who she is.”

“Thank you - not just for my kid, but for me. This is a community.”

“I’m very grateful...for this life-changing blessing to go to Wildflower.”
Our innovative ideas for serving children from families with limited economic means helped us secure an Early Childhood Innovation Prize from Gary Community Investments. Wildflower was selected as one of the Prize’s 15 Top Ideas. The existing public funding mechanisms for early childhood education are often difficult to access, are insufficient in supply and amount per child, and follow the family, making them difficult to build into school-level business plans. This prize will help us in our journey to disrupt the systemic barriers to providing an equitable early education experience for vulnerable children and create innovative early childhood environments that develop the extraordinary potential in every person: children, families, and teachers alike.

We are always looking for ways to expand access to Wildflower schools for learners from all backgrounds, which is why we are also pursuing options for public, tuition-free Wildflower schools (in addition to those that blend tuition with public subsidies). For instance, our New York charter school was recently approved to start blooming for Bronx families in 2019, and we have a charter application pending for Haverhill, Massachusetts. We believe that Wildflower’s flexible and autonomous model makes our schools a good fit for a public charter setting. For one thing, facilities are much easier to obtain for an urban shopfront school, lowering a common charter school hurdle.
Looking Forward

Wildflower’s model emanates from a set of values and aspirations that we hold for children and communities, such as an intentionally diverse environment and teacher-leaders committed to social justice. At the same time, Wildflower’s core ideas are largely grounded in research that shows students in an authentic Montessori environment outperform their peers in a traditional school setting in both literacy and numeracy. In the coming year, we will release a white paper on Wildflower’s Roots in Research, which will detail the marriage of science and art unique to the Wildflower educational philosophy.
This annual report, and the year it summarizes, reflects the ways in which we have spent our time and energy, equally, on data-driven practice and aspirational belief. We believe that the Wildflower model has the potential to not only transform the lives of children, but also to transform stubborn notions of what “school” must be. Something different, but also familiar, is possible for educators, students and families. We thank you for following along on our journey and we extend a special thanks to those who have contributed leadership gifts to support Wildflower’s work including Arthur Rock and Toni Rembe Rock, Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, Charter School Growth Fund, CityBridge Education, the Douglass Brandenborg Family Foundation, Frey Family Foundation, Gary Community Investments, Graves Foundation, JF Maddox Foundation, Marge and Tom Barrett, Mass IDEAS*, NewSchools Venture Fund, Omidyar Network, One8 Foundation, Patrick and Alice Rogers Family Foundation, Piper Family Fund, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Strategic Grant Partners, The Mind Trust, Walton Family Foundation and Wend Ventures.

*an initiative of Next Generation Learning Challenges at EDUCAUSE, with generous support from the Barr Foundation and the Nellie Mae Education Foundation

We know it takes the right environment for an entire field of wildflowers to grow. Wildflower Schools require a network of committed supporters. If you’re inspired to nurture Wildflower Schools, we hope you’ll consider joining our community of donors by visiting wildflowerschools.org/donate/.
Appendix

Board and Staff / wildflowerschools.org/about
July 1, 2017 to June 30, 2018 Unaudited Financials

unaudited financials are for 12-month period, July 1, 2017 - June 30, 2018. Audited financials will be made available soon at https://wildflowerschools.org/2018-wildflower-financials/

**Balance Sheet**

### Current Assets
- Cash: $4,188,928
- Other Assets: 10,306
- Total Current Assets: $4,199,234

### Other Assets
- Loans to Schools: 1,048,986
- Total Current Assets: $5,247,720

### Current Liabilities
- Payables: $141,986
- Other Current Liabilities: 153,160
- Total Current Liabilities: $295,146

### Net Assets
- $4,364,511

### Total Liabilities and Net Assets
- $5,247,720
Income Statement

Revenue

- Non Profit Income $9,279,806
- Other Revenue 23,890
- Total Revenue $9,303,696

Expenses

- Accounting Fees $51,988
- Advertising and Marketing 4,686
- Bank Charges and Interest 1,769
- Conference Registration Fees 34,616
- Dues & Cloud-Based Subscriptions 92,925
- Grants to Schools 213,900
- Insurance 13,134
- Interest Contribution - Loans to Schools 26,225
- Legal & Professional Service Firms 176,688
- Office Space 61,705
- Office Supplies, Shipping & Printing 18,858
- Payroll 3,357,501
- Benefits 600,619
- Contractors 1,658,272
- Program Supplies 56,699
- Shipping & Delivery 7,091
- Other 171
- Training 38,658
- Tech Hardware, Software & Hosting 60,469
- Transparent Classroom 157,867
- Transportation, Hotel & Housing Costs 272,846
- Total Expenditures $6,906,687

Net Income $2,397,009