



Hill View Montessori

Minutes

Board of Trustees Meeting

Date and Time

Thursday October 22, 2026 at 6:30 PM

Location

75 Foundation Ave, Haverhill MA 01835

Trustees Present

A. Fergus (remote), J. Hood, J. Landry, K. Bridges, K. Laureano, P. Carelis, R. Garhwal, S. Stecher

Trustees Absent

N. Williamson

Guests Present

Brooke Darling (remote), G. Whitson, H. Herklotz, J. Gibbons, N. Dolan, Natali Mercedes, Sharon Blazejowski (remote)

I. Opening Items

A. Record Attendance

B. Call the Meeting to Order

J. Landry called a meeting of the board of trustees of Hill View Montessori to order on Thursday Oct 22, 2026 at 6:33 PM.

C.

Public Comment

D. Approve Minutes - SEP

J. Hood made a motion to approve the minutes from Board of Trustees Meeting on 09-24-26.

J. Landry seconded the motion.

The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

II. Updates

A. Presentation of the Annual Audit

- Sharon Blazejowski and Brooke Darling presented the June 30, 2026 annual audit for Hill View and the Foundation.
- Sharon reviewed the required Board Communication Letter and explained the audit process.
- Two new accounting standards were adopted:
 - GASB 103 – Updated the Management's Discussion and Analysis section.
 - GASB 104 – Related to certain capital assets but did not affect the current financial statements.
- The auditors reported no difficulties completing the audit and no disagreements with management.
- One minor noncompliance finding was identified involving two late grant reports during the transition from Elizabeth to Central Source.
- A new process has been implemented to prevent late filings going forward.
- Brooke reviewed the draft financial statements and confirmed that the school received a clean, unmodified audit opinion.
- Financial highlights included:
 - Total assets of approximately \$4.7 million, an increase of \$296,000.
 - Cash and cash equivalents of approximately \$1.6 million.
 - Capital assets of approximately \$2.5 million.
 - Total liabilities of approximately \$2.3 million.
 - Total net position of approximately \$1.9 million, an increase of \$170,000.
 - Operating revenues of approximately \$6.2 million.
 - Tuition revenue of approximately \$5.3 million.
 - Operating expenses of approximately \$5.9 million.
 - Salaries and benefits of approximately \$4.2 million.
 - Operating income of approximately \$130,000.
- No material weaknesses or significant deficiencies were identified.
- Sharon asked the Board four required questions regarding subsequent events, undisclosed related-party transactions, litigation, and fraud.
 - The Board responded no to all four questions.
- One legal letter is still outstanding before the audit can be finalized.

- Jeff asked whether anyone had additional questions or concerns regarding the audit.
- The finalized audit must be submitted to the state by October 30.
- Jeff H. made a motion to accept the audit as presented in draft, assuming no changes are made.
- Motion approved.

B. Board Candidate - Rahul Garwhal

- Rahul introduced himself and shared his interest in joining the Board.
- His daughter currently attends Hill View in first grade, and he expressed a personal interest in supporting the school.
- He has a background in business management, science, life sciences, and data analytics.
- Currently works as a senior product owner for a life sciences company.
- Jeff H. asked how Rahul's professional background could benefit the Board.
 - Rahul discussed opportunities to make accountability data easier to understand through dashboards, scorecards, and measurable goals.
 - He explained that his experience could help connect data to strategic objectives and track progress.
- Jeff L. asked about his availability for monthly Board and committee meetings.
 - Rahul shared that evenings are generally manageable, although occasional work travel throughout the year.
- Andy asked how Rahul would balance being both a parent and Board member, particularly when other parents bring concerns to him.
 - Rahul explained that concerns should be directed through the appropriate school administration channels rather than handled informally as a Board member.
- Board members asked about his previous experience and what he enjoys most about Hill View.
 - Rahul shared the positive changes he has seen in his daughter's learning, particularly her reading skills and independence.
- Rahul thanked the Board and stepped out while members discussed his candidacy.
- Scott shared that he had no reservations and felt Rahul had a strong skill set and good temperament.
- Kevin highlighted Rahul's experience working with complex data and presenting information to different audiences.
- The Board discussed Rahul's positive involvement as a parent and his potential long-term commitment to the school.
- Jeff L. made a motion to approve Rahul as a new Board member, and Kevin seconded.
- Motion approved unanimously.

- Jeff will email Rahul with the decision and next steps.

C. BOARD GOAL - Meeting Attendance

- Current Board and committee meeting attendance is approximately 91.49%.
- The Board continues to exceed its goal of 80% attendance.
- Jeff mentions that attendance remains strong.

D. YMCA Educator of the Year Nominees

- Two Hill View staff members have been nominated for YMCA Educator of the Year:
 - Matt DeWinde – Middle School Humanities Teacher.
 - Ginger Whitson – Head of School.
- Hill View has two of approximately ten nominees.
- The awards event is scheduled for November 10, 2026.
- Board members were encouraged to attend and support the nominees.
- The November Development Committee meeting will need to be rescheduled due to the event.

E. Directors Report

- Ginger shared feedback from Darnisa Jackson's professional development focused on creating a culture of belonging and inclusion.
- She plans to provide the Board with more frequent updates on staff professional development throughout the school year.
- Massachusetts recently announced digital safety and mental health grant opportunities.
 - Hannah is working on an application.

7th Grade Overnight Trip

- Only 12 of 32 seventh graders participated in the overnight trip to Vermont.
- Participation has historically been much higher.
- Ginger explained that the school considered canceling due to low attendance but ultimately decided to continue.
- The students who attended were having a great experience.
- Parent survey feedback identified several reasons for low participation:
 - Students not interested in the outdoor experience.
 - Length of the trip.
 - Students not wanting to be without their phones.
 - Cost concerns raised by two families.
- The trip costs approximately \$150 for four days and three nights.
- Staffing was adjusted to one staff chaperone and two parent chaperones, reducing substitute coverage needs.

- The school plans to survey eighth-grade families earlier to better anticipate participation in their spring trip.
- Jeff discussed whether a day trip may be more appropriate for seventh graders in the future.
- Ginger shared that the school will consider alternative options, including a day trip to Camp Lincoln.

Integrated Monitoring Review

- The school has an Integrated Monitoring Review scheduled for January 2027.
- The state will review approximately 25 areas, including:
 - Civil rights and student access.
 - Document translation and accessibility.
 - Teacher licensing.
 - Professional development and compliance requirements.
- Ginger and Niamh will attend training on November 9 to prepare for the review.
- Ginger explained that this will be a significant project for the school.

The Hive

- Session 2 is currently underway, with 63 students participating.
- Five clubs are being offered:
 - Lego Club.
 - Art Club.
 - Cooking Club.
 - Spanish Club.
 - Paint & Create.
- Nearly all students are paying full tuition, which has been positive for program revenue.
- Registration for Session 3 will begin soon.

School Events

- The Screenagers parent education event was held October 6, with approximately 49 parents attending.
- Ginger shared that the feedback was very positive.
- Trunk or Treat is scheduled for the following week.
 - Approximately 23 cars registered to decorate.
 - More than 160 attendees registered.
 - A food drive will be held to replenish the school pantry.
- Mystery History Day will include students researching historical figures and presenting them in a wax museum-style event.
- Families, kindergarten teachers, and Middle School teachers have been invited to attend.

Accountability and Enrollment

- Ginger reviewed the school's 2026 DESE accountability results.
- The school's accountability percentile increased:
 - 2024: 25.
 - 2025: 27.
 - 2026: 34.
- Ginger highlighted the continued improvement in the school's accountability standing.
- Enrollment increased from 305 to 307 students.
- The Massachusetts Charter Public School Association contacted Ginger regarding Hill View's notably low chronic absenteeism rate.

F. Head of School Goals

- The Board reviewed Ginger's updated Head of School goals.
- All previously discussed goals remained unchanged.
- An additional goal was added focusing on cultivating a positive and collaborative staff culture.
- Board members expressed support for the additional goal.
- No further changes were requested.

G. Financial Governance Presentation

- Jeff L. presented an overview of financial governance following board's request for a clearer understanding of school finances and the Board's responsibilities.
- Discussed the transition of financial oversight responsibilities to Ginger and the current structure involving June and Central Source.
- The Board has five core financial responsibilities:
 - Ensure timely submission of the annual report.
 - Oversee the annual independent audit.
 - Approve the annual school budget.
 - Approve certain purchases, sales, or leases of property.
 - Oversee investment policies.

Annual Budget Process

- The annual budget process begins in January with Ginger, June, and Central Source.
- The previous year's budget is used as a starting point, with adjustments for staffing, tuition, and other anticipated changes.
- February and March are spent refining projections as additional information becomes available.
- The Board receives its first draft in March.
- Additional reviews and discussions continue through May or June before the final budget is approved.

- Jeff L. emphasized the Board's responsibility to ensure the budget:
 - Is accurate and realistic.
 - Aligns with school priorities and strategic goals.
 - Maintains appropriate financial reserves.
 - Considers long-term facilities and operating needs.

Financial Oversight and Responsibilities

- The Finance Committee reviews monthly financial reports with Ginger, June, and Central Source.
- Reviews spending trends, budget variances, and future financial needs.
- The school currently falls within DESE's low-risk financial categories.
- Jeff L. reviewed the financial responsibilities of school administration:
 - Ginger has final approval authority over financial decisions.
 - June manages day-to-day financial administration, invoices, purchasing, payroll, school accounts, and staff questions.
 - Central Source manages accounting, monthly financial reporting, bill payments, and related reporting requirements.
- Financial policies establish check-signing and approval requirements.

Questions and Discussion

- Scott asked whether the school has money available for investment.
- Jeff L. explained that the school still holds more than \$400,000 from previously received Employee Retention Tax Credit funds.
- The funds had originally been designated for roof and HVAC repairs.
- Scott suggested reviewing investment opportunities for the remaining funds.
- Jeff L. agreed that the Board should consider developing an investment strategy with professional guidance.
- The Board discussed restrictions associated with the funds and April 2027 as an important date.
- The Board also discussed future building expenses and the importance of planning for major repairs.
- Ginger discussed ongoing roof leaks near the Olive classroom.
 - The contractor has returned several times to reseal the affected area.
 - Some classrooms continue to experience heating, cooling, and ventilation inconsistencies.
- Jeff suggested postponing the detailed budget review to a future meeting.
- The Board agreed.

H. Accountability Data Primer

- Hannah presented a glossary of accountability terms for Board members.
- The goal is to ensure everyone uses consistent definitions when reviewing school performance data.

- Paul asked whether anything had changed from previous years.
- Hannah explained that the glossary was primarily intended to establish a consistent understanding of terminology.
- Jeff H. suggested uploading the document to Board on Track.
- The Board discussed using the glossary as an onboarding resource for current and future members.

I. Faculty Liaison

- Natali shared that staff had requested additional information about Ginger's goals.
- Natali explained that she spoke with Ginger and June will send her the meeting notes.
- She will include the information in her regular staff update.

J. POLICY REVIEW - Physical Restraint Policy

- The Board reviewed the updated Restraint Prevention and Behavior Support Policy.
- Ginger explained that the policy was updated to comply with current state requirements.
- The changes are not expected to significantly affect existing school practices.
- The school does not use seclusion, and the current reset room meets the safety expectations discussed.
- Jeff L. made a motion to approve the updated policy, and Paul seconded.
- Motion approved.

K. PTO & Foundation Update

- Jessica McCarthy is the new PTO co-chair.
- Upcoming PTO events and activities include:
 - Five Guys fundraiser.
 - Trunk or Treat.
 - Student Vendor Fair, with approximately 13 vendors signed up.
 - Fall Cleanup on November 3.
 - Proposed Middle School spaghetti dinner.
 - Middle School dances.
 - Ski Club.
- The PTO is planning a dinner where Middle School students can invite a special person.
- The Board discussed the importance of offering more events for older students and their families.
- The November 3 Fall Cleanup will take place on a professional development day when students are not in school.
- Parent volunteers will assist with outdoor cleanup.

Foundation

- The community skating fundraiser is tentatively scheduled for January 9.
- Hannah explained that the date conflicts with a Montessori conference that some staff will attend.
- Additional rink dates are being requested before finalizing the event.
- Rock & Roll Bingo planning is beginning.
- Hannah and Tai will take a more active role in sponsorship outreach.
- The Foundation will focus on building relationships with larger sponsors and identifying new supporters.

L. Board Composition Matrix

- Jeff L. explained that only three or four Board members had returned their completed forms.
- Discussion postponed until additional responses are received.
- The Board will revisit the matrix at a future meeting.

M. New Business

N. Committee on Trustees

- Reviewed school bylaws and Board governance responsibilities.
- Discussed legal and training compliance requirements for Board members.
- Discussed creating a digital document repository and improving onboarding materials.
- Several follow-up tasks were identified.
- Next committee meeting scheduled for Thursday, November 5, 2026.

O. Accountability

- Hannah presented updated accountability data comparing Hill View with Haverhill Public Schools.
- Discussed adjustments needed to the reporting spreadsheet, including cells displaying red when no data is available.

MCAS – ELA

- Overall meeting/exceeding expectations:
 - Hill View: 28%.
 - Haverhill Public Schools: 26%.
- Grade 7:
 - Hill View: 53%.
 - Haverhill Public Schools: 27%.

- Grade 8:
 - Hill View: 41%.
 - Haverhill Public Schools: 28%.
- Overall ELA student growth percentile: 56.
- Hannah reported that Hill View had the highest ELA growth among Haverhill elementary schools.

MCAS – Math

- Overall math student growth percentile: 52.
- Second-highest math growth among Haverhill elementary schools.
- Math achievement remains an area requiring improvement, particularly in lower grades.
- The Board discussed the importance of considering growth alongside raw MCAS scores.

Questions and Discussion

- Kevin discussed following student cohorts from year to year to better understand changes in performance.
- The Board discussed how small grade-level populations can cause significant changes in percentages.
- Hannah explained why comparisons to Haverhill Public Schools may be more meaningful than statewide comparisons because the schools serve similar populations.
- Niamh shared that approximately 53 MCAS-eligible students in grades 3–8 have IEPs.
- The Board discussed the importance of understanding student needs when interpreting assessment results.
- Hannah shared that approximately 19% of students in the partially meeting category were within five points of meeting expectations.
- Approximately 12% were within five points of the not-meeting threshold.
- The Board discussed how small score differences can change achievement categories.

Civics

- Hill View students performed approximately 20 percentage points higher than Haverhill Public Schools.

DIBELS and STAR

- Hannah reviewed reading proficiency trends:
 - Fall 2024: 40.3%.
 - Fall 2025: 39.2%.
 - Fall 2026: 46.1%.

- Discussed summer learning loss and improvements in reading performance.

Reporting Format

- Jeff H. suggested that the presentation contained too much information for one meeting.
- Recommended focusing on one assessment area at a time, such as MCAS, and reviewing DIBELS and STAR separately.
- Hannah discussed separating assessment areas into different presentations.

P. Development

- The November Development Committee meeting will be rescheduled due to the YMCA Educator of the Year event.
- Hannah reported nearly 100% Board participation in the Annual Fund.
- Approximately \$12,620 has been raised so far.
- Hannah identified an internal fundraising goal of \$15,000.
- Fundraising communications will continue through the weekly newsletter.
- Hannah set a Rock & Roll Bingo sponsorship goal of \$20,000.
- She has begun reaching out to local businesses and previous supporters.
- Several school visits are being arranged for potential sponsors.
- Board members were encouraged to share contacts for businesses interested in charitable giving.

Q. Finance

- The Finance Committee reported that the school is currently in good financial standing.
- Current projections show spending approximately \$150,000 under budget.
- Some of the difference is expected to level out as additional staff are hired.
- Salary expenses are currently trending below budget.
- Some unexpected facilities expenses have occurred, but no major financial concerns were identified.

III. Closing Items

A. Next Meeting

Next Board meeting scheduled for Thursday, December 3, 2026

B. Adjourn Meeting

There being no further business to be transacted, and upon motion duly made, seconded and approved, the meeting was adjourned at 8:25 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

J. Gibbons