

HILLTOWN COOPERATIVE CHARTER PUBLIC SCHOOL



Family Handbook and Directory 2012-2013

We hope that the information in this book will help make your year at Hilltown informed and enjoyable. Please come in at any time to clarify or to ask questions. Translations of this or any other school document are available for families who need it.

The text of this handbook and related material is also available on our website:
www.hilltowncharter.org

(Si usted desea una copia de este manual - o de cualquier otro documento de la escuela - en español, por favor comuníquese con Amy Aaron, coordinadora administrativa.)

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Making gingerbread people at the Winter Fair



Salmon Eggs arrive in the Indigos

HILLTOWN PERSONNEL 2012/2013

Teachers

Bill Farkas, Blues (K-1)
Rebecca Belcher-Timme, Indigos (K-1)
Nan Childs, Greens (2-3)
Paula Yolles, Yellows (2-3)
Coco Moran, Oranges (4-5)
Kate Saccento, Reds (4-5)
Peter Kennedy, Purples (6)
Beth Adel, Prisms (7-8)
John Van Beckum, Prisms (7-8)
Laurel Loomis, Atelier
Marguerite Durant, Music & Movement
Heather Punska, Special Education
Gaby Blaustein, Special Education
Felicia Mednick, Reading
Deena Lashway, Spanish, ELL

Teaching Assistants, Instructors and Specialists:

Kathy Elsea, Blues TA
Seana Dickson, Indigos TA
Penny Giguere, Greens TA
Evan Curran, Yellows/Greens TA
Jenn Palmer, Yellows TA
Kate Kamins, Oranges TA
Suzanne Turner, Reds TA
Beth Dirks, Reds TA
Annie Levine, Purples TA
Grace Mrowicki, Prisms TA
Reka Peterson, Music and Movement TA
Joy Kinigstein, Atelier TA, Prisms visual art
Amanda Faro, Phys. Ed. / After-school

Student Support Team

Deb Haas; Nurse, Health Ed.
Emilie Woodward, School Counselor
Justin Wright, Speech Therapist
Amy Linnell, Speech Therapist
Alyssa Lovell, Occupational Therapy
Margaret Chappuis, Physical Therapy

Administrative Staff

Dan Klatz; Education Coordinator
Deirdre Arthen; Community Coordinator
Amy Aaron; Administrative Coordinator,
Civil Rights Coordinator
Carey Royce; Development Associate
Monique Bourgeois; Admin. Assistant
Carla Clark; Bookkeeper, purchasing agent
Dave Soucie; Technology coordinator



... a special appearance at the Coffeehouse

Board of Trustees

Kipp Armstrong, *President*
Susannah Howe, *Treasurer*
Ellen Ferris, *Clerk*
Laura Baker, *chair, Site Committee*
Tom Sippel, *Site Committee*
Peter Flynn, *chair, Personnel Committee*
Dan Levy, *chair, Long-range Planning Committee*
Allison Gomes, *chair, Governance Committee*
Ellen Brown, *Scribe*
Sam Charron, *Domain Council*
Jane Percival, *Personnel Committee*
Bill Summers, *Liaison Friends of Hilltown*

Friends of Hilltown Board

Andi Porter, *President*
Maurine Malone, *Vice President*
Kathy Elsea, *Treasurer*
Bill Summer, *Clerk*
Jennifer Gottlieb, Heather Warner, Paula Yolles
Ronna Kulberg, Rae Korengold, Dianne Hobbs
Mary Price, Mary Ellen Rousseau

MISSION

The Hilltown Cooperative Charter School was founded in 1995 as a Massachusetts Public Charter School. Our mission is:

- **To engage students in a school which uses experiential, hands-on activities, the arts, and interdisciplinary studies to foster critical thinking skills and a joy of learning.**
- **To sustain a cooperative, intimate community of students, staff, families and local community members, which guides and supports the school and its educational program.**
- **To cultivate children's individual voices and a shared respect for each other, our community, and the world around us.**

PHILOSOPHY

The Hilltown Cooperative Charter Public School (HCCPS) was founded in 1995 as Massachusetts Public Charter School. Inspired by the pre-schools of Reggio Emilia in Italy, our educational approach is grounded in knowledge of children's development and in a commitment to teaching creative, critical thinking skills and strong basic skills.

At HCCPS, we believe that children construct their understanding of the world through direct experience with teachers serving as guides and resources. We create an engaging and joyful learning environment using an interdisciplinary, project-based curriculum. Emphasis is placed on asking children and adults to reflect on and document the learning process. The expressive arts play a critical role in the academic and social curriculum, and create a common language that brings our community together in meaningful ways.

HCCPS welcomes and relies on family involvement. Children, families, school and community form an integrated, interdependent system, which operates through an inclusive, consensus-based governance structure. Beyond Academic curriculum, children learn essential life skills through participation in an intimate, whole school cooperative. Involvement in the local environment and its communities inspires learning and encourages social and civic responsibility as well as stewardship for the earth.

Parents and teachers help children to care for and respect themselves and each other. We strongly believe that cultivation of each individual voice within a community leads to inclusion of and respect for differences and multiple perspectives.



Lili shares her writing with Mary

ADMISSIONS

The Hilltown Cooperative Charter School is a public K-8 school and is open to all children of appropriate grade levels from any Massachusetts town, on a space available basis with priority given to siblings of current students from Hampshire and Franklin counties. No tuition or application fee is required. Students bring with them the per pupil expenditure from their home school districts. Hilltown does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, creed, sex, ethnicity, sexual orientation, mental or physical disability, age, ancestry, athletic performance, special need, proficiency in the English language, or academic achievement. Our enrollment for the 2011-2012 school year is 172 students, kindergarten through grade 8, in eight mixed-age classrooms.

In January each year the school advertises and holds an open Informational Meeting and then conducts an admissions lottery in February to assign students to a waiting list for the following September. As openings occur, the top person on the list is offered the slot. Following the admissions lottery, parents are notified of acceptance or waiting list status. Parents of prospective students should contact the school for an application. Once a student is enrolled at Hilltown s/he has a secure space for subsequent years and all siblings gain admission priority. School meetings orient families to the cooperative structure of the school and help welcome them into the school community.



2011-12 Blues and Indigos classes

THE COOPERATIVE

The Hilltown School is structured as a cooperative. We believe that education is enhanced by strengthening the ties between school and home, so parental involvement is an essential factor in the school. Parent contributions also help us to keep costs down and allow a flexibility, richness and diversity in the school, which we might otherwise not achieve.

Membership

All members of the school community are considered members of the Cooperative. Parents, staff and outside community members who invest an average of at least 4 hours of volunteer work per month to benefit the school as a whole are eligible to vote on by-law changes at the annual meeting and to elect the school's Board of Trustees. Parents are strongly encouraged to become Voting Members in order to become more actively involved in their children's educational environment and for the good of the school as a whole. Parents serve on all major decision-making bodies of the school, including the Board of Trustees, all policy-making committees and on the board of The Friends of Hilltown (see below).

CO-OP meetings are held twice a year, in the fall, and in the spring. Parents are strongly encouraged to attend both meetings. These meetings are a chance for members to talk with each other, the Board of Trustees and the school administration about current happenings at the school and relevant community issues such as school culture, structure, location and educational philosophy. Elections of new Board of Trustees members occur at the spring meeting.

Educational Forums are held twice a year as a vehicle for the teaching staff to share important elements of the HCCPS curriculum with parents. It can be a great place to get answers to curriculum or pedagogical questions.

Volunteering at school

There are a wide variety of ways in which parents can meet the 4-hour work requirement for voting membership either in school or at home. All parents are asked to complete individual Coop-Member Resource forms. These give us information about the resources available to the school and your own preferences about how you would like to be included in this community. The Community Coordinator, teachers, Development Associate, class parents and committee chairs have access to this information and will help you make connections. Parents who want to spend time with students in the classroom or driving on field trips must give permission for a state CORI check as well.

Sharing volunteer hours

If a parent would like to be a Voting Member but is unable to meet the work requirement due to unusual personal or work constraints, the extra hours of other cooperative members may be shared. Couples in a family often share hours like this and we are always willing to help find partners for other parents in this position. Talk with Deirdre, the Community Coordinator.

COMMUNICATION

Good communication among parents, staff and the Board is essential. In the main entryway, a **white board** and **monthly calendar** list upcoming dates or events of note. Family mailboxes are also found here. The central area at the school, the All-School Space has several **bulletin boards** where announcements and minutes from meetings are posted. Recent memos are on the wall outside the **Coordinators Office**.

The **Hilltown Newsletter** is published once a week. It contains an updated calendar, information about various classes' activities, meeting summaries from the Board of Trustees and its committees, and other announcements and articles from the school. The Newsletter is sent by e-mail but may also be delivered on paper in your mailbox if you request it.

Please be sure to give the office any address, e-mail or phone number changes throughout the year so that we can stay in touch with you. A **Family Directory** is distributed in the Handbook at the beginning of the year to help parents and students stay in touch with one another by phone and e-mail. This information is confidential and must not be passed along to anyone outside the school or used for group mailings. We will pass along address changes to the school community via the newsletter.

Communication with Teachers

While teachers welcome greetings during drop-off and pick-up times they are generally unable to discuss individual concerns with parents at this time. A written message left in the teacher's office mailbox, an e-mail or a phone call is a better way to set up a time for uninterrupted discussion. Please include your telephone number and the times you are most easily reached. The teacher will contact you to discuss the issue or set up a time to meet, if necessary. If you call the school to leave a message for a teacher, please be aware that they may not check their messages until the end of the day. Leave all urgent messages with the Administrative Assistant to pass along in person.

Communication with Students

During the day you may leave messages for students in the office and they will be delivered when time allows. Students will be called from class only for emergencies. No student cell phone use is allowed, 8:00 am and 4:30 pm, so please don't call your child on his/her cell phone. (see policy below)

Parent Mailboxes

Mailboxes are located in the entryway and parents are expected to check them at least twice a week. Although much communication is done through email, many important notices are distributed here, sometimes with short notice of upcoming events or changes in plans. You may miss something if you are not on top of your mail. The mailboxes are for official school communications only. *Please do not use the mailboxes for sending invitations or distributing non-school-related information.*

Addressing Concerns, Getting your Voice Heard

We encourage everyone in the school to go directly to the person involved to resolve problems as they arise. Classroom concerns should first be addressed with the teacher involved.

Parents with questions about the school and its policies may turn to the **Community Coordinator**. She will do her best to provide an answer and will also schedule morning coffee hours when shared issues arise - informal and open drop-in times where parents can express and share ideas or concerns. The Administrative or Education Coordinator may attend these meetings as well. Times will be posted outside the Coordinators' Office.



SCHEDULES AND DAILY LOGISTICS

Massachusetts General Laws require children to attend school regularly. Parents and guardians are essential to good attendance and are responsible for ensuring that children attend school regularly and on time. The Hilltown Cooperative Charter School expects students to attend school daily to receive the maximum benefits of our program. Our attendance policy is included in the Appendix; please look at it to familiarize yourself with the limits on absences and tardies.

Arrivals and Departures

School begins at 8:15. It is critical that all children arrive on time. Students who need to be dropped off early may arrive anytime after 8:00 and wait in the All-School Space until 8:15, when school begins. Attendance is taken promptly at 8:30. (See attendance policy in appendix) **Timeliness is key.** Straggling arrivals and departures create disruption, distraction and chaos in the classroom.

Two entrances are available for regular drop-off and pick-up times and safety concerns are paramount. Young children should not walk alone in the parking lot at any time.

The school's main entrance is on the west end of the Brassworks building facing the driveway in, and the other entrance is at the atrium entrance on the back of the building facing the river. We prefer that parents walk young children into the school, but **drop off is permissible at the main entrance only.** Both doors are monitored after school and no child may leave without an adult or written permission. Please follow the marked parking and traffic pattern to prevent accidents.

The school day ends at 3:00, except on Wednesdays when grades K-5 end at 12:30 and only the Purples and Prisms (6-8th graders) continue until 3:00. Please be prompt at pick-up times and make your way out of the building as calmly and quickly as possible. All students must be signed out by an adult as they leave their classrooms at the end of the day. With written parental permission, students may leave school on their own to walk home, or take the PVTa bus.

Late Arrivals

If a child arrives after 8:30, she will find the door to her classroom closed and she will need to sign in and pick up a "Late Pass" from the office in order to be admitted. 5 "tardies" add up to one unexcused absence. (See Attendance Policy in appendix) Persistent tardiness will result in a telephone call from a teacher or an administrator and may necessitate a meeting between parents and the administration.

Illness and Absence

Children with a fever over 100 degrees should stay home until there is no fever for 24 hours without fever medication. Children with one event of vomiting or diarrhea should stay at home until at least 12 hours have passed without any further events. Children diagnosed with strep throat must be treated with antibiotics for 3 doses and be fever free before returning to school. *Strep throat* may be present without a fever and may include symptoms of headache and stomachache. Replacing your child's toothbrush after 24 hours of antibiotics will reduce the risk of re-infection.

If your child will be absent due to illness, a parent must call the school by 8:30 and speak with Deb, our school nurse, or leave a message on the attendance voice mail extension, # 55

If your child is not feeling well in the morning and stays home from school, but seems better after a few hours, please call and check in with the nurse before bringing her in late.

Early Pick-up

In the event that you need to pick a child up from school early, please inform both the Administrative Assistant and the teacher in advance and check the child out in the office when you leave. It is important that we have an accurate count of students actually in the building in case of emergency.

Carpools and play-dates

Please be sure that the office has an accurate schedule for your carpool. If you need to make an early pick-up or if a child is leaving with a friend's parent, please write that information on the "Special Arrangements" sheet in the office. Students may not use office phones or personal cell phones to make social plans. Please arrange play dates ahead of time and keep us informed.

Snow Days

Parents may listen to TV, radio, check our website: www.hilltowncharter.org or call the school at 413-268-3421 ext. 9 to find out about school closings due to weather. Only in extraordinary circumstances will an emergency phone-tree be initiated. We will also be listed on the "closings" page at www.wwlp.com (channel 22) or www.wggb.com (channel 40).

A FEW SCHOOL POLICIES

Visiting the School

Parents are welcome at Hilltown at any time except during active test hours. We have parents somewhere in the school almost every day. There are many other visitors to the school as well, including educators, grandparents and community volunteers, so the students are used to seeing many adult faces throughout the day. Family visitors are asked to wear a sticker when they are in the building other than at drop off and pick up times so that staff and students can recognize that you belong here. The stickers are available in the classrooms and in the main office. Other visitors sign in at the main Office and wear a Visitor Pass while they are in the building.

Cell Phones and IPODs / MP3 players

Cell phones and ipods may not be used by students between 8:00 am and 4:30pm. Neither outgoing or incoming calls nor texts are permitted. Should you need to get a message to your child during the day, please call the main office and we will either relay the message or, in an emergency, connect you with your child's classroom. Students who need their phones for after-school communication must leave them turned off and in their backpacks during those hours. Any cell phone or ipod found in use will be taken to the Coordinators' office and may be retrieved from there at the end of the day.

Lost Book Replacement

In most classes, students will be issued at least one text or workbook and will often borrow reading books from the class library. These books are costly and are important to the program. If a student loses them, that student and his or her family are expected to pay at least ½ of the cost of replacing it.

Pet Policy

Due to student and staff allergies, and health concerns, family pets are not allowed in the school at any time unless pre-approved by staff for educational purposes.

Recess Snow Rules

All students K-6 must wear boots and snow pants at recess if there is snow on the ground. If they don't wear these then they are restricted to the black top. This is non-negotiable. While we don't advise it, Prisms students can suffer with wet clothes if they want to.

Things to leave at home

Hilltown policy prohibits electronic games and equipment, pocketknives, skateboards and weapons of all kinds – toy or actual,. (See weapons policy in appendix) The limitations of our space require that Yo-yos only be used outdoors and bikes and scooters are only permitted when used as transportation to and from school.

SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Snack / Lunch

Most children generally bring their own snack and lunch each day. We encourage you to pack plenty of healthy low-sugar items. It is a long day and snacks are essential. Please use re-closable, re-usable and non-glass containers as well as silverware that can be taken home and washed. No refrigeration or warming facilities are available. Students will bring home all trash and uneaten food.

We have a hot school lunch that is provided by local vendors. Order forms can be picked up in the Main Office at school and returned with payment at least a day in advance. It is best to pre-order. All payments should be made to HCCPS. Those eligible for free or reduced-cost lunches can get applications from the "Blank Forms" file box in the main office.

Once a week, we offer students pizza for \$1 per slice. Orders must be placed in the office by Thursday afternoon. Full-year order forms are available in the office.

Community Service Learning

Hilltown has a successful ongoing relationship with The Overlook at Northampton, a long term care facility about a mile away from us in Leeds. Through our "Bridging the Gaps" program, each year every student spends some time visiting Overlook and engaging in projects with the residents there. In years past projects have included writing and producing books about the residents' lives, visual art, yoga, internet usage, singing, and also studies about science, local history and geography. The program culminates in the summer with an outdoor celebration on the lawn at The Overlook. Parent volunteers are encouraged to participate in this program with any class.



Field Trips

Parents of new students are asked to sign a blanket permission slip at the beginning of their first year here authorizing their child to participate in local field trips during their time at Hilltown. At the beginning of each year families are asked to contribute a modest sum to cover fees for field trips for the entire year. Subsidies are available for those who need them. The Prisms and Purples classes each take an overnight field trip each year, which are funded separately. Parents are notified in advance of upcoming trips and sometimes are required to sign an additional form for a specific trip.

English Language Learners

Hilltown has an instructional program in place for students at all levels who have a primary language other than English. The school uses standardized assessments to identify these students and then provides the necessary services.

Lost and Found

The main lost and found is located on the 2nd floor stair landing. During the winter it quickly grows out of control. **Please label children's clothing**, especially outerwear, and check the lost and found frequently. Every couple of months, a volunteer will put out a notice, bring out the contents and display all unlabeled items in the all-school space for four school days. After those four days, unclaimed items will be donated to charity.

SCHOOL-WIDE ACTIVITIES

All activities at the school, except where restricted by age, are open to all students regardless of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, sexual orientation or disability.

Lunchrooms

Each month K-6 students are assigned to a new lunchroom where they eat with students from all the other classes. This way they get to know students of all ages. Children are expected to sit and eat for 15 minutes, after which they can participate in quiet activities. If a child wants to request a special “lunch buddy” for the coming month, he may make a written request to the Administrative Coordinator one-week before the start of the new month.

Recess

All students have 30 minutes of recess daily, outside whenever possible. Two classes generally go out together. We go out in all kinds of weather, and appropriate clothing is essential. Boots, gloves and snow pants are required during the winter and sturdy shoes are recommended all year. It is important that young children keep an extra set of clothing and socks stored in their cubby at school.

Mini-courses

Mini-courses are a wonderful opportunity for students to explore an activity in depth, with students of all ages and with an adult other than their own teacher. All students select from the options offered by the teachers, parents or community members. In the past choices have included play writing, drumming, mural painting, nature studies, newspaper production or yoga. Mini-courses take place several times a year on Thursdays from 1:30 – 2:50. They generally run for 4 weeks and are often followed by presentations to the school community at All School. If you are interested in teaching or helping with a mini-course, get a proposal form from the Community Coordinator.

“All-School”

Hilltown supports the sense of school community by holding a weekly gathering of all the classrooms at the beginning of each Friday morning, 8:40 – 9:30 am. This varies from week to week and involves some combination of singing, announcements, birthday celebrations and sharing of something learned during the week. Parents and families are encouraged to attend whenever they can.

“Il Teatro”

Several times a year, students are encouraged to share music, poems that they write or love, skits or other self-initiated creative performances with the entire student body. These productions are rehearsed outside of school hours and the performances are greatly anticipated within all of the classes. Parents are invited to attend, or perform with their children. Due-dates for performance proposals, screening schedules and performance times are included in the newsletter.



Sisters perform together!



Celebrations / Holidays

Hilltown holds three special school-wide celebrations: The Welcoming Ceremony at the beginning of the year, a Winter Celebration just before break in December and a Summer Celebration just before the break in June. We hold special All School events in honor of MLK Day and Earth Day, but the school does not celebrate holidays like Halloween, Valentines Day or religious days. Classroom discussions of family traditions are encouraged.

Birthdays

Birthdays are special occasions and are celebrated by the whole community with a song at the "All-School" closest to the actual day. Summer birthdays are celebrated during the month of June. Some classes permit a birthday child to bring in a special snack to share with the class.

Please keep invitations and conversations about birthday parties outside of school and be sensitive to the feelings of others who aren't invited when transporting groups from school to a party.

Special Events

School-wide events that include whole families are one of the ways that our community grows and stays strong. They are a great opportunity to make connections with other parents and get involved in the school community. The **Winter Fair** is an annual family event including craft-making tables, performances and a book sale, is held at the beginning of December. Our **All-School Sleepover** is a highlight annual event for many of the students. **Art Spark**, in the spring, is an all-adult, dressed-up fundraiser, usually featuring performances, an auction and always with great food. The **Prisms Coffeehouse** with dinner and student performances, and the springtime **Music Festival** where all of our students perform, round out the year's big events.

Community events of all sorts are scheduled at least once each month. Look for: classroom orientation meetings, potlucks, parties, 6-7-8 dances, games nights, movie nights, parent workshops, student performances and the coop meetings.

At after-hours school events, the school's basic policies regarding student behavior - no running, shouting, climbing or going outdoors without an adult - remain in effect. *Staff members are not on-duty after hours. Parents are responsible for supervising their children at all times.* In the event that students' behaviors become dangerous or distracting during an event, the activity will be stopped and parents will be asked to re-establish order before it resumes.



"Pillow fight" at the All-school Sleepover

ADDITIONAL PROGRAMS

Hilltown offers several after school enrichment or childcare options for a minimal fee. Some ongoing programs like chorus or running club cost a flat fee for a semester's participation; others, like Kids' Club (see below), charge by the session and offer discounts for advance registration. All of the specifics and sign-up forms are available in the office. Families entitled to free or reduced lunch may be entitled to fee reductions or waivers. Talk with Amy Aaron.

Kids' Club and Homework Club

The HCCPS Kids Club Program is a daily after- school offering for students of all ages, running from 3:10-5 (Mon, Tues, Thur, Fri) and 12:30-5 on Wed. It is a combination of indoor and outdoor activities including snack, games, arts and crafts, cooking, theater, music, and quiet, supervised space for home work or reading. Registration forms are available in the main office and prepayment is required. Same day- sign up is possible on a space available and pre-pay basis.

Chorus

The Hilltown Chorus, for students in grades 3-8, meets weekly on Thursdays after school, from 3:15-4:30. Students in the Prisms also have the option of participating in the Chamber Singers group which meets from 4:30 – 5:00 right after the Chorus rehearsal. All children in chorus must bring an extra snack to rehearsal. Enrollment forms are distributed at the start of the year.

Team Sports

The Hilltown HiCCkS is the school's **Ultimate Frisbee** team, coached by our Phys Ed teacher. It relies heavily on the parents of the players for support during the spring season. Students from the Prisms, Purples, Reds and Oranges may participate.

Running Club serves the same age group during the fall. Practice is usually two afternoons a week and the team competes in some local meets.

Community Service Learning Club

This new club for students in grades 5 -8, will meet weekly after school with Justin Wright to develop leadership skills while assessing and addressing needs at our school and in our community.

Instrumental Music Lessons

We offer violin and guitar lessons during the day at school at parent expense. Violin lessons are on Thursday mornings and Registration forms will be sent home at the beginning of the year explaining the instruments offered, age range and cost of lessons.

String Band(s)

This year there will be two levels of String Band available for students playing mostly, but not exclusively, stringed instruments. It meets on Thursday mornings during the school day. Lynn Newdome, the violin teacher, conducts and the fee is very reasonable. Students should have been playing their instrument and taking lessons for at least two full years in order to participate in level one or three years for level two. Please talk to Lynn if you play a wind or percussion instrument and are interested in being in the orchestra.

Any parent sponsored after-school clubs or programs, such as Environmental Club, Chess Club or Scrabble Club, will be announced as they are scheduled.

The children of parents who volunteer weekly in an afterschool sports program may participate in the program for no fee. See the Community Coordinator to get involved.

FUNDRAISING

The **Development Associate, Carey Royce**, along with the Board of Friends of Hilltown, our affiliated 501-c3 non-profit organization, coordinate fundraising for the school with a special focus on the **Annual Fund**. Our major yearly events include a family **Winter Fair** family craft-making and book sales in early December and **Art Spark**, an adult evening event including an auction. Hilltown also participates in ongoing school-wide efforts including weekly *pizza sales*, monthly *Dean's Beans coffee sales* and participation in *Big Y's Education Express and Box Tops fro Education*.

The Friends of Hilltown organizes an annual fundraising appeal to raise money both for operating expenses and to fund a rolling arts grant program available to teachers throughout the year. Some classrooms may also organize one fundraising project during the school year if needed for a specific purpose. All fundraising ideas and proposals must be vetted through the Development Associate to avoid conflicts.

HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Health and Immunization records

All new students, as well as every kindergartener, 4th grade and 7th grade student needs to have an updated physical exam form (any date after 3/01/12) and immunization record on file at the beginning of the school year. In accordance with Massachusetts Law, your child must have written proof of required immunizations as part of their school health record in order to attend school.

The only exemptions from this regulation are if you choose to not vaccinate your child for religious or medical reasons. A medical exemption must be documented by your health care provider. The letter for a religious exemption only needs to be written once and it will remain in the student's file.

If there is an outbreak of a vaccine-preventable disease such as chicken pox or measles, then students who have not been vaccinated will need to be excluded for a certain period of time.

Medication

Students may not carry any sort of medication with them at school. The school nurse may dispense prescription or over the counter medications to children during the school day only if a specific permission form has been filled out by the parent and the prescribing physician. These forms are available in the office or from the nurse. Medications, labeled and in their original packaging, must be left with the nurse and may be refrigerated if needed. If possible, we ask parents to adjust medication schedules if they can, to avoid the need for their administration during school. The only medications that students are permitted to carry are inhalers. Health care provider and parent consent forms must be on file in the nurse's office to allow students to carry inhalers.

Screening

Regular state mandated screenings are conducted as follows:
Parents will be notified in writing of any problems.

- Vision – K-7th
- Hearing – K - 3rd, 7th
- Heights and Weights including BMI– K, 4th, 7th
- Postural screening for scoliosis 5th-8th

A Healthy School Environment

No smoking by adults or students is permitted in or around the school building. Hand sanitizers are on the walls inside each classroom and we encourage everyone to use them frequently. In addition, we ask that community members refrain from using "added scents" at school and at school functions in deference to those with chemical sensitivities and allergies.

Life-Threatening Food Allergies

There are some students that have severe peanut, tree nut, or other food allergies. Strict avoidance of these foods is the only way to prevent a life threatening allergic reaction. Since we do not have a cafeteria and the students rotate lunch rooms we have put in place strict guidelines so that our community remains safe for allergic children.

These guidelines include:

- No sharing of food whatsoever is permitted.
- Hand washing will occur before and after eating snack/lunch.
- Hand sanitizer will be provided in every classroom.
- A peanut-free/allergen-free table will be established in applicable classrooms.
- We encourage that food for class celebrations/community events be nut-free. If not then all ingredients must be listed and the food will be placed in a separate area.
- There will be no eating on the play structure.

Lice Protocol for Parents

Lice are a fact of life in most schools these days. We do our best to avoid problems and prevent stigmatization of children that have lice via education. If a child is found to have lice while at school, a parent will be called to bring the child home for treatment. The nurse will perform a head check on the student's classmates. Prior to returning to school, the child will be checked by the nurse for any lice or nits. The parent and child should report to the nurse for this check before heading to the classroom.

If lice remain, the child will be sent home again for further intervention. If only a few nits remain, the child will be admitted back to school. The nurse will notify parents, via email or letter if lice are present in the school.

There is much overlap of children in our community with carpools, integrated lunch rooms and siblings. It is incumbent upon parents to communicate with the school nurse, as well as with other parents. This is the only way that we control the problem.

Feel free to discuss this further with the nurse or your health care provider. The nurse is happy to demonstrate how to check for lice/nits and how to get rid of them upon request.

Infectious Diseases Protocol

The school nurse will notify parents in writing if an infectious disease is found in a classroom, i.e. strep throat, pink eye, ringworm. If there are numerous cases in the school, an all-school alert will be sent via email. If your child has an infectious illness it is a courtesy to let Deb know so that she can inform parents of other children in the classroom and thus the parents will be able to monitor their children for symptoms and follow up as necessary.



Prisms with rare books at the library of Congress



In the Atelier

COMMUNITY AND BEHAVIORAL EXPECTATIONS

Community Expectations

The Hilltown Cooperative Charter Public School is built on a strong sense of community and the success of our efforts has been consistently remarked upon in state reviews. All members of the school -- students, teachers, staff, parents, and community members - are encouraged to develop strong communication skills and respect for each other. From this community base children learn to respect their peers, teachers, and school environment. Treating others as they want to be treated and taking care of "our" school helps children, parents and teachers define appropriate behaviors that meet those ends. We expect relations between adults within the community – parents, teachers, staff and volunteers – to be respectful and provide a model for the students.

HCCPS is an inclusive and non-discriminatory community. If you feel that you have been discriminated on the basis of sex, race, color, national origin, sexual orientation or disability you should contact our Civil Rights Coordinator, Amy Aaron.

Community Compact

Each year parents, students, teachers and administrators at Hilltown are asked to sign the Community Compact (see appendix), which puts into simple language our expectations for each member of our school community. This is a formalization of the commitment that we have to one another to build an environment for learning filled with respect, responsibility and openness. The Compact, along with clear definitions for students of its language and meaning, is reviewed by teachers in each classroom at the beginning of the year and is revisited throughout the year.

If there a substantial lack of adherence to the Compact on the part of a student or family, the school administration will call a Compact Meeting to gather all constituents for a problem solving conversation.



At the Prisms Coffeehouse

Student Behavior

In our classrooms, regular meetings provide forums for students to identify problems, work to resolve conflict in a positive manner, and develop strong listening and speaking skills. Teachers and children identify behaviors that foster a safe and productive school. As with the curriculum, many of the rules and expectations emerge from the school community.

Group discussions and talking with children at the time of difficult incidents help children identify alternative solutions to problems. In some situations a neutral third party is needed to peacefully resolve a conflict. The goal at Hilltown is to empower students to mediate such conflicts whenever possible. Such incidents are used as learning opportunities for clear communication of feelings and handling conflict in a safe way. Maintaining the self-esteem of each child is paramount. Under no circumstances is it permissible for any student to intentionally harm any other person in the school.

At the beginning of the school year teachers and students discuss the Community Compact and our "Code of Cooperation", pointing out the ways that they make the school a safe place. When necessary they remind each other of the rules and the reasons behind them and request that they be followed.

Guidance is consistent and based on the needs and development of each child and the group. If a child behaves in such a way that is disruptive or disrespectful, teachers will provide logical consequences that bring behavior back within safe limits and may send the child to the Coordinators office.

After consultation with a Coordinator, parents will be asked to come and pick up any child who has been intentionally violent toward any other person in the school. Consequences for serious behavioral issues may also include suspension or ultimately, expulsion.

LEARNING

In the course of creating a long-range strategic plan for the school in 2002, HCCPS created a document called Critical Elements of Classroom Practice. It describes our educational perspective and classroom approach. It is included in the Appendix and we encourage you to read it.

Curriculum

As a public school we are obligated to integrate the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks with our pedagogy. We balance this requirement with our core philosophy to create our own approach to curriculum. (*See Critical Elements of Classroom Practice in the Appendix*) These elements come together in the integration of arts across all subjects; strong parent involvement; careful documentation of students' work and processes and projects that draw from the interests of the students.

Whenever possible, Hilltown students explore subjects in depth using a particular theme as a point of departure for an integrated curriculum. They develop skills in art, math, science, reading, writing, problem solving, and critical thinking as they work with central themes. Through teaching problem solving and critical thinking strategies that can be applied in all disciplines, problem solving becomes a thread that weaves all subject areas together. It creates a standard for questioning and seeking answers whenever a new topic is approached.

The curriculum also includes the social aspects of life. A cooperative environment is created out of mutual respect and problem solving when differences arise. Skills are explored and practiced to achieve these goals.

Learning Challenges

If you are concerned that your child may have a disability that is affecting his or her ability to make progress in school, you can first speak with the classroom teacher. As you speak with the teacher, explain your concerns and ask the teacher to share his or her concerns. As part of your conversation, it may be decided that a Child Study Team will be convened to discuss your concerns, and plan classroom accommodations to address concerns for a short period of time.

If your child continues to have difficulty with schoolwork, you may, at any time, make a request in writing to the Education Coordinator for a special education evaluation. This evaluation involves a range of testing and assessments conducted by our special education staff. When complete, the results of the evaluation are distributed to the relevant parties and are discussed at a TEAM meeting, which includes the parents, where a plan is developed collaboratively.

Classroom Assignment

Classes at Hilltown are mixed age in nature and students stay in the same classroom for two years except for one year in the transitional sixth grade. The process for placing students entering Second and Fourth Grades is as follows: at the end of each year the Coordinators and educational staff meet to discuss each student individually and plan the make-up of each classroom for the following year. This is a thoughtful, time-consuming process, which includes input from parents as well as staff. If after serious consideration of all factors, the wishes of parents and the judgment of the Education Domain differ and resolution is not possible, the Education and Administrative Coordinators make final decisions. Only in very rare circumstances, will the staff consider moving a student to a different classroom for the second year in a two-year sequence.

Evaluation

Evaluation of a student's progress is multi-faceted. Teachers use observation and discussion, in combination with developmentally appropriate assessment, to identify student strengths and next steps. Photos, videos, note taking, student-created work, and recordings have all been used to measure growth and development in addition to paperwork. Teachers share detailed narratives about each student and review samples of their work at parent/teacher conferences. The school uses its own developmental academic competency standards and performance based assessment system in addition to an externally developed reading assessment. Third through eighth graders take the Iowa Test of Basic Skills in language arts and math and participate in the MCAS as required by the state. Progress Reports go home 3 times a year and parent conferences happen twice a year.

Teaching Staff

We are fortunate to have a strong, stable and highly qualified teaching faculty at Hilltown. Almost all of our teachers have been here over 5 years and their collective experience shows in the quality of their work. Parents may request to see information about any teacher's credentials at any time by asking Dan Klatz, the Education Coordinator.



In the Blues

GOVERNANCE BY DOMAINS (or... who is in charge of what)

The governance of the school is arranged to in “Domains”: Administrative, Community and Education, all supervised by the Board of Trustees. Each Domain has responsibility for coordinating specific aspects of the functioning of the school in cooperation with the others.

The Education Domain is responsible for the instructional program at Hilltown and includes the teachers, teaching assistants and **Dan Klatz, the Educational Coordinator** who supervises and develops all aspects of this domain.

Open communication is an important principle of the school and parents are encouraged to raise concerns with individual teachers as soon as they arise. Parents are encouraged to participate in the classroom by attending the beginning of the year orientation session for each classroom and by asking the teacher, Class Parent or Community Coordinator what they can do to help. Participation in classroom activities is best done by prior arrangement and is a great way to learn how a teacher operates. Parents who want to discuss ideas or offer comments should schedule an appointment so that continuity of the day is not interrupted.

If parents have questions or concerns about their child’s overall education program or concerns that cannot be resolved directly with a teacher, they may make an appointment to meet with the Education Coordinator or just stop by to see if he is available for a quick check-in.

The Community Domain is the home of the Cooperative. It ensures the involvement of Coop members in the school’s functioning and decision-making and holds the sense of community within the school. **Deirdre Arthen, the Community Coordinator**, administers this domain, working to create an environment beneficial to parents and other volunteers and to the school as a whole. In addition to working with members of the Cooperative, the Community Coordinator also oversees the fundraising efforts of our Development Associate, Carey Royce, and builds connections between the school and the community, bringing in volunteers from outside the school and organizing community service learning projects for students.

To offer suggestions or address concerns within this domain, or if you have a question or concern about the school in general, stop by and talk with, e-mail or leave a note for the Community Coordinator. She will be certain that your concern is either addressed directly or is sent to the correct body for discussion and resolution.

The Administrative Domain takes care of the day-to-day operations at school and all budgetary matters. **Amy Aaron, the Administrative Coordinator** provides oversight and coordinates office staff, the school nurse, custodial staff and the bookkeeper and well as managing the facility and the admission process. Monique Bourgeois, the Administrative Assistant is responsible for staffing the office and answering the phone, and coordinates the day-to-day procedures in the school office.

Basic questions about schedules and general procedures should be directed to the Administrative Assistant. She can also serve as a clearing-house for information – if a parent doesn’t know where to go to address an issue, she can help point the way. Questions about public relations and school operations or policies can be addressed with the Administrative Coordinator by making an appointment, sending an e-mail or dropping by the office.

The Board of Trustees is responsible for the school's overarching philosophies, direction and policies and is accountable for all legal and fiscal issues affecting the Hilltown School. It operates using a consensus model (see appendix) and makes final decisions on Coordinator hiring and outside contractual relationships. Members of the Cooperative elect the Trustees at their annual meeting in the spring. Trustees serve a three-year term and may be parents at the school or community members. The Coordinators attend Board meetings as speaking but non-decision-making members.

Board of Trustees (BOT) meetings are open to the public and take place on the second Wednesday of each month and at other scheduled times. Schedules of BOT meetings, agendas, and minutes are available for parents to review on the bulletin board in the All-School Space.

Committees do much of the Board's work. If you are interested in the work of the Personnel, Finance, or Site Committee, please be in touch with the Committee Chairs listed, or talk to the Community Coordinator.

Domain Council is made up of the three Domain Coordinators and the president of the Board of Trustees. It is not a decision-making body in itself, but is responsible for setting the agenda for Board meetings, discussing policy and budget issues, proposing the annual budget and policy changes to the Board and occasionally dealing with other urgent matters as they arise.

Friends of Hilltown is a 501-C3 nonprofit organization whose sole purpose is to raise funds for the school. Parents and involved community members, along with the Development Associate, plan events, organize the Annual Fund, and write grants to benefit the school. They contribute most of the money they raise directly to the school's operating budget and distribute the rest through direct arts-related grants within the school. Parents are encouraged to explore participation in Friends of Hilltown as a great way to both fulfill membership hours and to benefit the school.



The Prisms visit a beekeeper's home

Strategic Planning

This year the Board of Trustees is involved in a strategic planning process to set some goals and guides for the school for the next 7-10 years. A committee of staff, parents and trustees has been created and will be involving the entire community in the process during the coming year through surveys and focus groups. The project is intended to be completed by the end of the calendar year.

STATE AND FEDERAL EDUCATION LAWS

No Child Left Behind Law

The federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act defines new standards for teacher quality. Under NCLB, teachers must demonstrate subject matter competency in the areas they teach. NCLB standards apply to the subject matter taught by teachers. You may request information about the qualifications of their child's teacher and teachers:

- Whether your child's teacher has met State qualification for the grade levels and subject areas in which the teacher provides instruction.
- Whether your child's teacher is teaching under an emergency license or waiver through which the State qualifications or licensing criteria have been waived.
- The baccalaureate degree major of your child's teacher and any other graduate certification or degree held by the teacher, and the field or discipline of the certification or degree.
- Whether your child is provided services by paraprofessionals and, if so, give their qualifications.

If you would like to receive any of the information listed above for you child's teacher, please contact Dan Klatz, Education Coordinator.

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) (20 U.S.C. § 1232g; 34 CFR Part 99) is a Federal law that protects the privacy of student education records. FERPA gives parents certain rights with respect to their children's education records.

- Parents have the right to inspect and review the student's education records maintained by the school. Schools are not required to provide copies of records unless, for reasons such as great distance, it is impossible for parents to review the records. Schools may charge a fee for copies.
- Parents have the right to request that a school correct records which they believe to be inaccurate or misleading. If the school decides not to amend the record, the parent then has the right to a formal hearing. After the hearing, if the school still decides not to amend the record, the parent has the right to place a statement with the record setting forth his or her view about the contested information.
- Generally, schools must have written permission from the parent in order to release any information from a student's education record. However, FERPA allows schools to disclose those records, without consent, to the following parties or under the following conditions (34 CFR § 99.31):
 - School officials with legitimate educational interest;
 - Other schools to which a student is transferring;
 - Specified officials for audit or evaluation purposes;
 - Appropriate parties in connection with financial aid to a student;
 - Organizations conducting certain studies for or on behalf of the school;
 - Accrediting organizations;
 - To comply with a judicial order or lawfully issued subpoena;
 - Appropriate officials in cases of health and safety emergencies; and
 - State and local authorities, within a juvenile justice system, pursuant to specific State law.

Schools may disclose, without consent, "directory" information such as a student's name, address, telephone number, date and place of birth, honors and awards, and dates of attendance. If you do not want your directory information shared, contact Amy Aaron, Administrative Coordinator.

Special Education Laws and Principles

Special education is specially designed instruction and related services that meet the unique needs of an eligible student with a disability or a specific service need that is necessary to allow the student with a disability to access the general curriculum. The purpose of special education is to allow the student to successfully develop his or her individual educational potential. Along with providing services to the child, if necessary, services are provided to parents and to teachers for the student to benefit from special education. Special education is provided by the school district at no cost to parents.

In Massachusetts, the special education system is based on the federal special education law, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), in combination with the state's special education law (MGL c. 71B). These laws protect students with disabilities who are eligible for special education and guarantee them an Individualized Education Program (IEP) designed to meet their unique needs.



Family Study in the Blues



Dipping candles in December



That's true School Spirit!



Grandparents day 2012

APPENDIX

APPENDICES INCLUDED:

Home-study Guidelines

Weapons and Controlled Substances Policy

Attendance Policy
Grade Placement Policy

The Community Compact

Critical Elements of Classroom Practice at Hilltown

Internet Acceptable Use Policy

Consensus process description

OTHER DOCUMENTS YOU MAY WANT TO READ – Available on our website: www.hilltowncharter.org or on the Family Corner bookshelves

Annual Reports

School By-laws

Strategic Plan for 2003-2013

Charter Renewal Application

HCCPS Consensus-process articles

Hilltown Accountability Plan

Ed. Materials selection policy

Grievance Procedure

Physical Restraint Policy

Reggio Emilia articles

Board of Trustees officer and committee descriptions

Friends of Hilltown Bylaws and Newsletters



Purples and Blues on the playground



Visitors offer traditional Balinese Dance



The Purples perform at the Music Festival

Homework Guidelines

Teachers carefully reviewed our practice regarding homework last year. Many factors were examined including effectiveness on school achievement, impact on the home environment, and the role homework plays in building a sense of responsibility. Parents had opportunity to comment at the annual meeting of the Cooperative.

The result of this review was a modification of our homework requirements. Students in the younger grades are expected to read or be read to every night for at least twenty minutes. Classroom morning meetings will offer students the opportunity to share some aspect of what they are reading with their peers. We see this as a way to develop good habits as readers, which is a major goal of the primary grades.

Beginning in fourth grade, students will continue with nightly reading, however specific books will be assigned. These will be the books the students are reading as part of their literature study. In addition, students will have one or two math problem every night, Monday-Thursday.

Middle School age students will have more regular, systematic assignments. Sixth graders can expect up to one hour per night, and seventh and eighth graders can expect between sixty and eighty minutes per night.



The String Band performs at the Winter Fair

Homework expectations by class

Blues, Indigos, Greens and Yellows:

At least 20 minutes of reading or being read to each night.

Oranges and Reds: Up to 30 minutes of reading nightly, plus one or two math problems

Purples: 60 minutes each night, M-Th plus occasional weekend assignments.

Prisms: 60-80 minutes each night plus some weekend work on major projects.



The Oranges decorate for Spirit Week



Reds and Indigos Publishing Party

Critical Elements of Classroom Practice at Hilltown

Creation of a safe, nurturing, classroom community

- Value of learning to be a member of a community
- Necessary to the academic success of all students

Students' ideas, questions and interests are a part of curriculum and classroom community

- Spark of interest coming from students in context of the classroom community
- Shared experience which fires the imagination and builds community
- Sharing expertise and inquiry
- Kids authentic questions – looking at learning from their perspective
- Choices and options in student learning

Teachers engage in substantial collaboration with one another

- In small groups and teams
- As a whole staff
- In cross age groups

Students engage in substantial collaboration with teachers and other students

- Learning about the process of consensus
- Partners and small groups in the classroom/school

Teachers are flexible in their use of time

- Schedule changes are required for in-depth studies
- Flexibility is necessary based on the needs of different groups

Skill building

- Students need to develop basic skills as a means of communicating ideas, opinions, etc.
- Some students require skills as a means of participating

Cross age experiences

- Multi-age classrooms
- Experience throughout the school which mix ages

Arts integration/interdisciplinary/project based

- Importance of understanding the interconnected nature of what they learn
- Importance of hands-on projects
- Value of the arts as a means of expression

Using our community resources (parents, local community, environment, etc)

- Parents as classroom volunteers/resources
- Connecting children with local community and environment

Importance of understanding and utilizing different learning styles

- Every child is a learner
- Adapting our practice to meet various ways of learning
- Multi modalities of learning are valued
- Classrooms must have a materials rich environment

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Massachusetts General Laws require children to attend school regularly. Parents and guardians are essential to good attendance and are responsible for ensuring that children attend school regularly and on time. The Hilltown Cooperative Charter School expects students to attend school daily in order to receive the maximum benefits of our program. This policy details the necessary steps to be taken by parents when attendance is not possible, and the consequences of chronic absences.

Absence of Necessity may include:

- Illness
- A death in the immediate family or other significant family crisis
- Court appearances
- Religious Holy Days
- Suspension from school

Missing more than ½ of a day of school counts as an absence.

Family vacations are not considered to be absences of necessity (see below).

Illness/Significant Family Crisis:

1. Parents are expected to call in by 8:30 to inform school of illness or family emergency. You should leave messages with the main office or voice mail option 55. If we have not heard from the parent the nurse will call the home at 9 am. If we do not hear back from a parent the absence will be considered unexcused.
2. When a student is out for 3 consecutive days a written note with parent signature must accompany student upon return.
3. When a student is ill for more than 5 consecutive days documentation from a health care practitioner is required.
4. When a student has excessive illness related absences (non-consecutive but frequent) that begin to interfere with a student's education, the appropriate staff will contact the family. We will work together to clarify the medical situation, request medical documentation and provide appropriate supports if consistent attendance is not possible. Parents will be expected to help with make up work.

Religious Holy Days: Parents should inform the teacher in writing 2 weeks in advance.

Absence of Choice (All other absences)

1. Parents must inform teachers, in writing, two weeks in advance when an absence of choice is planned. It is advisable for parents to meet with a teacher, in advance of planning an absence, in order to assess the educational impact of the absence on the student.
2. Parents are responsible for overseeing their child's make up work. This may include helping the teacher with preparation, ensuring that the student stays for after-school help sessions upon return and creating alternative assignments.
3. All parents are informed of their child's attendance record in the mid-year report. If a student has 7 absences of choice prior to this report, the school will inform the parent in writing.
4. Should absences of choice become excessive and interfere with a student's education the family will be notified in writing and asked to meet with appropriate staff in order to create remedies and provide appropriate support. If absences of choice continue to be excessive, a meeting to consider the student's future with the school will be held with parents and appropriate staff. Factors to be considered are:
 - Frequency and pattern of absence;
 - Responsibility taken by student and parents re: notification, accountability for make up work, willingness to provide appropriate documentation

Parents will be informed that future absence may jeopardize their child's enrollment in the school. A Child in Need of Service (*CHINS*) petition may be filed for students who are chronic absentees and whose parents have failed to fulfill their responsibility to ensure their child's attendance in school.

5. Five late arrivals (after 8:30 AM) will constitute one unexcused absence.
6. When a student has been absent by choice for a total of 15 days in a school year, s/he will forfeit his/her slot in the school. Parents will be given written notice of this pending forfeiture after the twelfth absence.

In rare circumstances when a family will be living out of the immediate Pioneer Valley area for career related purposes, a family may formally request up to twenty consecutive school days absence from school. HCCPS will apply the following criteria in considering these requests:

1. The impact on a student's academic progress.
2. Frequency of previous absences, especially unexcused.
3. Frequency of previous requests for extended time away from school.

Requests in writing must be submitted to the Administrative and Education Coordinators at least one month in advance. The Coordinators, following consultation with teachers, will make decisions within ten days of the request.

If approved, the family will be responsible for developing with the classroom teacher a school work plan. The family will take responsibility for overseeing their child's make up work. This may include helping the teacher with preparation, ensuring that the student stays for after-school help sessions upon return and creating alternative assignments.

If the request is not approved and the family removes the child from school, the HCCPS Attendance Policy will apply. *Approved by the Board of Trustees July 14, 2004*

Harassment Policy

It is HCCPS policy to strive for an environment free of discrimination, which includes freedom from harassment of any kind. HCCPS prohibits harassment in any form, by anyone who may be present at the school. Respect for dignity is expected under all circumstances.

Specifically, no individual or group shall threaten or insinuate threats either explicitly or implicitly whether physical, verbal or electronic. This includes: slurs, jokes, or degrading comments of any nature. Such conduct will result in disciplinary action.

Any member of the community should report complaints to the Education or Administrative Coordinator who will conduct an investigation into the alleged offense. The investigator will gather all relevant facts by talking with the complainant and the accused party or parties, reviewing any relevant documents, and interviewing any witnesses. The process will be confidential except that information may be shared on a need to know basis. The investigation will be concluded as promptly as possible. The sanctions for harassment and discriminatory conduct are dependent on the severity and frequency of the conduct. Anyone engaging in harassment will be subject to disciplinary action.

Weapons and Controlled Substance Policy

The HCCPS Weapons and Controlled Substance Policy conforms to state law:

According to Massachusetts Law Chapter 71: Section 37H " Any student who is found on school premises or at school-sponsored or school-related events, including athletic games, in possession of a dangerous weapon, including, but not limited to, a gun or a knife; or a controlled substance may be subject to expulsion from the school or school district by the principal.

GRADE PLACEMENT

Overview:

We generally believe it is appropriate for students to follow the typical K-8 sequence of grades and the accompanying curriculum through the school. Children vary considerably in their academic, social, physical, and emotional development. Therefore our instructional program in each class is adjusted to meet the needs of all students. However, under some circumstances, it may be appropriate to consider repeating or skipping a grade. In these cases, we will use a combination of factors to consider grade placement including chronological age, academic achievement, and social and emotional maturity.

For teacher initiated requests:

Teachers will complete a Request to Change Grades Form, and then discuss issues regarding grade placement with the Education Coordinator. If the teacher and Education Coordinator agree, these questions will be shared with parents before January 31.

For parent initiated requests:

Parents requesting a change in grade placement for the following year should complete a Request to Change Grades Form and return it to the Education Coordinator before the February vacation. The form asks parents to address the needs that are not currently being met, and why a change in grade placement would help meet these needs. Forms are available of the school office

Process:

Following the initial request, the Education Coordinator will form a staff committee comprised of the classroom teacher, Education Coordinator, one other teacher who works directly with the student, and a teacher who does not work directly with the student. The Committee will meet with the family to discuss issues related to the child's grade placement. Staff and parents will have the opportunity to comment on specific aspects of the child's academic, social, emotional, and physical development, which relate to questions of grade placement. The committee will review all academic records including progress reports, standardized test results, internal assessment results, any related special education documentation or other relevant materials, if available. The committee will also speak with the previous year's teacher when possible. If deemed appropriate by parents and staff, a staff member will meet directly with the student to discuss relevant issues, and obtain feedback from the student.

The committee will present information from the parent meeting at a subsequent staff meeting. The purpose will be to allow all staff to ask questions and share insights related to the student and the grade placement.

Following the staff meeting, the committee will meet with the parents to share information obtained in the process. Parents will have the opportunity to discuss this information, as well as provide additional information, ideas, and opinions. This will be the last meeting before the committee makes its decision. Parents will have up to 14 calendar days following the meeting to provide any additional input.

Decision:

After all above steps have been completed, the committee will decide on the grade placement of the student for the following year. This decision should be made no later than April 15. The committee will make the decision by consensus, and this decision will be final. If the committee is unable to reach consensus, the Education Coordinator will make the final decision.

INTERNET ACCEPTABLE USE POLICY

Internet access is available to students and staff at Hilltown Cooperative Charter School.

The Internet is a network of networks that facilitates resource all sharing, innovation and communication for people around the globe. School uses may include:

- Accessing curriculum-related sites on the World Wide Web and gathering information from diverse sources.
- Exchanging information with others, including students, educators and experts from a variety of fields.

The nature of the Internet provides many educational opportunities, but also necessitates personal responsibility for its use.

A responsible user will use of the school's electronic resources:

- In a considerate, ethical, efficient and legal manner.
- To support learning and enhance instruction.
- To complete instructional and administrative tasks requiring research, inquiry, problem solving and/or communication.
- In a manner that complies with Hilltown Cooperative Charter School policies.

A responsible user will NOT:

- Use electronic resources for personal or commercial profit-making enterprises, political lobbying or campaigning, electronic theft, or copyright violations.
- Transmit or download material in violation of state or federal regulations.
- Use language or retrieve information that is profane, obscene, abusive or threatening.
- Use electronic communications to disrupt the use or compromise the security of any electronic resources including hardware/software, networks or files.
- Reveal personal information such as home addresses or phone numbers of self or others.

Such irresponsible uses are unacceptable. Unacceptable uses of the Internet or any telecommunications services will result in immediate revocation of access privileges and, for students, parent's notification. Unacceptable uses may result in additional disciplinary action as set forth in Hilltown Cooperative Charter School disciplinary policies. Misuse could have legal implications.

Access to the Internet provides connections to other computer systems located worldwide. Parents of students who are users must understand that neither the Hilltown Cooperative Charter School nor its staff controls the content of the information available on these other systems. Some of the information available is controversial and may be offensive. The Hilltown Cooperative Charter School and the staff will make every effort to restrict access to sites it considers inappropriate for HCCPS students.

Internet access must be used in a responsible, efficient, ethical and legal manner. The Hilltown Cooperative Charter School will provide instruction in appropriate use of the Internet for both staff and students. Staff and students must agree to follow the rules of this Acceptable Use Policy. Parents will be asked to help insure proper use of the Internet by reviewing this policy with their child(ren) and signing the On-Line Access Contract for Student Use of the Internet along with their child(ren). Students will not be allowed access to the Internet unless the On-Line Access Contract for Student Use of the Internet has been signed by both parent(s) and child(ren).

Community Compact of Understanding

At the Hilltown Cooperative Charter Public School we believe that education works best as a cooperative process among teachers, staff, parents, students and the community at large. Parents' involvement in their children's education contributes greatly toward their success and this school relies on its cooperative structure to create the innovative and alternative educational environment that is at the core of its mission. This compact of understanding is a way of clearly stating our common commitment to collaboration in creating a learning community that nourishes and supports all of its members. If a situation ever arises in which the spirit or words of the compact is consistently not being met, all involved parties gather for a Compact Meeting to discuss and plan solutions. It is through this level of commitment and cooperation that we are able to successfully fulfill the school's mission.

The Student pledges to:

- do my best to learn while in classes and when doing the home-study I am assigned.
- show respect, through my words and my actions, for myself, my school, my teachers, other people, and materials.
- be inclusive of others and resolve conflicts in a positive, non-violent manner.
- take responsibility for my actions and my safety.
- believe that I am a person who can learn in many different ways.

I, _____, Student, will do my best to keep this agreement. **Date:** _____

The Parents pledge to:

- read the school handbook and abide by the policies and guidelines set out in it.
- to the very best of my ability, give 4 hours of volunteer service per month, or 40 hours per year, that will benefit the school and help my child and others learn.
- ensure that my child arrives at school on time (8:15 am), rested and ready to learn.
- ensure that my child comes to school dressed appropriately for the weather and with a nutritious lunch and snack.
- help my child take responsibility for completing home-study assignments in a timely manner.
- keep myself informed and up to date about events and issues at school by reading the notices in my mailbox, newsletters, e-mails and posted announcements.
- attend *at least* two individual parent/teacher conferences and one classroom meeting per year.
- help strengthen the school community by participating in events and discussions whenever possible.
- show respect and support, through my words and actions, for my child, other students, the staff and the school.

I, _____ (and _____),
Parent(s)/legal guardian(s), agree to do my best to follow through with the responsibilities listed above.

The Administration and Staff of the Hilltown Cooperative Charter School pledge to:

- provide a safe, cooperative and respectful environment for learning.
- believe that all students can succeed and learn.
- nurture each child's innate creativity and encourage his/her self-expression using many modalities.
- communicate and work with each family to support their child's learning.
- have challenging expectations for students and staff.
- seek out and value parent participation and input in all areas of the school community.
- respect and honor the cultural differences of students and their families.
- seek to improve our program through an ongoing cycle of planning, evaluation and refinement.

We, _____, Teachers
and _____, Coordinator

Pledge the school staff's commitment to the above stated responsibilities and ideals. **Date:**

What the Community Compact means for students:

The Student pledges to:

- **do my best to learn while in classes and when doing the home-study I am assigned.**

This means:

No disruptive behavior in class: Interrupting, side conversations or physically distracting others
No refusing assignments in or out of class

- **show respect, through my words and my actions, for myself, my school, my teachers, other people, and materials.**

To show respect for:

The authority of adults – respond to adult direction
Each other– no teasing or put-downs
Equipment – no stealing, throwing or damaging objects
Our community – no vulgar language

- **be inclusive of others and resolve conflicts in a positive, non-violent manner.**

This means:

No threats or intimidation
No hurting others – hitting, kicking, biting
No exclusion

- **take responsibility for my actions and my safety.**

This means:

No lying
No running indoors
No leaving supervised areas
No wrestling or inappropriate rough play

- **believe that I am a person who can learn in many different ways.**

We want everyone to try – just give it a shot, even if it's new.

CONSENSUS PROCESS AT HCCPS

Consensus is a decision-making process, which emphasizes cooperation and respect among all those involved. Its focus is on making the best and most informed decision possible by considering and blending all available points of view in order to reach an acceptable level of unanimous agreement. Majority vote, though a more popular and expedient approach, presents a competitive model in which making the best possible decision for all concerned becomes less important than “winning.” While consensus can be a more complicated and time-consuming process, it generally leads to better, more satisfying outcomes.

What today we call “consensus” is very likely the oldest form of decision-making to be found anywhere, since it is essentially the method used by tribal peoples among the world’s most ancient cultures. Specifically, our modern consensus process is derived from the tribal council structure of the Iroquois Confederacy whose principles influenced the likes of Jefferson and Franklin. It also appears to have influenced the early Quakers, who developed the basic method we use today.

The consensus process of the Board of Trustees:

Designate three people whose job is to support the discussion:

- **Meeting Facilitator** to oversee the process. S/he is empowered to interrupt, re-direct or set time limits to keep the discussion focused.
- **List-keeper** notes all who wish to speak; records of their names in the order of request. S/he may announce the names on the list periodically.
- **Time-keeper** watches the clock and tells participants when they are approaching a time limit.

1. Presentation of proposal

Facilitator asks the designated person to present the proposal.

Proposals should be given in writing to meeting participants in advance of the meeting.

The report should include the key elements in the discussions leading up to the proposal, e.g.:

- Why would this be a good or necessary thing to do?
- How is the proposal in keeping with the aims of the school?
- What concerns or objections, if any, do committee members have about the proposal?
- What other factors (time, money, etc.) have a bearing on the proposal?

2. Clarifying questions

Facilitator opens a round of clarifying questions.

Debate and discussion are not allowed at this time.

Questions should be as specific and concise as possible.

3. Discussion of proposal

Facilitator opens a round of discussion.

Facilitator may allow clarifying questions or responses out of order on the list.

If no one asks to speak, facilitator may check to see if consensus already exists.

4. Finger poll

Facilitator may ask for a finger poll at any point, and especially between rounds of discussion

The goal is to see how close you are to consensus, and to identify those with concerns.

If there are substantial or blocking concerns:

5. Further discussion, questioning, and compromise

Facilitator asks to have concerns restated

Facilitator opens another round of discussion specifically focused on the objections. [The goal is to craft a compromise addressing the concerns sufficiently so that the blocks can be withdrawn.]

6. Standing aside.

A trustee with substantial objections may elect (or be asked) to step aside. This may occur at any point in the discussion.

7. Blocking

- A participant may block a proposal:
- A block must be “principled”; that is, it must relate to the mission, by-laws, and culture of the school, not be based on personal values or preferences.
- Blockers must be willing to compromise actively, honestly and substantially
- The facilitator may call a break or adjourn the meeting to another date to defuse a volatile situation.

Questions to ask a blocker:

- What do you fear will happen if the proposal is approved?
- Are there parts of the proposal that you can accept?
- How does your block of this proposal serve the best interests of the school?
- Is your block based on your personal values or preferences? If so, is it fair to try to impose those on everyone else?
- How does your block of the proposal relate to the aims, values and culture of the school?
- How is this situation different from (name a similar situation, in which someone set aside their block)?
- Would you be willing to accept the proposal on a trial basis, to be evaluated by such-and-such a date?

8. Overriding a block

- If all other members unanimously agree that the block is not "principled", and/or the blocker is not actively working towards compromise, they can override the block on the grounds that the blocker has stepped outside of the agreed-upon consensus process.
- Simple majority vote: HCCPS by-laws stipulate that if the BOT cannot reach consensus, the trustees may decide the outcome by simple majority vote. This is to be avoided, since it points to a failure of our chosen process. It should only be used if the process is failing AND there is compelling reason to make a decision at this meeting.

9. Reaching consensus

Facilitator asks if there are any further objections to the proposal. If none, the facilitator will state that "consensus has been achieved", or "the proposal will be considered approved."

POINTERS:

Be clear and concise; avoid repeating yourself or restating what someone else has already said, Use non-verbal shows of agreement such as “twinkling” (raising the fingers and wiggling them)

Standing aside means that a person still harbors strong objections to a proposal, but is willing to allow it to pass.

Finger Poll: Each member raises from one to four fingers to indicate their level of agreement: four fingers show that the trustee fully supports the proposal as it stands; three fingers indicate support with minor reservations; two fingers stand for reluctant agreement with substantial reservations which would encourage further discussion and modification of the proposal; and one finger signifies that the trustee disagrees strongly enough with the proposal as to block agreement.

Some basic principles of consensus:

- Cooperation** - participants must be willing to work harmoniously with each other
- Respect** - participants must honor each other’s intrinsic value and inclusion in the process
- Flexibility** -participants must be willing to compromise, to bend their ideas to accommodate others’.
- Creativity** --- participants must strive to find creative and innovative solutions in order to achieve acceptable compromises; thinking “outside the box” is encouraged.



COMMUNITY DIRECTORY

2012 - 2013

*Please use only for school-related and social communication and keep all information confidential.
Look for and corrections in the school's weekly newsletter.*





SNOW DAY ?

Check the web: www.hilltowncharter.org

or

Check the school's recording: 413-268-3421 ext. 9
or check local TV channel 40 or 22

The Hilltown Cooperative Charter Public School

132 Main St., Haydenville, MA 010

Phone: 413-268-3421, Fax: 413-268- 3185

www.hilltowncharter.org e-mail: info@hilltowncharter.org

In 1993, the Massachusetts Legislature passed an education reform act that included provisions calling for the development of charter schools. Five local parents, artists and educators from the rural communities of Hampshire County set out to create a partnership of teachers, students, families, and community members to establish a creative learning environment for elementary school children. A child-centered approach, focusing upon the needs of individual children and following their creative impulses was the backbone of the educational philosophy alongside a commitment to governance by a consensus-model parent cooperative.

Support for the vision was overwhelming as many talented community members offered their expertise for the project and joined the founding coalition. On Dec. 9, 1994, the Massachusetts Secretary of Education granted Hilltown a five-year charter to begin operation in Williamsburg in September 1995 and the school opened its doors in the Brassworks building with 3 classrooms and 40 students.

We have now grown to 8 classrooms with 165 students, adding the 7th and 8th grades in 2000 and 2001 respectively. The state reviews of the school have been most favorable and in 2010 we received our third charter renewal. Congratulations Hilltown for sixteen successful and creative years!