

## **Word from the Head of School**

Each year, The Mountain School at Winhall looks forward to carrying on its symbiotic relationship with its sending towns, Stratton and Winhall. Since its founding in 1998, the relationship has had two key components: MSW guarantees admission in exchange for the sending towns approving The Mountain School's tuition.

This arrangement provides parents a community school in which they can send their children without concern of not being accepted for admission or having to pay additional tuition in order to attend. This model of a "private school with a public mission" is referred to as a Town Academy. Town Academies have been around in New England since the 1700's, with only 20 Academies still in existence. The Mountain School at Winhall is currently the only Town Academy ever in existence that serves elementary students.

MSW's relationship with Winhall in particular has been historic and unique over the past 14 years. In 1998, visionary citizens closed the public school and started an "independent community school," a phrase chosen by Winhall citizens that were members of the Blue Ribbon Committee, which helped found and guide school principles. These simple yet powerful principles are still followed by the school to this very day: equity and excellence.

I am proud to say that, 14 years later, we have fulfilled these principles. As for equity, MSW has accepted every Winhall child wishing to attend, regardless of socioeconomic background or academic or physical ability (30% of MSW students qualify for free/reduced lunch and 17% receive special education services); it provides financial support for students to attend field trips and participate in sports; MSW provides laptops for students in middle school if needed; and more. Regarding excellence, MSW has raised its standard of performance to become one of the top schools in the state of Vermont. Our students score well above the state average in Reading (10%) and math (15%). We also offer a comprehensive, challenging, and creative curriculum based on scientific research that focuses on critical thinking and problem solving. MSW has become a model of visionary, cutting-edge education.

The Mountain School also remains Winhall's community school - not only in the historic concept of the Blue Ribbon Committee, but in its daily commitment to Winhall residents. Examples include: MSW was founded by Winhall citizens; MSW is the only school over the past 14 years to guarantee admission to every Winhall resident; MSW resides geographically within the town of Winhall; more MSW students come from Winhall than any other town; and more Winhall students attend MSW than any other school.

We are proud to continue this commitment to Winhall and Stratton, and look forward to their continued commitment to us as well. With their support, we pledge to serve as their community school focused on equity and excellence for years to come!

Sincerely,  
Daren M. Houck  
Head of School