

Overview of the Hilltop Montessori School Board of Trustees

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OVERVIEW

The role of the Hilltop Board of Trustees is to determine and oversee policies that support the mission of the school and to ensure the school's fiscal stability. This includes the hiring and evaluation of the Head of School, appointing standing and ad hoc committees, overseeing the lease and facility use, fundraising, and strategic planning. HMS Board members also serve as ambassadors for the school to the community at large.

SKILL SET DESIRED

Serving on the HMS Board or on one of its various committees is a great way to offer your professional expertise, experience, and time to Hilltop. The Board has an ongoing need to attract potential trustees from within and outside the Hilltop community who have experience or expertise in the following areas:

- Law
- Finance/Investment
- Development/Fundraising,
- Contracting/Architecture
- Equity and Justice work
- Education & school counseling
- Administration/Organization
- Community Connection
- Mental health
- Human resources

HILLTOP MONTESSORI SCHOOL OVERVIEW

Hilltop Montessori School in Brattleboro, Vermont, is a state-accredited pre-K, elementary, and middle school with approximately 120 students, summer camps, and a variety of before and after school programs. Hilltop was founded in 1972 and moved to its new 43-acre campus in 2009. The school now has an annual budget of around \$2 million. Hilltop enjoys a committed and engaged parent, grandparent and alumni community.

OUR MISSION

Hilltop's mission is for students to practice responsible independence in a caring community of curious, critical learners and thoughtful citizens.

CORE THEMES

The Educational Partnership

Honest, open communication forms the basis of the educational partnership among teachers, students and parents. Members of the Hilltop community believe that it is the responsibility of each individual to be respectful and caring of each other and of the world in which we live.

The Montessori Curriculum

The Montessori curriculum fosters inquiry and exploration. Teachers committed to Montessori principles serve as role models and guides in a multi-disciplinary curriculum that requires initiative, problem solving skills and the personal integrity to work to one's fullest capacity.

The Prepared Environment

Each child is given the freedom and permission to learn directly from a thoughtfully prepared environment. The responsibility to make choices instills in students self-discipline, independence, and joy in the learning process.

The Collaborative Learning Community

In Hilltop's multi-age classrooms students are encouraged to develop, share, and acknowledge individual strengths and skills. Learning is a collaborative process in which students inspire, motivate, teach and, above all, respect each other.

The Potential of Each Individual

On an intellectual, emotional, physical and spiritual level students are guided and supported as they strive toward fulfilling their individual potential. By respecting a child's unique voice, learning style, rhythm and pace, teachers foster self-confidence and a willingness to take risks. Student assessments measure the personal growth of each individual in the academic and social context.

HMS DIVERSITY STATEMENT

“We shall walk together on this path of life, for all things are a part of the universe, and are connected with each other to form one whole unity.”

— Maria Montessori

At Hilltop Montessori School:

We endeavor to honor the qualities that make us similar to each other and those that make us different, co-creating a space that values and respects the race, ethnicity, national origin, immigration status, language, religion, socioeconomic status, gender identity, size, sexual orientation, and dis/ability of all students, families, and employees.

We understand that this effort is a work in progress and that the achievement of such principles grows from the work of educating ourselves and each other as we address our biases and revisit program curriculums and school policies. The empowerment of the members of our community will bring confidence and compassion for understanding and communicating with a more inclusive language, challenge discrimination and stereotypes, and provide guidance.

We strive to develop, embrace, and celebrate diversity in order to fulfill our mission, affirm the principles of Montessori education, and carry out a responsible role in our community.

BOARD MEMBER JOB DESCRIPTION

ROLE OF THE BOARD

The role of the Board of Trustees is to determine and oversee policies that support the mission of the school, and to ensure the school's fiscal stability. Their work includes the hiring and evaluation of the Head of School, appointing standing and ad hoc committees, overseeing facility use, fundraising and strategic planning. Equally important, Board members serve as ambassadors for the school community. The Board's work is guided by the priorities outlined in the school's Strategic Plan, adopted in 2017.

EXPECTATIONS OF BOARD MEMBERS

Attendance

Attendance at Board meetings is critical for its success. Trustees must attend at least 75% of the year's regularly-scheduled meetings.

Committee Work

Board meetings are structured in part around reports from its various Board committees, which meet at least once in between full Board meetings. Thus, a great deal of most important Board work happens in committee. Trustees recognize that committee work will take additional time, energy and vision, outside of what is already given to the meetings of the full Board.

Fundraising

All trustees are expected to make a meaningful contribution to the Annual Fund each September, at a level comfortable to the trustee. All trustees will be actively engaged in cultivating and/or thanking donors and will make every effort to participate in the school's major fundraising events.

Ambassadorship

Trustees will serve as Hilltop ambassadors to the community.

TERM OF OFFICE

Trustees serve a three-year term. They may be re-elected to a second 3-year term. In the event that their seat has not been filled, they may be elected to an additional 1-year term.

BOARD MEETINGS

The full Board has monthly meetings during the school year on Wednesday evenings, which typically run about 3 hours including dinner. Meeting preparation usually requires approximately one hour per month. In addition, the Board holds a four-hour summer retreat. On rare occasions, to deal with urgent situations, special meetings may be called. Board members are asked to make every effort to attend extraordinary meetings. Board members are invited to volunteer to provide dinner for the group one or two times per year.

COMMITTEES

Committee work happens outside the regular Board meetings. On average, committees have a monthly 2-hour meeting. However, some committees meet more frequently, especially during their busiest times of year. Committee charges are posted to the website.

Executive Committee / Leadership Team

Comprises current chair, outgoing chair and incoming chair, plus Head of School. Meets weekly. LT time focuses on coordinating the monthly board meetings and as a supportive workspace for the Head of School to discuss executive issues.

Committee on Trustees

Comprises 2-4 Board members plus Head of School. Meets monthly. Responsibilities include working with LT to plan Trustee education throughout the year and conducting the annual evaluations of the Head of School and Board. CoT also works with LT to recruit new Trustees, and is responsible for the Board's self-governance.

Finance Committee

Composed of at least two Board members, up to 3 community members, Business Manager, and Head of School. Meets monthly, prior to the full Board meeting. Ensures the stewardship of overall school finances. Partners with and listens to monthly reporting and recommendations from school administration and where applicable, makes alternate suggestions. Assists to distill financial data and concepts for presentation to the full board as well as the public. Depending on internal and external factors and issues, may need to meet more frequently to ensure financial stability.

Building & Grounds

Comprises 2 Board members, up to 3 community members, Facilities Director, and Head of School. Meets monthly. Provides link between the Facilities team and the Board of Trustees about current and upcoming projects, and general support for the Facilities team.

Development Committee

Comprises at least 2 Board members, up to 8 community members, Development Director, and Head of School. Oversees both the raising of funds and the planning of events. Typically meets monthly and sometimes appoints subcommittees for particular development projects such as Annual Fund, anniversary celebrations, community events, alumni gatherings, etc.

Strategic Planning Committee

The Strategic Planning Committee has recently been revitalized as we have reached the end of our current Strategic Plan (2017–2021) and are embarking on the process for developing the next one. This includes evaluating and reevaluating the school’s mission with careful consideration of the core values, beliefs, and goals of the school, surveying the community, staff, faculty, and trustees, and financial planning. The Strategic Planning Committee spends time thinking about the school’s larger impact, and long term goals—both academic and financial.

QUALIFICATIONS

Serving on the HMS Board or on one of its various committees is a great way to offer your professional expertise, experience, and time to Hilltop. The Board has an ongoing need to attract potential trustees from within and outside the Hilltop community who have experience or expertise in the following areas: Law, Finance, Development/Fundraising, Contracting/Architecture, Education, Administration/ Organization, Community Connection, Equity & Justice Work.

PRINCIPLES OF BEST PRACTICE

The Board is the guardian of Hilltop’s mission. It is the Board’s responsibility to ensure that the mission remains relevant and vital to the community it serves and to monitor the success of the school in fulfilling its mission. In fall 2010, the Hilltop Board adopted the following Principles of Best Practice.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

1. The Board and the Head of School work in partnership to fulfill the following principles of good practice.
2. The Board adopts a clear statement of the school’s mission, vision, and strategic goals and establishes policies and plans consistent with this statement.
3. The Board reviews and maintains appropriate bylaws that conform to legal requirements, including duties of loyalty, obedience and care.
4. The Board assures that the school and the Board operate in compliance with applicable laws and regulations, minimizing exposure to legal action. The Board creates a conflict of interest policy that is reviewed with, and signed by, individual trustees annually.

5. The Board accepts accountability for both the financial stability and the financial future of the institution, engaging in strategic financial planning, assuming primary responsibility for the preservation of capital assets and endowments, overseeing operating budgets, and participating actively in fund-raising.
6. The Board selects, supports, nurtures, evaluates, and sets appropriate compensation for the Head of School.
7. The Board recognizes that its primary work and focus are long-range and strategic.
8. The Board undertakes formal strategic planning on a periodic basis, and sets annual goals related to the plan.
9. The Board conducts annual written evaluations for the Head of School and the Board itself.
10. The Board keeps full and accurate records of its meetings, committees, and policies and communicates its decisions widely, while keeping its deliberations confidential.
11. Board composition reflects the strategic expertise, resources and perspectives (past, present, future) needed to achieve the mission and strategic objectives of the school.
12. The Board works to ensure all its members are actively involved in the work of the Board and its committees.
13. As leader of the school community, the Board engages proactively with the Head of School in cultivating and maintaining good relations with school constituents as well as the broader community, embraces our responsibility to the local and global community, and demonstrates compassion and a commitment to equity.
14. The Board is committed to a program of professional development that includes annual new trustee orientation, ongoing trustee education and evaluation, and Board leadership succession planning.

INDIVIDUAL TRUSTEES

1. As members of the Board of Directors, individual trustees uphold the following principles of good practice.
2. A trustee actively supports and promotes Hilltop's mission, vision, strategic goals and policy positions.
3. A trustee is knowledgeable about Hilltop's mission and goals, including its commitment to equity and justice, and represents them appropriately and accurately within the community.
4. A trustee stays fully informed about current operations and issues by attending meetings regularly, coming to meetings well prepared, and participating fully in all matters.

5. The Board sets policy and focuses on long range and strategic issues. An individual trustee does not become involved directly in specific management, personnel, or curricular issues.
6. The trustee takes care to separate the interests of the school from the specific needs of a particular child or constituency.
7. A trustee is a team player. The trustee works well with the full Board and with Board committees. The trustee can discuss sensitive or difficult issues in a candid yet civil manner.
8. A trustee accepts and supports Board decisions. Once a decision has been made, the Board speaks with one voice.
9. A trustee keeps all Board deliberations confidential.
10. A trustee guards against conflict of interest, whether personal or business related.
11. A trustee has the responsibility to support the school and its head and to demonstrate that support within the community.
12. Authority is vested in the Board as a whole. A trustee who learns of an issue of importance to the school has the obligation to bring it to the Head of School, or to the Board chair, and must refrain from responding to the situation individually.
13. A trustee contributes to the development program of the school, including strategic planning for development, financial support, and active involvement in annual and capital giving.
14. Each trustee commits time and resources to the school at levels comfortable to the trustee.
15. Each trustee, not just the treasurer and finance committee, has fiduciary responsibility to the school for sound financial management.

[Adapted from the National Association of Independent Schools, Principles of Good Practice for Trustees, 2001.]