



**CREEKSTONE**  
Montessori School

Annual Report  
Inaugural Academic Year  
2022-23

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## **Mission**

Creekstone Montessori School's mission is to provide a learning environment that embraces a child's natural desire to learn and to empower all children to grow to their full social, academic, and emotional potential through Montessori principles and methods of education.

## **Vision**

Our purpose is simple: to inspire a lifelong passion for learning and build the foundations for profound respect towards humanity and the natural world.

## **Core Values**

Creekstone Montessori School (Creekstone) is proud to represent a different perspective in education; driven by individualized instruction and the adoption of authentic Montessori pedagogy, increasing learning opportunities for all pupils and encouraging the use of different and innovative teaching methods, especially in the research-based Montessori strategies.

Located in Red Wing, MN, Creekstone offers authentic Montessori education from 33 months through Grade 7. Creekstone students' education experiences are enriched by learning opportunities to explore nature, music, art and exercise the body during physical education and recess. Students are also given access to the woods, trails, and large greenspaces that makeup the school's campus on the Lutheran Social Service of MN historic VASA site.

## **Innovative Practices and Implementation**

Following the fundamental tenet of Montessori education, Creekstone allows children to learn in a social environment that supports the unique development of each child. As opposed to conventional school models, which involve group learning, Montessori emphasizes individualized learning. Creekstone allows room for catering to the unique needs of all children, including those requiring additional learning support.

Montessori pedagogy emphasizes children's developmental age and not their chronological age since age does not determine a child's ability. At Creekstone, classes are structured within a three-year age range. This gives children a chance to work at their own pace without being judged as quick or slow in comparison to their specific age group. When children work in mixed-age groups, they will have a graded series of models for imitation and the opportunity to

reinforce their knowledge by helping each other.

Creekstone's holistic curriculum helps children develop the physical, cognitive, and emotional competence and positive attitude towards learning that is required for school success. The Montessori learning environment promotes the development of self-esteem through experiences from which children can develop a deep understanding of the concepts of the Montessori curriculum.

Montessori pedagogy educates children for life. Children at Creekstone have the freedom to explore and develop their potential as they work with didactic materials, either independently or in groups, in a flexible learning environment. This method is based on the concept of respect for self, others, and the environment. Creekstone classrooms are well-prepared to meet the developmental needs of the age span served within each environment.

Creekstone's classroom materials and furniture, based on the Montessori model, are designed for the child's physical needs (size and proportion) and psychological needs (areas of interest or skill development). The learning setting includes a full range of Montessori materials. It is the role of the guides/teachers to observe, to know, and to support the child as he or she proceeds through the stages of development. The learning process is governed by certain basic human tendencies or needs:

- The need to communicate, to use language;
- The need for order: the need to organize, classify, and interpret reality;
- The need for independence and activity, the drive to work constructively and purposefully;
- The need for social relationships

The outdoor environment is considered an extension of the indoor environment. While there is scheduled time for large motor activities that encourage collaborative group play and allow children to gain an understanding of the rules and movements associated with a variety of sports, our outdoor space is used not only during recess. The outdoor environment also provides a "workspace" that is used during the Montessori teaching and learning cycle. Throughout the day and with the accompaniment of an adult, children may work on materials, garden, or simply explore the natural landscape of the outdoors.

Guides/teachers at Creekstone are not the center of the learning process, but rather they help to guide each child while also respecting his/her choices. The guides/teachers help the children reach their full potential by guiding them towards materials that meet their developmental needs and current interests. Individual and group lessons are varied and designed to meet each child's learning style and pace. Guides/teachers observe the children often and plan lessons

based on his/her observations of the needs and interests of an individual or group.

Within our multi-age classroom community, older children often serve as teachers and mentors for the younger children. These children share their experiences by helping others. This process not only helps create a sense of community and interdependence but also reinforces previous learning for the older children. Self-direction encourages trust, acceptance, and non-competitiveness.

## **Academic Performance**

In its first operational year, CSP Grant Funding allowed Creekstone to purchase personal computers and curriculum materials, including high quality Montessori math and reading materials and supplies to allow our students to engage and work within the Montessori Method. In addition, supplies, materials, and professional development training fostered innovative & successful ways of learning - and initiated the process of aligning Montessori practices with State Standards. These measures, funded in great part by CSP Grant financial support, provided us with the tools to continue implementing plans and processes to support students and monitor academic progress with diligence and success.

Observations, instructions, and practices, including participation in Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments, provided essential developmental baseline assessment information for review to help guide instruction and provide ongoing quality support to students. This not only complies with MDE standards and the terms of our Authorizer agreement but also holds us accountable to our academic school goals.

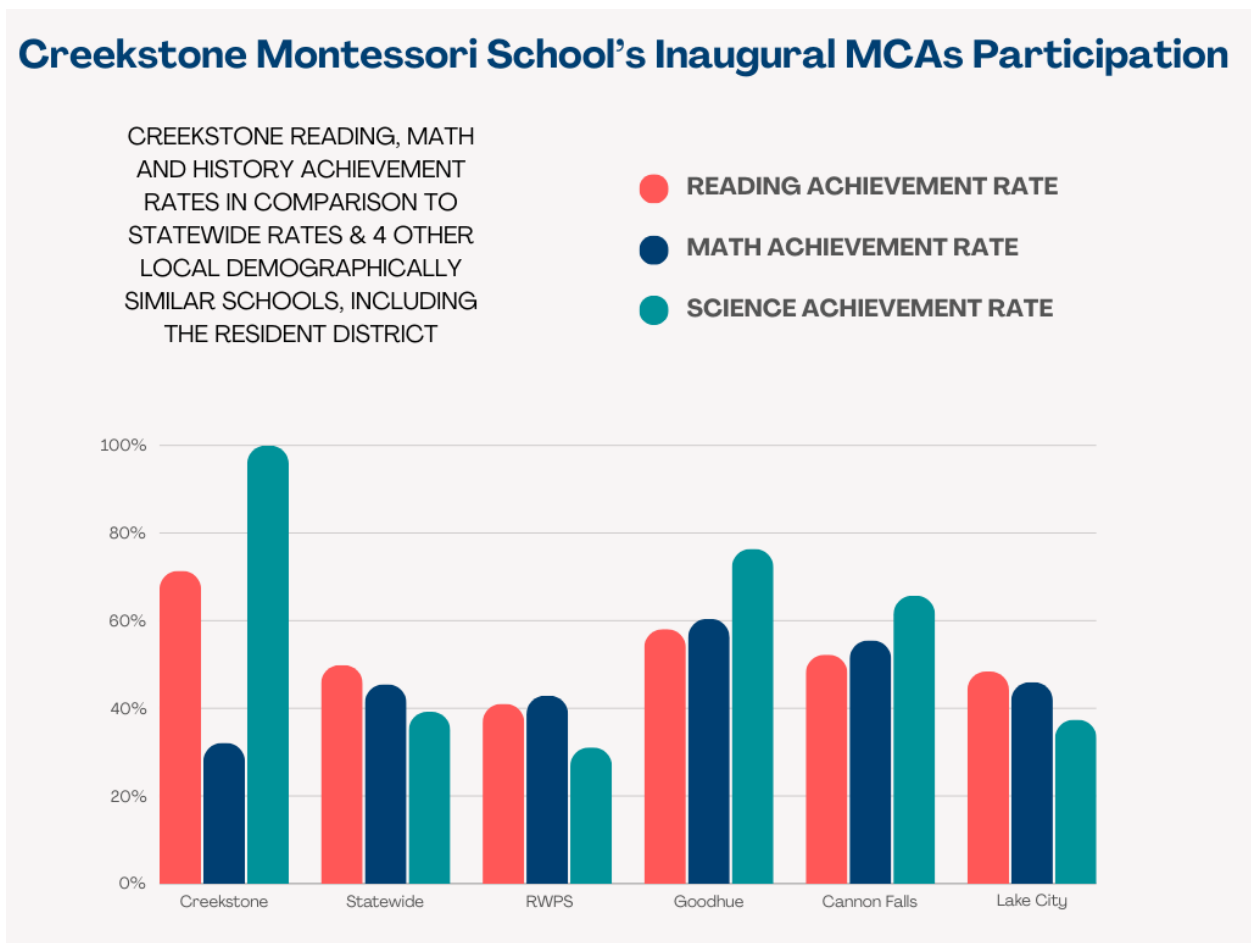
As shown in the graphics below, Creekstone students in grades 3-6 performed well in their first attempt at the MCA tests.

In reading, 71.4% of students met or exceeded grade level benchmarks, scoring higher than the statewide average of 49.9%, as well as the local district elementary composite of 49.9% and all 4 demographically matching schools.

Creekstone students' baseline percentage in meeting Math benchmark standards was 32.1%. In comparison, 45.5% of students statewide met or exceeded the benchmark in Math while in our local district, 51.2% of students met or exceeded the benchmark.

MCA Science exams are only given to students in Grades 5 and 8 in Minnesota. At Creekstone, there are fewer than 25 students in Grade 5 who took the MCA Science exam this year. 100% of students in Grade 5 met or exceeded the benchmark in Science as compared to 39.2% of

students statewide and 52.6% of students in the local district.



Based on student performance in Reading and Science Subjects above the state average, the school does not require support from MDE due to low performance as reflected in the North Star System.

Mathematics MCA data indicate the need for further study during the 2023-2024 academic year to identify key areas for student growth and needs for curriculum alignment with State Standards. It is consistent with Montessori philosophy that math retention and acquisition occurs later in youth development. We will, however, identify ways to address this within our curriculum to assure students are still on track for learning.

Faculty and staff will continue ongoing Montessori training across content areas throughout the year in order to increase learning opportunities for all pupils, including tactile-rich Montessori pedagogy, encouraging the use of interdisciplinary and innovative teaching methods.

The below table depicts Progress on the Academic Performance Framework Accountability System as identified in the Authorizer contract.

Academic Goal	Academic Framework	Academic Performance Rubric Designation	Evidence/Data Creekstone % / Comparative %
1.1	WBWF	3	
1.2	Math MN	1	32.1% / 45.5%
1.3	Math Local District	1	32.1% / 42.9%
1.4	Math Similar	1	32.1% / 51.2%
1.5	Reading MN	4	71.4% / 49.9%
1.6	Reading District	4	71.4% / 41.0%
1.7	Reading Similar	4	71.4% / 49.9%
1.8	Science MN	4	100% / 39.2%
1.9	Science Local District	4	100% / 31.1%
1.10	Science Similar	4	100% / 52.6%
1.11	As a first year Charter, continuous improvement unknown	n/a	n/a
1.12	As a first year Charter, continuous improvement unknown	n/a	n/a
1.13	As a first year Charter, continuous improvement unknown	n/a	n/a
1.14	As a first year Charter, continuous improvement unknown	n/a	n/a
1.15	As a first year Charter, continuous improvement unknown	n/a	n/a
1.16	As a first year Charter, continuous improvement unknown	n/a	n/a
1.17	As a first year Charter, continuous improvement unknown	n/a	n/a
1.18	As a first year Charter, continuous improvement unknown	n/a	n/a
1.20	Additional Purpose: Making Montessori pedagogy available to all pupils	3	At least 90% of teachers enrolled in Montessori specific training as part of their individual professional development plan

## Financial Performance

The Creekstone Montessori School Board of Directors established a Finance Committee composed of members Ted LaFrance, Beth Borgen, Ron Ward, and Elissa Behnke. The Finance Committee met regularly to review monthly financial statements prepared by Creekstone's Financial Business Partner, EdFinMN, and to discuss all pertinent financial matters. For any matters requiring board approval, the Finance Committee presented such matters to the board for decision making.

The school Fund Balance Policy establishes a general operations reserve fund balance. Creekstone has completed its Annual Audit for the period of its inception through June 30, 2023 performed by Smith Schafer, in which No Material Findings were noted.

The school established and maintained an annual budget, developed by the Finance Committee in partnership with EdFinMN, which was presented to the board for final approval. The budget for the 2022-2023 school year was approved by the Creekstone Board of Directors on June 30, 2022.

The school had sufficient cash flow to meet its near-term obligations. Given both the cycle of payments from MDE and holdback of funds until year-end, the board approved securing a Line of Credit in the amount of \$100,000 to ensure Creekstone's ability to meet financial obligations in a timely manner. The utilization of the line of credit was approved by the Creekstone board on September 19, 2022.

At the end of the first operational year, Creekstone had a fund balance of \$49,740. The school's assets and deferred outflows of resources exceed its liabilities by \$200,654.

### FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

Key financial highlights for the 2022-2023 year include the following:

- Total Assets \$683,436.
- Overall revenues for the General Fund were \$1,573,974 while overall expenditures totaled \$1,854,207.
- The General Fund Unassigned Fund Balance is \$49,740.
- The Food Service Fund total fund balance is \$0 after transfers in of \$19,111 from the General Fund.
- The Community Service fund balance is \$0.



**School's Revenue.** The School's total revenues were \$1,654,323 for the year ended June 30, 2023. Federal and state sources accounted for 82% percent of the total revenue. The other remaining revenue coming from other sources.

A condensed version of the Statement of Activities follows:

	Total 2023
<b>Revenue</b>	
Program revenues:	
Charges for services	\$ 79,452
Operating grants and contributions	1,358,050
General revenues:	
Other sources	216,821
Total revenues	<u>1,654,323</u>
<b>Expenses</b>	
District and school administration	56,072
District support services	126,665
Regular instruction	484,051
Special education	541,482
Community education and services	65,814
Instruction support services	6,443
Pupil support services	21,686
Site, buildings, and equipment	146,094
Fiscal and other fixed cost programs	5,772
Food service	33,646
Total expenses	<u>1,487,725</u>
Change in net position	166,598
Net position, beginning of year	<u>34,056</u>
Net position, end of year	<u>\$ 200,654</u>

## Student Enrollment and Attrition

The board established a target enrollment of 90 (34 PreK, 56 K-6) students, as approved on February 21, 2022. While the year began at full capacity, the actual enrollment was 92 (16 PreK, 76 K-6) at year end. Creekstone has an Admission Policy that outlines admissions, enrollment and lottery processes. This policy is followed diligently by the board and school administration.

Attrition: The year began at full capacity with 90 students, with zero leaving the program. The entering class size for 2023 was 114, resulting in no attrition rate. 100% of the students returned.

## Governance

It is the role of the Board of Directors to manage and direct the affairs of the Creekstone organization. School board officers are charged with the duty of carrying out the responsibilities entrusted to them for the care, management, and control of the public school of the school district. Founding board members work during the first operational charter school year is extensive and work is prioritized in serving children well and supporting staff efforts in providing a safe, quality educational environment. The board continues to lay the groundwork needed to establish essential policies and processes that ensures the board carries out the school's mission, continually shows duty of care, and supports and holds the Executive Director accountable to their goals.

The Creekstone Bylaws state the officers of the corporation shall consist of a Chair, Secretary, and Treasurer. The Bylaws also state that beginning with the creation of the Corporation, the affairs of the Corporation shall be managed by an interim Board of Directors until Directors are elected, which must occur prior to the end of the third full academic year of operation as a charter school. The interim Board of Directors may be composed of the founders and other individuals nominated by and approved by the founders to serve on the Board of Directors. Currently, the interim Board of Directors are still acting, as we have not yet reached the end of the third full academic year. For the 2022-2023 school year the interim board elected Elissa Behnke as Chair, Sheena Tisland as Secretary, and Ted LaFrance as Treasurer. The officers have performed their fiduciary duties and carried out their responsibilities as outlined in the Bylaws.

To ensure that all board members are consistently updated and well-informed on current school issues, activities, and topics to be board-discussed and approved, the Creekstone Governance Committee meets regularly to prepare monthly board meeting agendas, reports and materials that cover all subjects to be discussed at the monthly regular board meetings.

The Creekstone Board of Directors understands and complies with Open Meeting Law. Required board meeting information is posted on the school website. Below is a chart reflecting the membership on the board since its inception.

Board Member	Role	Length of Term	Date Seated	Date of Background Check	Term Expiration Date	Phone	School Email	Teacher License No.
Elissa Behnke	Board Chair	3 years	3.14.21	8.13.20	8.21.23	308.249.6115	ebehnke.cfb@gmail.com	n/a
Beth Borgen	Director	3 years	3.14.21	2.18.21	7.6.23	651.436.2289	bborgen.cfb@gmail.com	287823 exp. 2026
Tori Campbell	Director	3 years	3.14.21	2.18.21	10.21.21	651.343.9752	tcampbell.cfb@gmail.com	n/a
Kai Rodgers	Director	3 years	3.14.21	8.13.20	9.21.21	651.380.7249	krodgers.cfb@gmail.com	878384 exp. 2023
Perry Sekus	Director	3 years	3.14.21	8.13.20		612.300.4412	psekus.cfb@gmail.com	n/a
Sheena Tisland	Secretary	3 years	3.14.21	8.13.20		678.910.3656	stisland.cfb@gmail.com	463180 exp. 2024
Ron Ward	Treasurer	3 years	3.14.21	8.13.20	11.12.23	612.760.1483	rward.cfb@gmail.com	131371 exp. none
Nina Retherford	Director	3 years	3.21.22	3.6.22	6.14.22	320.420.5671	nretherford.cfb@gmail.com	n/a
Dave Conrad	Ex-Officio (Head of School)	Interim	6.20.22	n/a	6.30.23	320.583.9374	doncrad@creekstonemontessori.org	281232 exp. 2028
Theodore LaFrance	Treasurer	3 years	10.17.22	9.29.22		651.764.9519	tlafrance@creekstonemontessori.org	n/a

As required by the Minnesota Charter School Statute, the board members participated in ongoing training during the 2022-2023 school year. These training sessions included information about School Finance, School Law including Open Meeting Law Standards, School Budget, Special Education, Human Resources, School Governance. Participation of each board member is listed below.

	School Finance (8/4/22)	School Law (8/12/22)	School Budget (3/21/23)	Special Education + Human Resources (4/4/23)	School Governance (4/11/23)
Perry Sekus	X	X	X	X	X
Ted LaFrance			X	X	X
Sheena Tisland	X	X	X	X	X
Ron Ward	X	X	X	X	X
Beth Borgen	X	X	X	X	X

Elissa Behnke	X	X	X	X	X
Dave Conrad			X	X	X

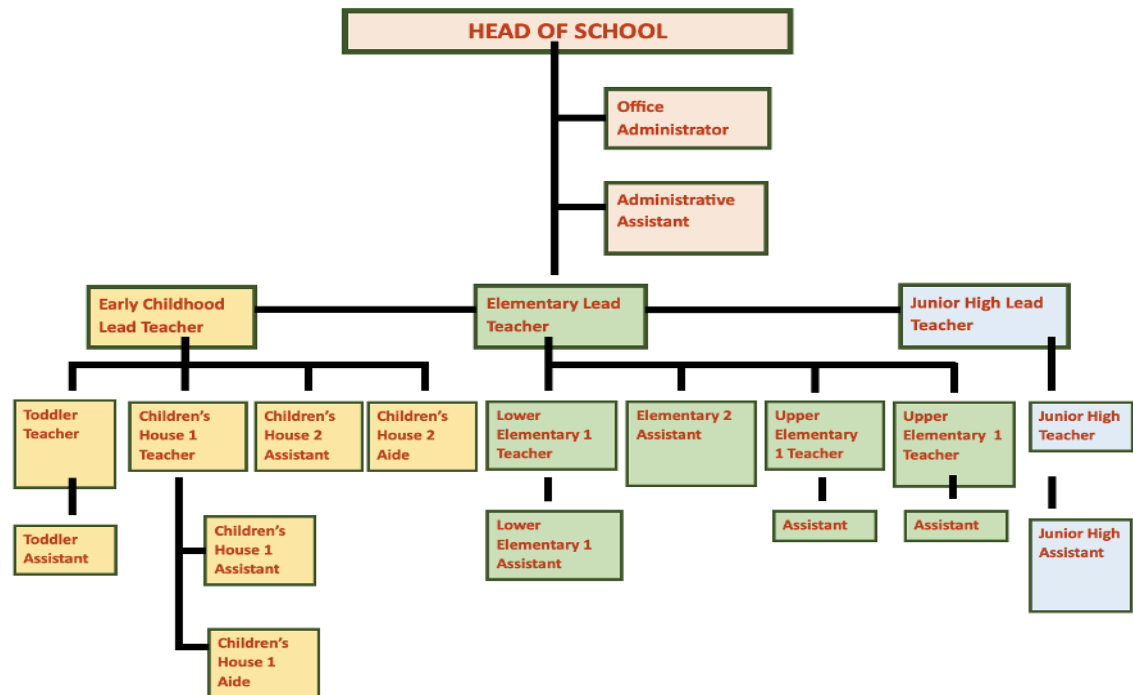
## Management

The Creekstone board works closely with legal counsel to ensure state law changes that impact the Bylaws initiate a review of the Bylaws. Additionally, Creekstone's preoperative membership with Minnesota Association of Charters Schools (MACS) helped the board stay aware of changes in legislation that impact charter schools and prompt the need to update and/or create essential policies.

The School Board remained responsible for policy matters relating to School Management including, but not limited to, budgeting, curriculum, programming, personnel, and operating procedures.

The School Board hired Interim Executive Director, David Conrad on June 22, 2023 to implement operational procedures and perform administrative functions, including the supervision, support, and evaluation of all staff, at the Board's discretion. The School Board was, at times, responsible for overseeing the School administrative functions, and for deciding policy matters concerning school administration.

The Creekstone Board carried out their responsibility in appointing an Executive Director and for overseeing their work. As such, the Executive Director is the only school staff member the board evaluated. The Governance Committee developed the framework and process for such evaluation and completed the evaluation process for Interim Executive Director, David Conrad, on May 30, 2023 and the final report was presented to the board for review and approval. Below is the 2022 Creekstone Organizational Chart.



## Staffing

David Conrad hired the entirety of Creekstone staff including the Director of Compliance and Administrative Services, the Special Education Coordinator & Student Services and Assessment Coordinator, licensed teachers, and all other employees not licensed to perform duties deemed necessary for the successful operation of the school.

Creekstone faculty members are all either appropriately licensed or in the process of completing such licensure. Because of the unique program in the Upper Elementary, we have requested out of field permission for our licensed lead guide. This is necessary due to the small class size and the interdisciplinary nature of the pedagogical model. Below is a chart indicating licensed and unlicensed staff for FY23.

2022-23 Staff Information				
	Name	File Folder #	Montessori Certificate	# of Years at Creekstone
<b>Administrators</b>	Dave Conrad	281232		1
	Kelsie Kuyath			1
	Danielle Mandelkow	517770		1
<b>Teachers</b>	Char Auge	278208		0.5
	Jody Bergeson	313350		0.5
	Deborah Chalmers		AMI	1
	Brooke Dressen		In Progress- NAMC	1
	Holly Kruger	477907	University of Wisconsin-River Falls	1
	Betsy Manning	380819		1
	Anna Rowlyn	1018572	AMS	1
	Korrie Szuberski	448134	In Progress- NAMC	1
	Jessica Wheeler	1019274	University of Wisconsin-River Falls	0.5
	Amanda Williams	447363	In Progress- NAMC	1
<b>Paraprofessionals</b>	Sarah Anderson			0.75
	Linda Beyers			0.75
	Sierra Bloom			1
	Kathie Brown			1
	Claire Flaska			1
	Stacey Hayes			1
	Angie Huber-Dehn			1
	Samantha Hunter			0.75
	Allyssa Lee			1
	Maddison Marking			0.5
	Krista Phernetton			0.5
	Anna Ramstad			1
	Heather Ressie			0.75
	Tiffany Schlicting			1
	Stacy Wood			0.5
	Trisha Woodcock			1
	Brittany Young			0.25

## **Growth and Retention**

At the end of the first operational year, 80% of lead faculty and administrative staff were retained and returned for the 2023-2024 school year. Roughly 85% of support staff were retained into the 2023-2024 academic year. Additionally, at the end of the 2022-2023 academic year, 100% of students intended to return for the 2023-2024 school year, with waitlists in nearly every program/grade level. This amount of student retention required the implementation of two additional student programs for the 2023-2024 academic year - a second Lower Elementary and a new Adolescent Program.

Professional growth and development is a key priority for the school and as such, resources are dedicated to the training of each employee. Creekstone provided generous tuition reimbursements to staff and established a partnership with Montessori Center of Minnesota for ongoing authentic Montessori training for all staff members that is set to take place throughout the 2023-2024 academic year.

## **Future Plans**

At the end of the first operational year, Creekstone is beautifully outfitted with materials and organized in a pure, authentic Montessori fashion. Most notably, our students are actively learning and immersing themselves in this new Montessori environment and countless families and lives have been impacted by this educational experience. The board is extremely proud of the work and investments from our community partnerships in allowing Creekstone to reach such milestones.

Creekstone Montessori School is proud to provide educational programming that promotes and embraces innovative learning. Our future plans include Pre-K - Grade 6 enrollment growth and the implementation of an authentic Montessori Adolescent Program that will serve students Grades 7-8. We are in the process of exploring new sites and partnerships for a new facility that is a true representation of our mission. We will continue to build collaborative partnerships and reach out to those within our community.

## 2022-23 World's Best Workforce (WBWF) Summary

The World's Best Workforce strategic plan focuses on five goals for continued student performance. Due to the K-8 scope of our charter and education services, Creekstone has not set a goal for high school graduation. In the future we intend to introduce our Upper Elementary students to the benefits of higher education and the significance beyond high school graduation. The board will appoint new members to an Education Committee in the coming year to further develop goals in each area for the 2023-2024 academic year and beyond.

### WBWF Goals and Results

#### *All Students Ready for School*

Goal	Result	Goal Status
Kindergarten (primary) curriculum will be carefully aligned to the common core/MN State Standards.	Kindergarten Curriculum (primary) was carefully aligned to the common core/MN State Standards with the assistance of the Minnesota Early Child Indicators of Progress per the guidelines of the Association Montessori Internationale.	<b><i>Check one of the following:</i></b>  <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> On Track (multi-year goal)

#### *All Students in Third Grade Achieving Grade-Level Literacy*

Goal	Result	Goal Status
Students will perform at similar reading levels to surrounding districts on Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCAs).	Creekstone students scored as well or more proficient than comparison districts on reading MCAs in 2023.	<b><i>Check one of the following:</i></b>  <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> On Track (multi-year goal)



***Close the Achievement Gap(s) Between Student Groups***

Goal	Result	Goal Status
Because our student demographics represent over 85% within the racial and ethnic majority group, it is important to us that 100% of our students have equitable access to all materials and programming. All students will have access to school supplies and curriculum materials.	Budget planning continues to ensure that school materials and field trips are available to all students regardless of ability to pay.	<b><i>Check one of the following:</i></b>  <u>X</u> On Track (multi-year goal)

***All Students Career and College-Ready by Graduation***

Goal	Result	Goal Status
Students in Upper Elementary will be introduced to the benefits of higher education and the significance beyond high school graduation each Spring.	Upper Elementary students will be exposed to local higher education options beyond high school beginning in the Spring of 2024.	<b><i>Check one of the following:</i></b>  <u>X</u> On Track (multi-year goal)

**Annual Public Meeting**

A Creekstone Annual Public Meeting was held on May 22, 2023 in compliance with 501(c)(3) organization requirements. A description of Creekstone as a 501(c)(3) was discussed, an overview of Open Meeting Law was presented, founding board members were introduced, and a variety of reports including academic, financial, organizational structure, and family involvement were provided to the public. We will review WBWF progress at the 2023-2024 Annual Public Meeting, scheduled for May 20, 2024, as well as in August at the Back to School Family Gathering.