



# Family Handbook

## 2025-26

*We hope that the information in this handbook will help make your year at Hilltown informed and enjoyable. Please reach out at any time to clarify or to ask questions. The complete text of this handbook and related material is also available on our website: [www.hilltowncharter.org](http://www.hilltowncharter.org)*

*Translations of this or any other school documents are available for families who need it.  
(Si usted desea una copia de este manual - o de cualquier otro documento de la escuela - en español, por favor comuníquese con Chris Kusek, Director de Escuela.)*

*Hilltown Cooperative Charter Public School is committed to maintaining a work and learning environment free from discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, gender identity, religion, national origin, limited English proficiency, sexual orientation, age, disability, or housing status.*

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 student-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 caregiver 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 11 classrooms with 218 students - adding the 7th and 8th grades in 2000 and 2001 respectively. The state reviews of the school have been most favorable and in 2025 we received a sixth renewal of our charter.

***We are proud of and grateful for Hilltown's thirty successful and creative years!***

Hilltown Cooperative Charter Public School

1 Industrial Parkway, Easthampton, MA 01027

Phone: 413-529-7178, Fax: 413-527-1530

Website: [www.hilltowncharter.org](http://www.hilltowncharter.org)

E-mail: [info@hilltowncharter.org](mailto:info@hilltowncharter.org)

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# SCHOOL CALENDAR - 2025-26

## HILLTOWN COOPERATIVE CHARTER PUBLIC SCHOOL CALENDAR 2025-26

<p><b>August</b> 27 - Practice Kindergarten 9-11 28 Students' First Day</p>	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="7">AUGUST</th> </tr> <tr> <th>S</th><th>M</th><th>T</th><th>W</th><th>T</th><th>F</th><th>S</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>1</td><td>2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td><td>6</td><td>7</td><td>8</td><td>9</td> </tr> <tr> <td>10</td><td>11</td><td>12</td><td>13</td><td>14</td><td>15</td><td>16</td> </tr> <tr> <td>17</td><td>18</td><td>19</td><td>20</td><td>21</td><td>22</td><td>23</td> </tr> <tr> <td>24</td><td>25</td><td>26</td><td>27</td><td>28</td><td>29</td><td>30</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	AUGUST							S	M	T	W	T	F	S						1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="7">FEBRUARY</th> </tr> <tr> <th>S</th><th>M</th><th>T</th><th>W</th><th>T</th><th>F</th><th>S</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td><td>6</td><td>7</td> </tr> <tr> <td>8</td><td>9</td><td>10</td><td>11</td><td>12</td><td>13</td><td>14</td> </tr> <tr> <td>15</td><td>16</td><td>17</td><td>18</td><td>19</td><td>20</td><td>21</td> </tr> <tr> <td>22</td><td>23</td><td>24</td><td>25</td><td>26</td><td>27</td><td>28</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p><b>February</b> 4 HALF DAY 11:50 dismissal - Prof. Dev. 16-20 NO SCHOOL Winter Break</p>	FEBRUARY							S	M	T	W	T	F	S	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28							
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\*Grades K-8 dismiss at 1:45 or 2:00 on Wednesdays, except where noted  
180 days for students

updated 4/27/25

# HCCPS PERSONNEL - 2025-26

<p><b>ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF</b></p> <p>Chris Kusek, Head of School          Rebecca Belcher-Timme, Director of Teaching and Learning          Tiffany Ross, C&amp;F Engagement Coordinator          Amy Linnell, Academic Support Coordinator          Jess Williamson, Behavior Support Coordinator          Monique Bourgeois, Data and Enrollment Coordinator          Brenda Pelissier, Administrative Assistant          Carla Clark, Finance Manager          Michaela Wuethrich, TA support, After School Administrator</p>	<p><b>SPECIAL EDUCATION &amp; RELATED SERVICE PROVIDERS (SERS)</b></p> <p>Andrea Hearn, Reading Intervention          Emily Endris, Math Intervention          Emilie Woodward (school counselor, Social Skills and Mental Health educator)          Emily Lees, Special Education Teacher          Mary Price (school nurse, Health educator)          Kate Kamins, Special Education Teacher          Kate Saccento, Special Education Teacher          Kathryn Bass, OT          Marc Caipizzi, SLP          Marina Donnelly, Psychologist</p>
<p><b>CLASSROOM TEACHERS</b></p> <p>Kerri Pollard, Blues Teacher          Cecilia Darby, Greens Teacher          Maddi Wixson, Yellows Teacher          Margaret Macaluso, Oranges Teacher          Julianne Clarke, Reds Teacher          Missy Kubacka, Purples Math Teacher          Skylar, Purples Humanities          Andrea Hermans, Purples Science          Joe Keppler, Prisms Science          Scott Cavanaugh, Prisms Humanities          Rachel Merrell, Prisms Math          Reagan DuPree, Academic Skills</p>	<p><b>TEACHING ASSISTANTS</b></p> <p>Adam Hargraves, Greens TA          Bailey Costin- Shaw, Reds TA          Cas Meade, Blues TA          Christopher Burnham, Prisms Math TA          Damiona Reid, Prisms Humanities TA          Dawson Clark, Purples Math TA          Debra Courage, Reds TA (1:1)          Jennifer Santiago, Purples Science TA          Katalina DaSilva, Purples Humanities TA          Liza Eaton, Recess          Marilyn Rivera, Spanish TA          Rose Carragher, Prisms Science TA          Steve Hoyt, Learning Lab TA          Will Speck, Oranges TA          Zoe Klatz, Yellows TA</p>
<p><b>SPECIAL SUBJECTS TEACHERS</b></p> <p>Alex Niemiec, PE Teacher, Head Coach          Felicia Sloin, Music Teacher K-4          Cyndy Sperry, Atelierista K,7/8          Grace Mrowicki, Technology Teacher/Coordinator          Juan Carlos Carpio, Spanish 5-8          Natalia Korczak, Health 5-8          Nicole Singer, Atelierista 1-6, Integration Specialist          Sasha Klare-Ayvazian, Music Teacher 5-8          Seana Lamothe, Drama Teacher</p>	

## **MISSION STATEMENT**

The mission of the The Hilltown Cooperative Charter Public School is:

- To engage students in a school that 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 STATEMENT**

The Hilltown Cooperative Charter Public School (HCCPS, or “Hilltown”) was founded in 1995 as Massachusetts Public Charter School. Inspired by the preschools 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 the academic curriculum, children learn essential life skills through participation in an intimate and inclusive 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.

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

# GOVERNANCE & MANAGEMENT

## Board of Trustees

The Board of Trustees (BOT) is the charter school equivalent of a School Committee. It is responsible for the school's overarching philosophies, direction and policies, and is accountable for all legal and fiscal issues affecting the School. It operates using a consensus model and makes decisions on the hiring and supervision of the Head of School, and contractual relationships. Members of the Hilltown Cooperative Charter Public School elect the Trustees at their annual meeting held each May. Trustees serve a two or three-year term and do not need to be caregivers at the school. The Head of School, Director of Teaching and Learning, Community and Family Engagement Coordinator, and 2-3 staff members attend Board meetings as speaking but non-decision-making members. Schedules of BOT meetings, links to meetings, agendas, and minutes are available to caregivers in the newsletter and on the calendar on the school website. All BOT meetings are open to the school community and the general public. All regular meetings include a public comment period at the beginning where anyone can submit input on any issue in the school. For more information, including a list of current Board and Committee Members, meeting schedules and minutes, or how to become a member of the BOT or a committee, please visit our website at [www.hilltowncharter.org](http://www.hilltowncharter.org) or contact the Community and Family Engagement Coordinator.

## Administrative Structure:

Hilltown Cooperative Charter Public School is led through a collaborative leadership model. The Head of School, Director of Teaching and Learning, and various Coordinators hold distinct responsibilities while working together to guide the school, maintain alignment with its mission, and ensure long-term sustainability. The administrative team collaborates closely to support students, staff, and families, and to ensure the school remains viable and responsive to community needs. The Head of School and Director of Teaching and Learning are non-voting members of the Board of Trustees. See Appendix M

## The “Cooperative” and Caregiver Participation

HCCPS is structured as a cooperative. We believe that education is enhanced by strengthening the ties between school and home, and caregiver involvement is an essential factor in the school. We ask families to volunteer as they are able. Caregiver contributions also help us to keep costs down and allow flexibility, richness and diversity in the school, which we might otherwise not achieve.

## Membership and Voting

All caregivers, legal guardians and staff at school are considered members of the Cooperative and are eligible to vote at the Annual Meeting at which we conduct the business of electing new members to Hilltown's Board of Trustees and vote on any updates that are needed to the school's by-laws.

Caregivers make up most of the membership of the major decision-making bodies of the school, including the Board of Trustees along with its policy-making committees. They also serve on The Friends of Hilltown.

Meetings of the cooperative are held several times a year, depending on the need. Caregivers are encouraged to attend. These meetings are a chance for members to hear from the Board of Trustees and the school administration about current happenings at the school and discuss relevant community issues such as school

culture, structure and educational philosophy. Elections of new Board of Trustees members occur in the spring at the Annual Meeting.

### **Volunteering at School**

Participating in the activities of the school is a wonderful way for caregivers to support students' learning, feel informed and connected, and get to know other caregivers. At Hilltown, we rely on volunteers to help us create the richest possible learning environment. There are many ways for parents and families to participate in this cooperative community and we encourage every caregiver to volunteer for the school in some way every year.

All caregivers are asked to complete an individual Caregiver Volunteer Survey at the beginning of the year. These give us information about how you would most like to participate as well as your skills and interests. Caregivers who want to spend time with students in the classroom or driving on field trips must give permission for a state CORI check.

## **ADMISSIONS**

The Hilltown Cooperative Charter School is a public K-8 school and is open to all students of appropriate grade levels from any Massachusetts town on a space available basis, with priority given to siblings of current students and applicants from Hampshire and Franklin counties. No tuition or application fee is required. Charter schools are funded by the per pupil expenditure from each student's home school district. Hilltown Cooperative Charter Public School is committed to maintaining a work and learning environment free from discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, gender identity, religion, national origin, limited English proficiency, sexual orientation, disability, or housing status. Our enrollment for the 2025-26 school year is 218 students, kindergarten through grade 8, in eleven mixed-age classrooms.

In January each year, the school advertises and holds an Informational Open House 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, caregivers are notified of acceptance or waiting list status. Caregivers of prospective students should contact the school for an application or download one from our website: [www.hilltowncharter.org](http://www.hilltowncharter.org). Once a student is enrolled at Hilltown they have a secure space for subsequent years and siblings gain admission priority. School meetings orient families to the school and help welcome them into the school community.

## **COMMUNICATION**

### **Overview**

Good communication among caregivers, staff and the Board of Trustees is essential. Hilltown has multiple ways to keep parents informed and engaged, including:

- Emails from teachers and staff members
- The school newsletter, "Hilltown Happenings"
- Hilltown's Google calendar
- Google Classrooms (student login required)

- Printed copies of forms in the main entryway
- On the rare occasion that communications or other announcements might be sent home with students, parents will generally be notified by email or in the newsletter.

If you are not able to receive school communications by email or through the portal, or if you think you have been missing some school communications, please contact Monique in the main office ([mbourgeois@hiltowncharter.org](mailto:mbourgeois@hiltowncharter.org), 413-529-7178 ext. 110). Printed copies of any forms or documents can be mailed to you upon request.

## Updating Contact Information

Please be sure to give the main office any address, email or phone number changes throughout the year so that we can stay in touch with you.

## Snow/Inclement Weather Day Information

HCCPS follows the Easthampton school district in canceling school due to snow or inclement weather. When school is closed or delayed, Hilltown sends a text and/or automated phone call to caregivers who wish to receive either or both, and an email to all caregivers. Hilltown also posts school closings at [www.wwlp.com](http://www.wwlp.com) and [www.wggb.com](http://www.wggb.com) (Channel 40).

## The Hilltown Student Information System

One of the main ways that we share information is through a secure portal system, Infinite Campus, where parents and caregivers can log in to find general information about school and class activities, as well as information specific to your child(ren) such as what classes they are in and their attendance. Progress Reports and other student reports can be downloaded from this portal, as they become available. We will generally email you when key items are posted, but it would be helpful to check for updates and developments periodically throughout the year.

## Family Directory

The **Family Directory** is available electronically and may also be obtained in a paper version to help caregivers and students stay in touch with one another by phone and email. This information is confidential and must not be passed along to anyone outside the school or used for group mailings. The interactive Hilltown Family map (aka carpool map) is another great tool for networking with other families. This map is shared only with Hilltown families and staff.

## Hilltown Newsletter

This is our other main method of communication. It is distributed to staff and families via email once a week. It contains an updated calendar, information about various special activities, meeting summaries from the Board of Trustees, and other announcements and articles from the school. There is a Community section where we list programs and activities that are happening at Hilltown but organized and managed by caregivers or other entities. Caregivers may also use this section to request help or offer giveaways. The Newsletter is sent by email via Constant Contact. Make sure that your inbox is ready to receive it so it doesn't go to SPAM.

## Social Media

Caregivers may also communicate with each other in private community **Facebook groups** which are created by the school for grade-level caregiver cohorts. These can be a good place for making connections around transportation, outdoor adventures, etc.

## Communication with Teachers

For most teachers, an email is the best way to request time for uninterrupted discussion. Staff email addresses can be found in the Staff Directory on Hilltown website. 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 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 or time-sensitive messages with the Administrative Assistant to pass along in person. Teachers are not expected to be available to caregivers and students at night or on the weekends. Teachers may take up to 24-48 hours to respond to non-urgent matters.

## Communication with Students

During the day you may leave messages in the office for students who are in the building, and they will be delivered when time allows. Students will be called from class only for emergencies. ***Please note that personal electronic devices—including phones and smart watches— will be collected and stored in the office during the school day.***

## Addressing Concerns, Getting Your Voice Heard

We encourage everyone in the school to go directly to the person involved to resolve problems as they come up. Educational or classroom concerns should first be addressed with the teacher involved. School administrators are always glad to converse with caregivers. Please reach out by email to ask questions or to schedule a meeting.

**Board of Trustees** meetings are open to everyone and have room for a public comment period during every meeting. Some of the Board committees have membership open to non-Board members, and participation in the work is a great way to have input into how things happen. Committee meetings are also open to the public. Times and links are posted in the newsletter and the school's online Google calendar.

## Special Education Parent Advisory Committee (SEPAC)

The Hilltown Special Education Parent Advisory Committee is a caregiver-run organization directly liaised with the Academic Support Coordinator and the Director of Teaching and Learning. The HCCPS SEPAC mission is:

- To provide a network in which parents/guardians/advocates of students with special needs have access to relevant information, training and support
- To encourage an atmosphere of effective open communication, understanding, and mutual respect among all students, caregivers, educators and the community-at-large about issues relevant to Hilltown's Special Education
- To provide advice and recommendations to school leadership and the Board of Trustees regarding special education programs and policies

Meetings are monthly, noted on the school's Google calendar, and are announced in the newsletter.

## **Parent Resource Group and Class Parents**

All active community members can be a good resource when you have general questions or need to check in. Class Parents assist teachers with materials and communications and also work to strengthen the sense of community among caregivers.

## **Visiting the School**

Caregivers are welcome to stop by the main office any time to ask questions, drop things off or pick up forms, but if you would like to visit a classroom or meet with a staff member please make arrangements in advance.

## **Lost and Found**

**Please label students' lunch boxes, water bottles, and clothing (especially outerwear).** We will collect lost items in our Lost and Found near the front door, and attempt to return them to their families if they are labeled.

## **Lost Book Replacement**

In many 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 a book, that student and his or her family are expected to pay at least half of the cost of replacing it.

## **Dissemination**

Sharing our best practices with the larger community is a goal at Hilltown. You can find the full details of our dissemination efforts in our Annual Report ([www.hilltowncharter.org](http://www.hilltowncharter.org))**SCHOOL ARRIVAL & DEPARTURE PROCEDURES**

# **School Arrivals and Departures**

These guidelines and procedures are intended to make arrival and dismissal at Hilltown safe and supportive of all the different ways students get to and from school, whether by car, bus, bike or on foot.

Please review your student's Transportation/Pick-up Form in your Hilltown portal at the start of each school year and update their permissions to walk, bike or take the bus.

### **Easthampton District Bus**

Easthampton residents may be eligible to take a yellow school bus provided by Easthampton District. In the summer, an email is sent to those who may be eligible. If you live in Easthampton and have questions about this bus, please email Monique Bourgeois at [mbourgeois@hilltowncharter.org](mailto:mbourgeois@hilltowncharter.org). Please note that the Easthampton bus arrives just after 3pm each day, including Wednesdays.

### **PVTA**

The Nashawannuck Express, running between Easthampton center and downtown Northampton, is available to pick students up in front of the school Monday through Friday starting on the first day of school. Currently, PVTA is free for riders, and anticipates keeping this policy for this school year. We will notify you of fare changes, if any, in the newsletter (Please note that PVTA does not offer a bus at 2:00, the Wednesday dismissal time). General

information about the PVTA can be found on the PVTA website: <https://www.pvta.com>. The Nashawannuck Express schedule can be found at: <https://www.pvta.com/schedules/NE>

### **Drop-off and Pick-up**

8:00-8:15 Drop-off window

3:00 Pick-up\* (Wednesdays, pick-up is at 1:45 for K-4 students, and 2:00 for 5-8 students pm)

\*Teachers often have after school meetings or other scheduled commitments.

It is important for caregivers to arrive on time for pick up.

### **Drop-off Details by Grade**

- **Kindergarten:** Caregivers walk Kindergarten students into the building through the front entrance. Kindergarteners may be dropped off on the blacktop in a specially designated area. Caregivers can also come in as early as 8 am and wait in the family corner until the classroom doors open at 8:15 am. Caregivers need to stay with their kindergartener until the classroom door opens.
- **Grades 1-4:** Students in grades 1-4 are dropped off in front of the school entrance by a single car line (and walk down the sidewalk to the blacktop if it is before 8:15 am) OR caregivers may park in the lot or on the street and walk the student(s) to the blacktop. Please do not drop off students in front of the blacktop area, as it causes a back-up in the parking lot. Grades 1-4 teachers pick up their classes at 8:15 am on the blacktop.
- **Grades 5-8:** Students in grades 5-8 are dropped off in front of the school entrance by a single car lane closest to the curb. Students in grades 5-8 walk to the blacktop if they are dropped off before 8:15 am.

### **Morning Blacktop Supervision**

Three staff members supervise the blacktop from 8:00-8:15 am. The before-school playground expectations are:

- Blacktop and platform only (no swings, play structure)
- No running if wet or icy
- No ball games
- No electronic devices
- No equipment from the shed
- Wait for the whistle to enter the building (Purples and Prisms go in when the whistle is blown. Grades 1-5 line up and wait for their teacher to walk them in.).

### **Dismissal and Pick-up Details by Grade**

To ensure safety and smooth traffic flow, dismissal times are staggered. Supervision will be provided for up to 15 minutes after the scheduled dismissal time, but please make an effort to pick up your child as close to dismissal time as possible. After 15 minutes, students will be escorted back to the main office for pick up.

- **Grades K-4:** Each class has a designated blacktop location. Every K-4 student must be signed out by a caregiver before leaving the blacktop. Each classroom teacher will have a clipboard with the signout sheet for the class.

- **Grades K-4:** At 2:45, teachers walk their students down the hallway to the blacktop. Students with siblings in grades 5-8 should be picked up at 2:45, and wait with families for the 3:00 dismissal time.
- **Grades 5-6:** At 3:00, teachers walk their students to the pick up line at the edge of the blacktop near the playground. Please note the new one-way traffic pattern with a distinct entrance and exit.
- **Grades 7-8:** At 3:00, students are dismissed and wait at the front of the building.
- **Bus riders** in Grades K-8 will be dismissed in the front of the building.

### Frequently Asked Questions

- *What if students arrive at 8:15 am when the front doors are open?*  
Students may enter the school and will be asked to wait in the hallway until their teacher arrives with the class. Students who arrive after 8:20 will be marked tardy.
- *What if it's pouring rain at arrival?*  
**The All School doors** will be open at 8 am for any students in **grades K-6** arriving early, and **the front entrance** will be open at 8 am for any students in grades 7-8. Grades K-6 wait in the All School space for their teacher to pick them up, Grades 7-8 wait quietly outside their homerooms.
- *What if it's pouring rain at dismissal?*  
Students in grades **K-4 wait in the All School space** in designated spaces, and students will be called as parents arrive at the doorways. Students in **grades 5-6** will continue to be **picked up in the back** and may be outside or inside depending on conditions. **Grades 7-8 wait in front** under the overhang of the building.

### Car Lanes

Please form one line only for drop-off and pick-up, in the lane closest to the school. The lane closest to Industrial Parkway needs to be left open for vehicles to exit the parking driveway/parking lot. Students should not get in or out of the car from the outside lane because that space is meant for vehicles to pass through.

### Crosswalks

There are clearly marked crosswalks that our community can use to get safely to and from school. When crossing a high traffic area, please utilize these crosswalks and be mindful of your environment.

*Vehicles may not park or temporarily stop in any of the crosswalks.*

Also, please remember that vehicles may not pass a school bus when the stop sign with flashing lights is on. The yellow school bus stops in front of the crosswalk on Industrial Parkway for loading and unloading.

### The Parking Lot

Caregivers may park in any of the open spots in the back parking lot to drop-off or pick-up their students. During the school day, the back parking lot is blocked-off by cones so that students may play in the lot during recess or PE. If you need to park in the back lot during the school day, please proceed slowly into the lot and park in one of the spots on the perimeter (not in the center of the lot).

### **Street Parking**

If you park on Industrial Parkway, please park on the side opposite the school and do not block any driveways or park on any areas marked with yellow paint.

### **No Idling**

When waiting to drop off or pick up your student after school, please turn off your engine if the line is not yet moving. Massachusetts law states that: "No person shall cause, suffer, allow, or permit the unnecessary operation of the engine of a motor vehicle while said vehicle is stopped for a foreseeable period of time in excess of five minutes." Vehicles should never be left running on school property without an adult inside or right nearby.

### **An important note for the drivers in our community:**

We ask everyone to be patient as safety and civility are of the utmost importance for our community. If time is of the essence and you need to be somewhere after dropping off your student, your best strategy is to arrive at 8 a.m. when there is little congestion in the parking lot and drop-off lanes. Please do everything to encourage students and adults to cross only at the crosswalks and not to cross Industrial Parkway without an adult.

Parking for caregivers is available in the large parking lot in the middle of the lot until 9 am and after 2:45 pm, and all day in the back lot along the chain linked fence. Parking is also available on Industrial Parkway on the opposite side of the street from the school except in areas that are marked in yellow, on the crosswalk or blocking any driveways. Please be courteous to our neighbors when parking, and please leave spots marked by the letter "S" for staff to park in.

## **ATTENDANCE & ABSENCES**

### **Attendance**

Massachusetts General Laws require children to attend school regularly. Regular school attendance is the foundation for a student's school success, and supports students to develop a sense of belonging, build strong relationships, and benefit from daily experiences and support in the classroom. Parents and caregivers are essential to strong attendance and are responsible to ensure children attend school regularly and on time.

### **Absences**

Students may need to be absent from school for full or partial days for a range of reasons that would be considered excused including illness, family emergency, court appearances, and religious observances. Family vacations are not considered excused, and we strongly encourage families to use scheduled vacation days for this purpose. Students who were not in attendance at school are not permitted to participate in school-sponsored after-school activities (e.g., Kids' Club, sports, theater).

Hilltown is required to report chronic absences to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). Chronic absenteeism is the percentage of students missing 10 percent or more of scheduled school days regardless of whether such absences are excused or unexcused (e.g., absent 18 school days when enrolled for 180 school days). Hilltown is also required to take action when a student is habitually truant, which is defined by state law as "a school-aged child, not excused from attendance under the lawful and reasonable regulations of such child's school, who willfully fails to attend school for more than 8 school days in a quarter."

Up-to-date student attendance records are available in the Hilltown Portal, and are included on all progress reports.

## **Late Arrival and Early Dismissal**

The school day begins at 8:15. An arrival after 8:20 is considered tardy, and students must check in at the main office upon arrival. Please use the “Reporting Absences” procedures below in the event that your student will arrive after the start of school, or needs to be dismissed early. A student must be at school, at a school related activity, or receiving academic instruction for at least half of the school day to be counted as present.

## **Reporting Absences**

It is important that we have an accurate count of students in the building in case of an emergency. If a student will be absent from any part of the scheduled school day for any reason, a parent or guardian must either email [attendance@hilltowncharter.org](mailto:attendance@hilltowncharter.org) (preferably by 8:20 am) or call the school at 413-529-7178 and leave a message on the attendance voice mail (option 2). If you need to speak with someone, please call the main school number and press “0.” If we have not yet heard from a caregiver by 9:00 am, we will contact parents.

## **Absence Due to Student Illness**

To minimize the spread of infectious disease and to provide for a safe environment, students should be kept home from school for:

- Fever greater than 100 within the last 24 hours (fever should be under 100 for 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medications before returning to school)
- Vomiting/diarrhea within the last 24 hours
- A communicable disease
- An upper respiratory illness with significant coughing and/or nasal discharge
- Pain that requires the use of narcotic medications

# **HEALTH & SAFETY**

Mary Price is the school nurse. She can be reached by email at: [Mprice@hilltowncharter.org](mailto:Mprice@hilltowncharter.org) or by phone at 413-529-7178 X113. Please feel free to reach out any time with questions or concerns.

**The school nurse should be notified by the parent/guardian of any:**

- Serious injury, illness or hospitalization
- Planned surgery
- Communicable diseases
- New diagnosis or change in your child’s health status
- Fracture, sprain, stitches, cast, or crutches
- New medication and/or dosing change.
- Need to be excused from Physical Education

## Student Illness

To minimize the spread of infectious disease and to provide for a safe environment, students should be kept home from school for:

- Fever greater than 100 within the last 24 hours (fever should be under 100 for 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medications before returning to school)
- Vomiting/diarrhea within the last 24 hours
- A communicable disease
- An upper respiratory illness with significant coughing and/or nasal discharge
- Pain that requires the use of narcotic medications

## Medication Policy

HCCPS follows the Massachusetts Regulation 105 CMR 210 which regulates the administration of prescription medications in schools.

### 1. Over the Counter Medications

Standing orders from the school physician are on file for several commonly used over the counter (OTC) medications. Caregivers are asked to review their child's permissions for these medications each school year. If you have any questions or would like to see the current list of medications available or change your permissions mid-year, please contact the school nurse, Mary Price: 413-529-7178 x113, [mprice@hilltowncharter.org](mailto:mprice@hilltowncharter.org). The OTC medications available include

Acetaminophen	Ibuprofen	Sterile eye drops
Triple Antibiotic Ointment	Orajel	Cetirizine (Zyrtec)
Benadryl	Cough drops	Sunscreen SPF 30
Caladryl Clear	Vaseline	DEET containing Insect
Calcium Carbonate (Turns)	Benadryl Itch Stopping	Repellent
Hydrocortisone Cream	Antiseptic wound wash	Alcohol based hand sanitizer
	Aloe vera gel	

### 2. Prescription Medications

All prescription medications that need to be administered during the school day need a medication order from the child's physician and a permission form signed by the parent. Medication must be brought to school in the original container provided by the pharmacist.

Students may not carry any sort of supplement or medication with them at school. The only exception to this rule is students who need immediate access to an inhaler or epipen.

If a parent needs to come to school during the school day to administer medication, they will be asked to meet their student in the nurse's office.

## Food Policy

Our school makes every effort to reduce the risk of life threatening allergic reactions caused by accidental allergen exposure during the day. **We are not a nut-free school.** Therefore, we have:

- No food sharing or trading during snack or lunch in K-6 classrooms

- Handwashing before eating
- All tables will be washed before/after lunch and snack
- No eating on the play structure.
- Limited use of food for classroom celebrations, and curriculum instructions. Nut free food is encouraged and all food is labeled with an ingredient list.
- An allergen-free table to be established as needed in applicable classrooms.

Families will be notified if it is necessary to restrict particular foods, based on student needs in a classroom.

## **Pets/Animals**

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

## **Medical Records, Physical Examinations, Immunizations**

A medical record is kept for your student from kindergarten through 8th grade. The State of Massachusetts requires a periodic examination of every school-age child. HCCPS complies with this regulation by requiring physical examinations for all incoming students and in 4th and 7th grade.

## **Health Screenings**

According to Massachusetts general laws, all students in grades Pre-K-8 are required to be screened for vision, hearing, and height and weight. In certain grades, body mass index (BMI) and postural screening are also performed. Additionally, a substance abuse screening is conducted at certain grades in middle school.

The schedule for health screenings in school is as follows:

- Vision: K through grade 5 and once in grade 6-8
- Hearing: K through grade 3 and once in grade 6-8
- Growth Screening—Growth screening is conducted for students in grades 1, 4, and 7th. Heights and weights are measured and calculated into BMI or Body Mass Index.
- Postural: Grades 5 through 8
- SBIRT: Grade 7
- SBIRT is an evidence-based screening to promote prevention and identify early risk for substance use in adolescents.

## **Lice Protocol**

The Centers for Disease Control, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the National Association of School Nurses all recommend that students not be excluded from school for having nits and that the management of head lice should not disrupt a student's educational process.

The AAP further recommends that since a student with an active head lice infestation has likely had the infestation for a month or more by the time it is discovered, poses little risk to others, and does not have a resulting health problem, he or she should remain in class but be discouraged from close direct head contact

with others.

When a student is assessed as having head lice, confidentiality is maintained so the student is not embarrassed. The student's parent or guardian will be notified that day and educated on the prompt, proper treatment of head lice. The student will be allowed to return to school after proper treatment.

The School Nurse will identify close contacts. Close contacts may include members of the same household, peers that may have had direct head-to-head contact, or shared personal items (such as hair tools) within the past 48 hours. For young students close contacts may include students who sit and play together often. Screening of close contacts will be at the discretion of the school nurse.

Classroom checks and letters home regarding individual lice cases will be discontinued unless three or more students of the class are affected.

## **Head Injury/Concussions**

### **What is a Concussion?**

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), a concussion is a type of traumatic brain injury caused by a bump, blow or jolt to the head, or a hit to the body that causes the brain to move or shift in the skull and causes a functional disturbance and chemical changes to brain cells. Concussions typically result in the rapid onset of signs and symptoms, although in some cases symptoms may evolve over minutes to hours.

### **Communicating with School Following a Concussion**

It is important to notify the school nurse following a head injury/concussion diagnosis. Full recovery from a concussion may take several days to several weeks or even months. There are physical and emotional symptoms that may continue during a recovery.

### **Returning to School Following a Concussion**

HCCPS requires students returning to school, post-concussion, to submit a re-entry plan from a healthcare provider.

Please Note: Students who are diagnosed with a concussion as the result of participation in Hilltown Extracurricular Athletics must submit a [Post Sports-Related Head Injury Medical Clearance and Authorization Form](#) prior to resuming the athletic activity.

Parents or legal guardians of students who participate in any extracurricular athletic activity and the students themselves, are required by 105 CMR 201.007 to acknowledge in writing that they have read and understood DPH approved training materials on Sports Head Injury and Concussion Awareness.

# TEACHING & LEARNING

## Teaching Staff

We are fortunate to have a highly qualified teaching faculty at Hilltown, whose individual strengths and collective experience show in the quality of their work. Caregivers may request information about any teacher's credentials from Rebecca Belcher-Timme, Director of Teaching and Learning.

## Classroom Structure and Class Assignments

Class groups at Hilltown are single-grade in Kindergarten, and mixed-age class groups for grades 1-8, and students stay with the same teachers for two years. Students in grades 5-8 are in single-grade groups for mathematics, Spanish, and the Learning Lab to accommodate the sequential nature of these curricula, and in mixed-grade groups for social studies, science, atelier, music, physical education, and technology.

The process for placing students entering first, third, fifth, and seventh grades—where they will be entering a new mixed-age grade band—is as follows: each spring administrators and educational staff members meet to discuss each student individually and plan the make-up of each classroom for the following year. This is a thoughtful process that takes into account a wide range of factors. Caregivers are invited to provide input about their students' social and educational strengths and needs prior to these conversations, and this input is included in the process. The Director of Teaching and Learning and the Head of School are responsible for final decisions. Only in very rare circumstances will they consider moving a student to a different classroom for the second year in a two-year sequence.

## 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. These elements come together in the integration of arts across all subjects, careful documentation of students' work and processes, and projects that draw from students' interests.

Whenever possible, and primarily in the areas of social studies and science, Hilltown students explore subjects in depth using a particular theme as a point of departure for an integrated curriculum. They develop skills in art, music, mathematics, science, reading, writing, problem-solving, and critical thinking as they work with central themes. Problem-solving strategies and critical thinking skills are a thread that weaves all subject areas together, and creates a standard for questioning and seeking answers whenever a new topic is approached.

All grades, K-8, use the Illustrative Math curriculum, which is designed to help students to build understanding of mathematical concepts, build procedural fluency, develop academic language, and solve real-life problems. Grades K-5 use the Being a Reader and Being a Writer curricula from Collaborative Classroom. The reading curriculum is designed to develop comprehension, fluency, decoding strategies, word analysis, spelling, vocabulary, and independent reading. The writing curriculum combines a writing process approach with guided instruction. Students are provided many opportunities to read and write within these lessons as well as integrated into other subjects such as social studies and science. Hilltown has a reading specialist who assesses all students in grades K-3 using the DIBELS assessment system, and works with students who have identified reading challenges. Examples of these supports include SIPPS (Systematic Instruction in Phonological Awareness,

Phonics, and Sight Words), which is a research-based foundational skills program, and Read Naturally, which supports reading fluency.

The Hilltown curriculum also includes the social aspects of life. Teachers work to create and support a cooperative environment based on mutual respect and problem solving when differences arise. Students learn and have opportunities to practice social and emotional skills in every class. The adjustment counselor provides lessons on social and emotional skills and concepts to all grades using resources from the Zones of Regulation curriculum and other sources. Students in grades 6-8 participate in a weekly Advisory program, which is based on a Circle structure that emphasizes equitable and safe participation through shared norms and values.

## **Evaluation**

Evaluation of a student's progress is multi-faceted. Teachers use observation and discussion in combination with developmentally appropriate formal and informal assessments to identify student strengths and next steps. Drawings, written work samples, presentations, and other types of student work are used to measure growth and development. Students' progress in mathematics is measured by assessments built into the Illustrative Math curriculum. Students' yearly progress in writing is assessed using a standard writing rubric. Standards-based progress reports are provided to caregivers three times a year with narrative comments included on the mid-year reports in addition to scores for each standard. Teacher-family conferences are offered in the fall to give caregivers the opportunity to speak directly with teachers. Students in grades 7 and 8 are included in the fall conferences, and take a lead role. Caregivers may request additional meetings with teachers at any time.

Hilltown uses two different nationally-normed screening assessments to check students' progress. All students in grades K-3 are assessed three times per year using the DIBELS benchmark reading assessment. All students in grades 3-8 are assessed three times per year using the Fastbridge aReading and aMath benchmark assessments. All students in grades 3-8 participate in MCAS testing as required by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

## **Homework Guidelines**

For the most part, students complete schoolwork at school where teachers and staff are available to provide time, space, and support. When home study is assigned, it is a thoughtful choice. We do not believe in busy work, and we are aware of equity issues that can be exacerbated by an overemphasis on homework.

In all grades, we encourage independent reading, or reading with a caregiver, for at least 20 minutes a day. This is one of the few home study practices that research has proven to be an important predictor of background knowledge, vocabulary, sustained attention, and literacy.

In the youngest grades (K-4), there is generally no assigned home study. Teachers may give students optional activities that they can choose to do. In fifth grade, students begin to have homework assignments in all subject areas.

## **Learning Challenges and Special Education**

If you are concerned that your student is struggling to make progress in school, you can first reach out to the classroom teacher to explain your concerns and ask the teacher to share their observations and insights.

Teachers may elect to initiate a Response to Intervention (RTI) process. This is a team approach during which the general education teachers and other members of the education domain discuss concerns about the student's learning, then determine a goal for improvement over a 6-8-week period and strategies to meet that goal. Over the next 6-8 weeks, the teacher implements these strategies, monitors the student's progress, and reports back to the team. If the strategies were effective, the teacher will typically choose to keep these classroom accommodations in place. If they were not effective, the team may discuss other options to put in place.

If a student continues to have difficulty with schoolwork, parents/guardians may, at any time, submit a written request for a special education evaluation to Amy Linnell, Academic Support Coordinator and Chris Kusek, Head of School. This evaluation can involve a range of testing and assessments conducted by special education and related services staff. When complete, the results of the evaluation are shared at a Team Meeting with the parents/guardians, and Special Education eligibility is determined.

### **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.

# SCHOOL-WIDE BEHAVIOR & DISCIPLINE

Hilltown Cooperative Charter Public School is built on a strong sense of community. All members of the school—students, teachers, staff, caregivers, and community members—are encouraged to develop strong communication skills and respect for each other. From this base, students learn to respect their peers, teachers, other staff members, and school environment. Treating others as they want to be treated and taking care of our school helps students, caregivers, and staff members define appropriate behaviors that meet those ends. We expect relations between adults within the community—caregivers, teachers, staff, and volunteers—to be respectful and provide a model for the students.

Hilltown Cooperative Charter Public School is committed to maintaining a work and learning environment free from discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, gender identity, religion, national origin, limited English proficiency, sexual orientation, disability, or housing status. Questions and concerns should be directed to our Civil Rights Coordinator, Rebecca Belcher-Timme.

## Code of Cooperation

*The Hilltown Code of Cooperation* outlines basic behavioral expectations for all students, staff members, and community members. Early each year, teachers review the Code of Cooperation with students, and define what these behaviors look like in various settings around the school.

- Treat others with kindness
- Include everyone
- Be safe with your body
- Talk one at a time and listen to each other
- Take care of materials and property

## Community Agreements

Hilltown has had a “Community Compact” in place each year (see appendix A), which is a formalization of the commitment that we have to one another to build an environment for learning filled with respect, responsibility and openness. This agreement, along with clear definitions for students of its meaning, has typically been reviewed with students by teachers in each classroom at the beginning of the year and then sent home for caregivers to read as well. Students, staff members, and parents/caregivers will have the opportunity to share ideas that will be incorporated into the new Community Agreements. When the new document is ready, caregivers, students, teachers, and administrators at Hilltown will be asked to sign the new Community Agreements as a way of showing that they have read and understood the basic ways that each of us can contribute to maintaining our cooperative school.

## Supporting Student Behavior

Student behavior expectations are based on the Code of Cooperation and Community Agreements. Hilltown's approach to supporting student behavior is based on three foundational elements. These include:

### Relationship-building & Community-building

Strong and trusting relationships are at the heart of any school's efforts to support student behavior. Connections among students and adults foster positive social interaction and establish a safe and supportive learning environment. Research shows that students who feel connected to school have better attendance, grades, and test scores. Successful relationships are focused on positive attitudes and beliefs about others, and cultural competence.

### Norms, Rules & Expectations

Students need to know what is expected of them in order to meet expectations. Educators lay a strong foundation for the year by explicitly teaching, modeling, and reinforcing norms, rules, and expectations in the first several weeks of school. Students of all ages are more likely to buy in when they have been included in creating, defining, and refining norms, rules, and expectations. Safe and supportive environments—essential for students who have experienced trauma or chronic stress—are characterized by clear and consistent expectations and routines.

### Support & Accountability

Any behavior support system requires strategies that support individuals to meet expectations, as well as strategies to hold them accountable to those expectations. Support paired with accountability keeps the learning community safe and predictable.

## School-wide Norms, Rules & Expectations

### Lunch Expectations

- Delivered lunch pick-up:
  - In grades K-4, a student from each classroom goes to the main office to pick up lunches, and returns the basket when finished
  - In grades 5-8, an administrative staff member will deliver lunches to the All School space, where students eat in a cafeteria style setting
- **The adult on duty distributes school lunches**
- Students must wipe tables, sweep floors, and push in chairs before the end of lunch
- **Students must not share or trade food due to food allergies family preference**
- Glass containers are not allowed for safety reasons (glass-lined water bottles are acceptable)
- Electronic devices are not allowed during lunch
- Students must sit in the same seat until clean-up (i.e., no wandering or standing)
- One student may leave the lunch room at a time
- We have a "pack it in, pack it out" system to reduce trash, and help parents to know what their child is and isn't eating

### Recess/Playground Expectations

- The Code of Cooperation is in place at all times and settings
- Recess is outside unless the "real feel" temperature is at or below 18 degrees, or it is pouring rain (a director will make this decision each day)
- There are designated areas outside of the school building where students can play:
  - The blacktop area/equipment shed near the school building
  - The play structures/swings
  - The field and far parking lot area

- The side yard by O'Neil Street
- The strip of grass in front of the school

Students must stay within the designated play areas, and be in sight at all times (e.g., not behind buildings or in the woods). Students in grades K-4 must ask an adult to get equipment that goes into a parking lot. Purples and Prisms students may retrieve their own equipment from a parking lot as long as they do it safely

- Three staff members are assigned at scheduled recess times to be responsible for a section of the playground. This includes:
  - the blacktop area/equipment shed near the school building
  - the play structures/swings
  - the field and far parking lot area

If there are only two adults outside (e.g., for "extra" class recess time), one is responsible for the blacktop/shed area, and the other chooses which second area to use. Students are then restricted to those areas

- Students must ask an adult to get equipment out of the shed for them, and return all equipment to that adult at the end of outside time
- In all grades, an adult must lead students to the playground and back to ensure adequate supervision while outside
- Healthy competition can be a fun part of recess. At Hilltown, we follow the guidelines:
  - Play hard
  - Play fair
  - Play safe

Students who are not following these guidelines, or any part of the Code of Cooperation, will be removed from an activity for a period of time determined by the adult in charge

- Equipment is not allowed on the play structures
- Do not climb trees
- Do not climb on the outside of play structures
- Students must get adult permission to go inside, one at a time. This should be the adult supervising the shed/blacktop area when using that area
- Some equipment has specific rules to ensure safety:
  - Log Swing
    - NO WALKING BETWEEN LOG SWING AND TIRE SWING WHILE IN MOTION
    - Two hands and two feet on the swing at all times
    - No acrobatics, grabbing or swinging from the red lines
    - No swinging higher than the painted lines on the posts
    - Students can sit on the rope swing to slow the swing down by dragging feet - no jumping off or on while swing is really moving
    - No sitting or standing on the ends of the log
  - Tire Swings
    - Three students on black tire swings at a time
    - One student at a time on the red tire swing
    - Students must sit when riding the tire swing
    - Students may not position themselves on the inner part of the tire
    - Students must not have items with them on any of the swings (e.g., pencils, pens, notebooks)
  - Spinners
    - One person at a time
    - Must sit in chair

- Basketball Hoops

- No hanging on the pole
- No “dunking,” or hanging on the rim/net
- Only an adult is allowed to change the height of the hoops

### **Winter Recess Expectations**

- There is no indoor winter recess option except for medical reasons approved by the school nurse
- Do not throw snow or ice (students will be removed from recess activities for a period of time determined by the adult in charge)
- Do not run or slide on ice
- Students may play on the snow banks next to the field and along the parking lot by the fence. Do not play on the snowbank by the dumpsters
- Students may not dig tunnels
- Winter clothing requirements for grades K-5 (encouraged for everyone):
  - Long sleeves or a vest if temperature is 32-40 degrees
  - At least one layer of outerwear and gloves if temperatures is below 32 degrees
  - Snow boots (K-5) and snow pants (K-3) are required to play in the snow

### **Before-school Playground Expectations**

- Blacktop and platform only (no swings, play structure)
- No running if wet or icy
- No ball games
- No electronic devices
- No equipment from shed
- Wait for whistle to enter building (Purples & Prisms)

### **Hallway Expectations**

- Walking feet
- Quiet voices
- Hands to self
- No eating
- Do not distract others
- Head directly to destination

### **Water Fountain Expectations**

- Be quick - count to 5
- Mouth off the spout
- No washing hands
- Do not dump liquids

### **Student Clothing Guidelines**

- Sneakers are required for PE (no boots, sandals or heels)
- Students’ eyes and ears must be showing if wearing anything on their head
- Hate speech and hate symbols are not permitted (we refer to the ADL for clarification on what constitutes hate speech and hate symbols)
- No references to violence/weapons, controlled substances, and offensive language/symbols

## Personal Electronic Devices

This policy aims to establish clear guidelines regarding the use of personal electronic devices ("PEDs") by students during the school day at Hilltown Cooperative Charter Public School to minimize distractions, promote a focused learning environment, and ensure the safety and well-being of all students. PEDs include, but are not limited to, smartphones, smartwatches, tablets, e-readers, headphones, and portable gaming devices.

### General Prohibition

The use of PEDs is strictly prohibited during the school day, unless explicitly authorized by a teacher or administrator for educational purposes. The school day is defined as the period from arrival on school grounds to pick up, including instructional time, lunch, recess, and any school-sponsored activities during those hours.

### Device Registration and Storage

- Families who choose to allow their children to bring PEDs to school must register these devices with the school at the beginning of each academic year or when a new device is purchased. Registration will include providing the device type(s), make and model of devices brought to school on a regular basis.
- Students who bring PEDs to school must turn them in each morning at a designated location. ● The school will provide a secure storage system for PEDs, ensuring their safety and protection throughout the school day.
- PEDs will be returned to students at the end of the school day upon dismissal.

After dismissal, students may use their PEDs to communicate with caregivers regarding pick-up arrangements or after-school plans, but only with staff permission. Otherwise, PEDs must remain off until students have been picked up.

### Consequences for Non-Compliance

Students who fail to comply with this policy will be subject to the following consequences:

- **First Offense:** Confiscation of the PED. The device will be stored securely and returned to the student at the end of the day. A written warning will be issued to the student and a record of the incident will be maintained.
- **Second Offense:** Confiscation of the PED. The device will only be released to a parent or legal guardian. A meeting may be scheduled with the student and parent/guardian to review the policy and discuss expectations.
- **Third Offense:** Confiscation of the PED and a mandatory meeting with the student, parent/guardian, and school administrator. Alternatives to bringing the device to school will be explored, and a temporary ban on bringing the device to school may be implemented.

### Exceptions and Special Circumstances

- **Educational Use:** Teachers may authorize the use of PEDs for specific classroom activities or projects.
- **Medical Needs:** Students with documented medical needs requiring the use of a PED will be granted an exception, subject to approval by the school administration and the provision of appropriate documentation.
- **Accessibility:** Students requiring the use of PEDs for accessibility purposes will be

accommodated in accordance with applicable laws and regulations.

### **Communication and Education**

- This policy will be communicated clearly to all students, families, and staff through the Family Handbook, school website, and other appropriate channels.
- The school will provide education and training to students and staff on responsible PED use, digital citizenship, and online safety.

### **Policy Review**

This policy will be reviewed and updated periodically by the Board of Trustees to ensure its effectiveness and alignment with current best practices and legal requirements.

### **Disclaimer**

The school is not responsible for the loss, theft, or damage of PEDs brought onto school grounds. Students and families are encouraged to ensure their devices are adequately insured.

### **Enforcement**

This policy will be enforced by all school staff, including teachers, administrators, and support personnel.

### **Smoking**

Smoking is not permitted on school property.

### **Weapons and Controlled Substances**

Weapons and controlled substances are not permitted on school property or at school-sponsored or school-related events. 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.

## **Tiered System of Support and Accountability for Student Behavior**

Hilltown uses a three-tiered system of support and accountability for student behavior:

1. TIER 1 - UNIVERSAL supports that benefit all students to function within the classroom
2. TIER 2 - TARGETED supports for students who struggle to manage their behavior
3. TIER 3:
  - a. EMERGENCY RESPONSE to significantly physically and/or emotionally unsafe or hostile behavior
  - b. INDIVIDUALIZED supports for students who struggle daily with big emotions and the requirements of school

### **TIER 1 Supports**

*These are UNIVERSAL supports that benefit all students to function within the classroom.*

The overarching goals of Tier 1 supports are to:

1. Support students in a fair and consistent manner to understand and meet expectations;

2. Handle off-task and disruptive behavior respectfully, fairly, and consistently to help students get back on track; and
3. Build students' self-reflection skills and repair harm to individuals and the community.

All staff members:

- Model expectations
- Reinforce and remind students about expectations
- Use proximity and visual cues to redirect and remind nonverbally
- Provide opportunities for self-reflection
- Teach self-regulation strategies, and support students to use them
- Point out examples of students meeting expectations

When problematic behavior occurs, staff members will:

- Name the behavior
- Remind about the expectation (avoiding blaming or shaming language/tone)
- State the consequence if the behavior continues (see below)
- If the behavior continues, the staff member will then give consequences and reintegrate students after incidents are resolved

Tier 1 consequences may include:

- Move seat/work area/activity
- Loss of relevant activities, materials, or equipment
- Break it/fix it
- Loss of computer privileges
- Loss of privilege to work independently in common spaces
- Restricted space at recess
- Recess in the directors' corner with an adult available to discuss behavior
- Community service (e.g., helping in the classroom)

If the behavior is part of an emerging pattern, a staff member will inform parents and enlist their support. Staff members will also inform parents about successes and resolutions and when things are going well.

**Restorative Dialogue** - Staff members will ask restorative questions when incidents occur in order to facilitate restorative dialogue and harm repair between students:

- What happened?
- What were you thinking about at the time?
- What have you thought about since?
- Who has been affected?
- In what way?
- What do you need to do to make things right?

...and also ask restorative questions to help those affected:

- What did you think about when it happened?
- What impact has this had on you and others?
- What has been the hardest thing for you?
- What needs to happen to make things right?

## **TIER 2 Supports**

*These are TARGETED supports for students who struggle to manage their behavior.*

Sometimes student behavior is significantly disruptive and prevents others from engaging in activities. This requires additional support from a director, the behaviorist, the counselor, or another teacher. All involved staff members use the same Tier 1 tools and strategies to redirect student behavior.

After the challenging behavior has been resolved, the staff member and a director will engage in a follow-up conversation with the student to:

- remind about expectations (e.g., the Code of Cooperation, and school-wide rules)
- state the consequence if the behavior occurs in the future
- work with the student to identify supportive strategies
- discuss harm repair options (if applicable)

After a Tier 2-level incident, a staff member will inform parents and enlist their support. Teachers will reintegrate the student into school activities, and inform parents about successes and resolutions.

To address patterns of challenging behavior, teachers will develop proactive strategies ahead of time with support from a director or service provider (e.g., the behavior support coordinator or adjustment counselor). For example: regular check-ins to reinforce expectations; scheduled opportunities for structured reflection; or a behavior incentive plan.

## **TIER 3A Emergency Response**

*This is an EMERGENCY RESPONSE to significantly physically and/or emotionally unsafe or hostile behavior.*

If student behavior occurs that is significantly physically and/or emotionally unsafe or hostile, involves harassment, involves violence, physical or verbal assault, and/or involves a weapon or a controlled substance, the nearest staff member will request immediate support from a director. The director will move the student(s) to a safe space (or otherwise ensure adult supervision), then convene all or part of the Response Team to manage the incident, collect information, and determine next steps. The Response Team includes the Director of Teaching and Learning, the Head of School, the school psychologist, the Academic Support Coordinator, the adjustment counselor, and the Student Behavior Support Coordinator, and the school nurse.

If the Response Team determines that the student has engaged in behavior that is significantly physically and/or emotionally unsafe or hostile, and the continued presence of the student poses a danger to persons or property, or materially and substantially disrupts the order of the educational environment, and there is no alternative available to alleviate the danger or disruption, the next step will be **emergency removal from school**. The director of teaching and learning informs parents and makes arrangements for pick-up as soon as possible.

Emergency removal is followed by a **notice of proposed suspension**, which describes the disciplinary offense, the basis for the charge, the potential length of the suspension, and an opportunity for the student and parents to have a suspension hearing with the director of teaching and learning (See Appendix I, Due Process for Suspensions, and Appendix K: Policy Concerning Discipline of Students Receiving Special Education Services).

After the suspension hearing determination and resulting suspension (if applicable), the Director of Teaching and Learning will facilitate a restorative process to repair harm to individuals and the community. Any restorative process requires voluntary participation from all parties. Students will be welcomed back and reintegrated into school activities after all disciplinary actions. Caregivers will be informed about the outcome of any restorative process.

**TIER 3B Supports**

*These are INDIVIDUALIZED supports for students who regularly struggle with big emotions and the requirements of school.*

When a student is known to have significant behavioral challenges, staff members develop proactive strategies and response plans with support from a director and special education or service provider, and with parent input and collaboration. These strategies may include more intensive and/or frequent Tier 1 strategies, a Behavior Support Plan (typically developed through a behavior assessment), and/or an established crisis plan. This process may occur within the context of special education.

# SCHOOL PROGRAMS & ACTIVITIES

## School Lunch Program

Despite our best efforts to join the National School Lunch Program we have determined it is not feasible for our school for many factors, including limited space, limited funds and no willing sponsors. Unfortunately this means our families are not able to take advantage of the "free lunch for all" opportunity for most Massachusetts public schools. We do not have the budget to allow us to provide free lunches for everyone without joining the NSLP. We will continue to offer lunches from Papa George at a cost (Families eligible for Free/Reduced lunch will receive free lunches). All menu options are available every day of the week. See the form for more details. Questions? Contact [lunch@hilltowncharter.org](mailto:lunch@hilltowncharter.org)

Most students bring their own snack and lunch each day. We encourage caregivers to pack plenty of healthy, low-sugar items. We recommend packing silverware and re-closable, reusable containers that can be taken home and washed. ***Please do not pack any glass, as this poses a safety risk.*** Students are expected to rinse and recycle any disposable containers. No refrigeration or warming facilities are available. We encourage students to bring home all trash and uneaten food.

School lunches are available to order. Lunch options are currently provided by Papa George Pizza, a local restaurant. Order forms can be found in your Hilltown Portal or picked up at school. Order forms should be printed and dropped off with payment at least one school day in advance, or payments can be submitted online. Applications for free or reduced-cost lunches are available in the school's main entry-way or can be downloaded from the Portal.

## School-wide Activities

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

### All School

Hilltown sustains its strong sense of school community by holding a weekly All School gathering of all the classrooms in the All-School Space, usually on Friday afternoons. Content varies from week to week and involves some combination of singing, announcements, birthday celebrations and sharing of something learned during the week. Caregivers and families are encouraged to attend and join in the singing whenever they can. Specifics and time or location changes are published in the weekly newsletter and in Hilltown's ongoing Google calendar.

### 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 months of June and September. Each classroom teacher will determine if and how other in-school birthday celebrations might happen this year. Please check with your student's teacher.

### Celebrations / Holidays

Hilltown holds three special school-wide celebrations: The Welcome Ceremony at the beginning of the year, a secular Winter Solstice Celebration just before break in December and a Summer Celebration just before the break in June. Other than these, and recognitions of Martin Luther King Jr. Day and Earth Day, the school does not celebrate holidays in any organized way, although classroom sharing of diverse family traditions is encouraged.

## **“Il Teatro”**

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

## **Mini Courses**

Mini courses are an opportunity for students to explore an activity in depth, with students of all ages, and with an adult other than their own teacher. They are offered in 3-4 week sessions three times a year – watch the newsletter and the Hilltown Google calendar for dates. All students select from the options offered by the teachers, caregivers or community members. Past offerings have included playwriting, drumming, mural painting, nature studies, newspaper production or yoga.

## **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 caregivers and get involved in the school community. Some of our most loved events include the Winter Solstice Celebration, and our Martin Luther King Jr. Day All School. Caregiver ideas, suggestions and assistance remain always welcome!

## **After-school Programs**

Hilltown has always offered several after school enrichment and childcare options for a minimal fee. Some ongoing programs may cost a flat “activities fee” for a semester's participation. All of the specifics and sign-up forms will be available in your Portal. Families eligible for free or reduced lunch may also qualify for fee reductions or waivers. Application forms are available electronically and in the main entry-way. For more information, contact the extracurricular coordinator, Michaela Wuethrich at [mwuethrich@hilltowncharter.org](mailto:mwuethrich@hilltowncharter.org).

### **Cross-Country Running (Fall)**

Hilltown's Cross Country team is open to students in grades 4 to 8 and welcomes runners of all experience levels. The program emphasizes fitness, goal setting, and team spirit in a supportive and inclusive environment. Practices are held on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 3:00 to 5:00 PM and include warm-ups, running games, drills, and trail runs on nearby bike paths and wooded areas. Students may choose to participate in scheduled meets with other area schools, though competition is optional. Whether running for fun, fitness, or personal challenge, all students are encouraged to try their best and support one another.

### **Ultimate Frisbee (Spring)**

Hilltown's Ultimate Frisbee team is open to students in grades 6 to 8 and welcomes players of all experience levels. Ultimate blends athleticism, strategy, and teamwork in a fast-paced, non-contact sport that emphasizes sportsmanship and fair play. Practices are held on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 3:00 to 5:00 PM at Nonotuck Park in Easthampton. Students build throwing and catching skills, learn offensive and defensive strategies, and improve overall fitness. The team competes in friendly games with other local schools, and all players are encouraged to participate. Ultimate fosters communication, respect, and a strong sense of teamwork.

### **Kaleidoscope Troupe**

The Kaleidoscope Troupe is Hilltown’s improv group, open to students in K-8. Through games, scene work, and creative exercises, students learn the fundamentals of improvisation - unplanned, unscripted performance that often leans into humor, quick thinking, and collaboration.

Improv helps students build confidence, communication skills, and trust in a supportive, playful environment. Whether acting out a silly scene or responding to an unexpected prompt, participants learn to think on their feet and work together to create something original and fun. No prior experience is needed—just a willingness to take risks, be present, and say “yes, and...”

### **Spring Musical**

The Spring Musical is a beloved Hilltown tradition that brings together students, staff, and families in a full-scale theatrical production each year. Open to students in grades K through 8, the musical offers opportunities to participate as actors, singers, dancers, stage crew, and set designers.

Students work together over several months to rehearse, build sets, design costumes, and bring the show to life. The experience fosters collaboration, creativity, and confidence while building skills in performance, storytelling, and technical theater.

Whether on stage or behind the scenes, everyone plays a role in creating something truly memorable.

### **Rock Band**

Hilltown’s Rock Band is an instrumental music group open to students in grades 5 through 8. All experience levels are welcome, from beginners picking up an instrument for the first time to more advanced musicians looking to play in a group setting.

Students rehearse and perform songs together, building skills in rhythm, collaboration, and musical expression. The group explores a variety of rock and popular music, and sessions often include opportunities to try different instruments, share creative ideas, and grow as performers. Whether you’re a drummer, guitarist, keyboardist, or just curious to give it a try, Rock Band offers a fun and supportive way to make music with others.

### **Hilltown Harmonies**

Harmonies is open to students in grades 5 through 8. This vocal ensemble explores harmony singing, vocal technique, and performance skills through a variety of musical styles. Students work together to build confidence, musicality, and expression while preparing pieces for school and community events.

Chorus is open to students in grades 2 through 4 and provides a joyful introduction to group singing. Young vocalists develop pitch, rhythm, and listening skills through playful warm-ups and engaging songs, all while learning to collaborate as part of an ensemble.

### **Student Government**

Hilltown’s Student Government gives students in grades 5 through 8 the opportunity to shape school culture, build community, and develop leadership skills through active participation. Students meet regularly to discuss school-wide topics, share ideas, and work in partnership with staff and peers.

The Student Government includes a central Student Council and several student-led committees:

- Governance, Policy, and Lower-Grades Advocacy: Focuses on school rules, student rights, and ensuring younger students have a voice
- JEDI Committee: Promotes justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion throughout the school community
- Social Events Committee: Plans dances, theme days, and other student-led celebrations and activities

Student Government encourages collaboration, responsibility, and civic engagement as part of everyday school life.

### **Kids' Club**

Kids Club is Hilltown's daily after-school childcare program for students in grades K through 8. Running from dismissal until 5:00 PM each school day, the program provides a safe and welcoming environment where students can relax, recharge, and connect with others at the end of the school day.

Kids Club offers a variety of unstructured, child-directed activities that support social development, creativity, and collaboration. Children might spend time outdoors on the playground, work on art projects, build with materials, or play board games with friends. The program also reflects Hilltown's mission to foster community by encouraging connections across age groups in a playful, low-pressure setting.

For more information, contact [kidsclub@hilltowncharter.org](mailto:kidsclub@hilltowncharter.org).

### **Civic Action at Hilltown**

Hilltown is committed to educating thoughtful, compassionate citizens. All students will participate in a weekly Civic Action block called Common Threads, where students will learn about identifying problems in their community, and how to solve them. We will use the [Solutionary Framework](#) to support our civic action work.

### **Field Trips**

Parents of new students are asked to sign a blanket permission slip at the beginning of their first year authorizing their student to participate in local field trips during their time at Hilltown. Parents will be notified in advance of upcoming trips and sometimes may be required to sign additional forms for specific trips. In some years, the Prisms and Purples may take extended field trips, as conditions allow. For these field trips, some of the funding might come from student and family fundraising efforts.

### **External Programs**

Some of the programs or after-school clubs that take place at the school may be sponsored and run by caregivers or outside organizations. Girls on the Run and Ski Club are two examples. While the school does not administer these programs, we share information about such opportunities in the Community section of the Newsletter as they are scheduled.

## FUNDRAISING

**Friends of Hilltown**, our affiliated 501-c3 non-profit organization , is a vibrant and valuable resource to us as it organizes fundraising to support both operating expenses, and special programs including field trips and a rolling arts grant program for teachers. Hilltown relies on fundraising to help it cover some of the wonderful programs that we offer. In the past, Friends of Hilltown, staff, students and parent volunteers have worked together to host fundraising events such as a Book Fair, a Winter Fair with craft-making and student performances, and Art Spark, an adult evening event in the spring, with performances and an auction. We hope to be able to continue these fun and rewarding community traditions.

The Friends of Hilltown also organizes a successful annual fundraising appeal and Hilltown participates in ongoing school-wide efforts including monthly Dean's Beans coffee sales and purchase programs at Target, Big Y, and Stop & Shop. For more information on Friends of Hilltown, please see Appendix B or visit our website at [www.hilltowncharter.org](http://www.hilltowncharter.org)). Watch the school newsletter for news of Friends of Hilltown's activities throughout the year, and ways you can become involved in supporting Hilltown.

# APPENDICES

## Appendix A: Administrative Roles at Hilltown

### Head of School

The Head of School provides overall leadership and management for Hilltown, ensuring that programs, operations, and systems align with the school's mission. Responsibilities include overseeing compliance and reporting, finances, facilities, admissions, and supervision of Director- and Coordinator-level staff, office staff, custodians, the school nurse, and Special Education staff. This role also currently serves as a licensed Special Education Administrator, ensuring the effective delivery of special education services and adherence to civil rights requirements.

### Director of Teaching and Learning

The Director of Teaching and Learning supports the Head of School in leadership and management at Hilltown, and co-leads the school's educational program, ensuring high-quality teaching and learning across all grades. Responsibilities include supervision of teaching staff, support for professional growth, and oversight of curriculum development and alignment. This role also co-leads hiring processes for teaching positions, and works closely with the Head of School to implement school-wide instructional initiatives.

### Community and Family Engagement Coordinator

The Community and Family Engagement Coordinator connects the school with families, caregivers, and the wider community. Responsibilities include building community partnerships, and overseeing the event and fundraising calendar. This role also plans and facilitates cooperative meetings and leads major Hilltown traditions such as the Winter Fair, Spring Music Festival, ArtSpark, Graduation, Summer Celebration, and Teacher Appreciation Lunch.

### Academic Support Coordinator:

The Academic Support Coordinator's responsibilities include managing all aspects of the IEP and 504 processes, ensuring compliance with regulations and timelines, and meeting regularly with the Head of School, and the team of special education and related service providers. This position is the primary point of contact for families for inquiries related to IEPs and 504s.

### Student Behavior Support Coordinator

The Student Behavior Support Coordinator is responsible for overseeing Tier 1 and 2 behavior systems, tracking behavior schoolwide, daily behavior response, conducting investigations related to behavior incidents, supporting teachers and staff in the implementation of behavior systems, and family communication around behavior. This position also works closely with the Head of School and Director of Teaching and Learning to ensure a safe and supportive school environment.

**Finance Manager**

The Finance Manager oversees Hilltown's day-to-day finances and long-range budgeting to keep programs strong. They prepare monthly reports for leadership and the Board, manage payroll, purchasing, and vendor payments, and coordinate the annual audit. The role also tracks grants and restricted funds to ensure compliance and responsible stewardship of resources.

**Data and Enrollment Coordinator**

The Data and Enrollment Coordinator manages the student information system and guides families through admissions, lottery, and enrollment. They collect required documents, maintain accurate records and rosters, and handle most state data reporting. Families can expect clear, timely communication and support with forms and translation needs.

**Administrative Assistant**

The Administrative Assistant runs the main office so students, caregivers, and staff receive friendly, timely help each day. They greet visitors, answer calls, and handle attendance, dismissals, and general inquiries. The role also supports schoolwide communication, schedules, and everyday logistics that keep the building running smoothly.

**After School Programs Administrator**

The After School Programs Administrator leads Kids' Club and ensures a safe, engaging environment after dismissal. They supervise staff, manage registration and attendance, and communicate with families about schedules, billing, and student needs. The role plans activities and follows safety procedures so students can learn, play, and connect with friends.

## **Appendix B: COMMUNITY AGREEMENTS**

### **Hilltown Cooperative Charter Public School Community Agreements**

At the Hilltown Cooperative Charter Public School, we believe that education works best as a cooperative process among teachers and other staff members, caregivers, students, and the community at large. The agreements outlined below state our commitment to creating a collaborative learning community that supports all of its members to thrive, and to fulfill the school's mission.

#### **All HCCPS community members will strive to enact the school's mission:**

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

#### **Students will:**

- Follow the Hilltown Code of Cooperation:
  - Treat others with kindness
  - Include everyone
  - Be safe with your body
  - Talk one at a time and listen to each other
  - Take care of materials and property
- Do their best to learn in school and at home
- Advocate for themselves when they need help
- Take ownership of their mistakes and make repairs

#### **Caregivers will:**

- Support the Hilltown community through active participation and mutual respect
- Ensure their child is present in school, on time, ready to learn and participate
- Support their child to engage in schoolwork in school and at home
- Monitor their child's academic and social progress
- Engage in two-way communication with teachers and staff members
- Stay informed about school policies, guidelines, news, and events
- Participate in decisions relating to their child's education

#### **HCCPS administration, faculty, and staff members will:**

- Provide a safe and supportive school environment where all students can learn and succeed
- Support a welcoming school community in which all members feel included and a sense of belonging
- Provide high-quality curriculum and instruction that enables students to make academic progress
- Nurture each student's creativity, self-expression, and well-being
- Engage in effective home-school communication in support of each student's learning
- Work to improve programs through cycles of planning, implementation, evaluation, and refinement

## Appendix C: Friends of Hilltown



Friends of Hilltown (FoH) is the 501c3 nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting the Hilltown Cooperative Charter School in its pursuit of excellence through education, community involvement and the arts.

**We raise money to fund program support, we distribute grants, and we host community events.**

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### How we raise funds:

- Sell merchandise; Dean's Beans coffee, tote bags, Klean Kanteen travel mugs, & stickers.
- Participating in programs such as Amazon Smiles, Stop & Shop A+ School Rewards, and BoxTops for Kids.
- Host community events - Like coffee corner at the Winter Fair and an annual silent auction party. We look forward to hosting fundraising and community events in person again when we are able to
- Directly solicit contributions

### How we distribute funds:

- Give direct funding to HCCPS, we call this program support and is outlined in the schools budget each year.
- FoH maintains 3 rolling grants each year. Teachers, clubs and in-school program coordinators can apply. The FoH board members review and vote on grant requests.

#### **Arts Grant** supports emergent curriculum in the arts

Past grants have...

- helped to fund the Yellows & Greens to create and perform a wonderful opera
- supported a prisms program to build and learn to play cajons

#### **Curriculum Support Grant** supports emergent curriculum at HCCPS

Past grants have...

- supported the community service-learning program with funds to purchase bag share program supplies
- funded the purchase of seedlings, trees, and supplies for the climate team

**Amplifying Voices Grant** supports the incorporation of social justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion into existing or emergent curriculum (newly added for the 2021-2022 school year)

- This grant is expected to amplify the voices and ideas of social justice, inclusion and diversity at Hilltown
- We had our first application before the school year even started and are hoping for many more as the school year progresses

## Appendix D: Attendance Policy

Regular school attendance is the foundation for a student's school success. With regular attendance, students develop a sense of belonging, build strong friendships, and benefit from daily experiences and support in the classroom.

Irregular school attendance can be the beginning of a pattern. The more students miss school, the less they learn. Frequent absences affect not only the individual child but the entire class. Hilltown's project oriented program requires students to work in small collaborative groups and every member is vital to the success of the group. When several students miss school at different times and for different durations, it has a ripple effect on the pacing of the entire curriculum.

This policy details the necessary steps to be taken by caregivers when attendance is not possible, and the consequences of chronic absences. The school day begins at 8:15 AM. An arrival after 8:20 AM is 5 minutes late and is officially considered tardy unless there is a specific medical appointment. Five tardies (after 8:20 AM), not related to a disability or medical appointments, will constitute one unexcused absence.

Students who are absent for non-disability related reasons, whether excused or unexcused, may not participate in any after-school or other extra-curricular activity on the day they are absent.

### Excused Absences

- Illness or chronic health problem
- A death in the immediate family or other significant family crisis
- Court appearances
- Religious Holy Days
- Suspension from school
- Absence related to an ADA defined disability

(If you believe that your child has a defined ADA disability, please contact the school's 504 Coordinator, Amy Linnell, [alinnell@hilltowncharter.org](mailto:alinnell@hilltowncharter.org))

Family vacations are not considered excused absences.

In the case of illness/significant family crisis/disability:

1. Caregivers are expected to call in by 8:20 a.m. to inform the school of illness or family emergency. If we have not heard from a caregiver, we will call the home at 9:00 a.m. If we do not hear back from a parent/guardian the absence will be considered unexcused.
2. HCCPS may request from the caregiver documentation from a healthcare provider if the student is ill for more than five (5) consecutive days.
3. 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 parents/guardians. We will work together to clarify the medical situation, request medical documentation and make reasonable accommodations to provide appropriate supports if consistent attendance is not possible. Parents/guardians will be expected to help with make-up work. Significant interference to a student's educational progress may result in grade retention. Students with disability-related absences shall be allowed the opportunity to make up missed work prior to grade retention or summer school.

Religious Holy Days: Parents/guardians must inform the school in advance. Failure to provide such notice will result in the absence being deemed as unexcused.

### Unexcused Absences

Hilltown Cooperative Charter Public School strongly discourages unexcused absences. Family vacations resulting in student absence from school create significant disruption to the educational process. Unexcused absences have consequences for the student, the class and the teacher and create additional responsibilities for parents/guardians. In the event of a planned, unexcused absence parents/guardians must understand and comply with the following:

1. Caregivers should inform teachers and administration, in writing, at least two weeks in advance of a planned unexcused absence.
2. Teachers are not required to provide make-up work for unexcused absences. Parents/guardians are responsible for overseeing the student's educational progress during the unexcused absence.
3. All parents/guardians are informed of their child's attendance record on each progress report.
4. If unexcused absences (more than 5) occur one or more of the following steps may be taken.
  - a. Phone call to caregiver
  - b. Community compact meeting with parents/guardian
  - c. Referral for counseling
  - d. Summer work
  - e. Exclusion from any or all after-school and extracurricular activities

In extreme cases where these steps have not been successful HCCPS may, in its sole discretion, pursue the following actions:

- File a "Failure to Send" complaint with the District Court
- File a "Child Requiring Assistance" complaint with the District Court
- File a 51 A with Department of Children and Families

5. In rare circumstances when a parent/guardian is required to be out of the immediate Pioneer Valley area for career related purposes, parents/guardians may formally request absence from school for up to 20 school days. HCCPS will consider, among other things, the following:

- The impact on a student's academic progress.
- Duration of the absence.
- Frequency of previous absences, especially unexcused absences.

Requests in writing must be submitted to the Directors of Administration and Teaching and Learning at least one month in advance. The directors, following consultation with teachers, will make decisions within ten (10) calendar days of the request. The directors retain sole discretion to make the determination and their decision is not subject to further review.

If approved, the family will be responsible for developing a school work plan. The family will take responsibility for overseeing their child's educational progress. If the request is not approved and the family removes the child from school, the absence will be considered unexcused.

## **Appendix E: Student Computer Loan Agreement & Acceptable Use Policy**

As the HCCPS curriculum has become increasingly reliant on computer and internet access, it becomes the responsibility of the school to make sure that students have access to the necessary equipment to complete their work. In light of that, we are providing a device to each student in the school. Here are the responsibilities that the student/family agrees to and those that the school agrees to in maintaining any digital device loaned by the school.

### **Student/Family Responsibilities:**

- Use the computer primarily for school assignments. The student may use the equipment for other purposes only to the extent that such uses do not interfere with this primary use.
- Run occasional system updates as prompted by the computer.
- Keep the computer in a safe location and in clean, working condition (away from food and drink, no stickers, writing, etc.), with allowance for reasonable wear and tear.
- Report any issues that limit the computer's functionality to the school so that they can be addressed as promptly as possible.
- Return to the school by the last day of the school year for summer maintenance or as requested by school administration.

### **School Responsibilities:**

- Troubleshoot unresolved issues affecting functionality during the school day or by email to ensure student access.
- Perform equipment repairs, upgrades or replacements if necessary.
- Install software necessary to complete school assignments as needed
- Perform a thorough check-up on the computer's condition and capability during the summer.

If the equipment is damaged or lost due to negligence, the school shall have the option of requiring the student/family to incur the total cost to repair the equipment to a state of good working order or to reimburse the school for the replacement cost of such equipment. The student/family agrees to indemnify the school against any claim occurring during or resulting from student's possession or use of the equipment, including, but not limited to, any claim for infringement or violation of applicable trademarks and copyrights attributable to student's use.

### **Student Computer Technology Acceptable Use Policy**

Technology provides tools and connections to other computer systems located worldwide. Parents of students who are users must understand that neither the Hilltown Cooperative Charter Public School nor its staff controls the content of the information available on these other systems. The school will make an effort to restrict access to sites it considers inappropriate for HCCPS students. Students must agree to follow the rules of this Acceptable Use Policy. The nature of this technology provides many educational opportunities, but also necessitates personal responsibility for its use.

Students are expected to adhere to the following guidelines:

- Follow directions from HCCPS staff about computer use during classes/directed study.
- Not use a computer for socializing, e.g., personal email, instant messaging, chatting, etc.
- Only use my @hilltowncharter.org email account that has been provided. I understand that the staff at Hilltown Cooperative Charter Public School reserves the right to inspect any documents and electronic mail sent from or stored within the HCCPS domain.

- Use language on-line which is consistent with school policy.
- Not tamper with equipment or software, nor alter the network interface, nor attempt to gain access to the data and files of others, nor violate any copyright laws, log on only under my own user name, nor attempt to represent myself as someone else.
- Not use my school account to subscribe to any platforms or services (ex. Apple ID, Instagram, Instructables) unless with explicit permission by an HCCPS teacher.
- Not reveal personal information such as home addresses or phone numbers of self or others.
- Not transmit or download material in violation of state or federal regulations.

If a student uses computer technology inappropriately and in a way to violate these guidelines, I understand that this behavior may result in these consequences:

- Limited access to computer/online resources
- Being subject to disciplinary measures under HCCPS policy and/or
- Being referred to the appropriate legal authorities, if warranted.

If I use computer technology inappropriately and in a way that violates these guidelines, I understand that my behavior may result in these consequences.

## **Appendix F: Grade Placement Policy**

### **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.

### **Teacher-initiated requests**

Teachers will complete a Request to Change Grades Form, and then discuss issues regarding grade placement with the Director of Teaching and Learning. If the teacher and Director of Teaching and Learning agree, these questions will be shared with caregivers by January 31.

### **Caregiver-initiated requests**

Caregivers requesting a change in grade placement for the following year should complete a Request to Change Grades Form and return it to the Director of Teaching and Learning before the February vacation. The form asks caregivers 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 in the school office

### **Process**

Following the initial request, the Director of Teaching and Learning will form a staff committee comprised of the classroom teacher, Director of Teaching and Learning, 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 caregivers 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 caregivers 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 caregiver 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 caregivers to share information obtained in the process. Caregivers 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. Caregivers 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 Director of Teaching and Learning will make the final decision.

## **Appendix G: 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 Head of School 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.

## **Appendix H: State and Federal Education Laws**

### **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 their individual educational potential. Along with providing services to the child, if necessary, services are provided to caregivers and to teachers for the student to benefit from special education. Special education is provided by the school district at no cost to caregivers.

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.

### **Teacher Qualifications**

Federal law requires that teachers must demonstrate subject matter competency in the areas they teach. 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 your child's teacher, please contact Rebecca Belcher-Timme, Director of Teaching and Learning.

### **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 caregivers certain rights with respect to their children's education records.

Caregivers 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 caregivers to review the records. Schools may charge a fee for copies.

Caregivers 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 caregiver then has the right to a formal hearing. After the hearing, if the school still decides not to amend the record, the caregiver has the right to place a statement with the record setting forth their view about the contested information.

Generally, schools must have written permission from the caregiver 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 Chris Kusek, Head of School.

## Appendix I: Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan

To file a bullying report, use [this form](#).

(Revised 5/2025)

HCCPS is committed to creating a safe, caring, respectful learning environment for all students and strictly enforces a prohibition against bullying, including without limitation, cyberbullying, of any of its students by anyone and also strictly enforces a prohibition against retaliation on any person who reports bullying, provides information during an investigation of bullying or witnesses, or has reliable information about bullying. Site-based initiatives, developed collaboratively between school administration and personnel, students, families, and community members will seek to: (1) help students of all ages and abilities stay safe, act wisely, and believe in themselves; and (2) help adults respond effectively to students' reports and their own observations.

### 1. Definitions

**Bullying** is defined as the **repeated use** by one or more students or by a member of school staff (including, but not limited to, an educator, administrator, school nurse, athletic coach, advisor, bus drivers, to an extracurricular activity or teaching assistant) of a written, verbal or electronic expression or a physical act or gesture or any combination thereof, directed at a target/victim that:

- (i) causes physical or emotional harm to the target/victim or damage to the target/victim's property;
- (ii) places the target/victim in reasonable fear of harm to himself or herself or damage to their property;
- (iii) creates a hostile environment at school for the target/victim;
- (iv) infringes on the rights of the target/victim at school; or
- (v) materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school. For purposes of this policy, bullying shall include cyberbullying.

**Cyberbullying** is further defined as bullying through the use of technology or any electronic communication, which shall include, but shall not be limited to, any transfer of signs, signals, writing, images, sounds, data, or intelligence of any nature transmitted in whole or in part by a wire, radio, electromagnetic, photo electronic or photo-optical system, including, but not limited to, electronic mail, internet communications, instant messages or facsimile communications. Cyberbullying shall also include (i) the creation of a web page or blog in which the creator assumes the identity of another person or (ii) the knowing impersonation of another person as the author of posted content or messages, if the creation or impersonation creates any of the conditions enumerated in clauses (i) to (v), inclusive, of the definition of bullying. Cyberbullying shall also include the distribution by electronic means of communication to more than one person or the posting of material on an electronic medium that may be accessed by one or more persons, if the distribution or posting creates any of the conditions enumerated in clauses (i) to (v), inclusive, of the definition of bullying.

**Aggressor or Perpetrator** is defined as a student or a member of school staff including, but not limited to, an educator, administrator, school nurse, cafeteria worker, custodian, bus driver, athletic coach, advisor to an extracurricular activity or paraprofessional, school volunteer or a vendor, contractor or other person working under a contract with the school who engages in bullying, cyberbullying, or retaliation.

**Hostile environment** is defined as a situation in which bullying causes the school environment to be permeated with intimidation, ridicule, or insult that is sufficiently severe or pervasive to alter the conditions of a student's education.

**Retaliation** is defined as any form of intimidation, reprisal, or harassment directed against a student who reports bullying, provides information during an investigation of bullying, or witnesses or has reliable information about bullying.

**Staff** is defined to include, but is not limited to, educators, administrators, counselors, school nurses, custodians, bus drivers, athletic coaches, advisors to extracurricular activities, clerical staff, or teaching assistants/paraprofessionals.

**School** is defined to include the school, school grounds, travel to and from school and/or school-sponsored events or functions, property immediately adjacent to school grounds, school-sponsored or school-related activities, functions, programs whether on or off school grounds (such as social events, trips, sports events, or similar school-sponsored events and functions), at a school bus stop, on a school bus or other vehicle owned, leased or used by the school, on the way to and from school or through the use of technology or an electronic device owned, leased or used by the school and at a location, activity, function or program that is not school-related or through the use of technology or an electronic device that is not owned, leased or used by the school, if the act creates a hostile environment at school for the target/victim or witnesses, infringes on the rights of the victim or witnesses at school or materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school.

**Target or Victim** is defined as a student or an adult against whom bullying, cyberbullying, or retaliation has been perpetrated.

## **2. Prohibition**

Bullying of students occurring in schools is prohibited by law and will not be tolerated by HCCPS. Bullying can take many forms and can occur in any setting. Bullying can include but is not limited to, intimidation such as name-calling or threatening, social alienation such as shunning or spreading rumors, or physical aggression such as assaults on a student or attacks on a student's property.

Bullying can create an atmosphere of fear for all members of the school community. It also can create unnecessary and unwarranted anxiety that affects the ability of a student to attend school, learn in school, walk in school corridors, eat in the school cafeteria, play in the schoolyard or recreation areas, participate in or attend special or extracurricular activities or travel to and from school.

Bullying behaviors that are not addressed can lead to devastating consequences for young people, including depression, and drops in school performance and attendance. The failure to address bullying behaviors also gives other students the message that it is permissible to engage in negative behaviors.

Consistent with state law, HCCPS recognizes that certain students may be more vulnerable to becoming a target of bullying or harassment based on actual or perceived differentiating characteristics, including: race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, sex, socioeconomic status, homelessness, academic status, gender identity or expression, physical appearance, pregnant or parenting status, sexual orientation, mental, physical, developmental or sensory disability or by association with a person who has or is perceived to have one (1) or more of these characteristics.

### 3. Process and Response

HCCPS takes allegations of bullying seriously and will respond promptly to complaints and allegations of bullying. Additionally, allegations of retaliation against a person who reports bullying provides information during an investigation of bullying or witnesses; or has reliable information about bullying also shall be taken seriously and HCCPS will respond promptly to such complaints and allegations.

If any student, caregiver/guardian of a student, staff member, or other community member believes that a student has been subjected to bullying, or to retaliation for reporting bullying, providing information during an investigation of bullying or witnessing or having reliable information about bullying, they should bring the matter to the attention of the Head of School, Director of Teaching and Learning, or Behavior Support Coordinator. This may be done verbally, electronically, or in writing.

Reports of bullying and/or reports of retaliation for reporting bullying, providing information during an investigation of bullying, or witnessing or having reliable information about bullying also may be made anonymously to the Head of School, Director of Teaching and Learning, or Behavior Support Coordinator. Please note; however, that no disciplinary action shall be taken against a student solely on the basis of an anonymous report having been received.

Before fully investigating the allegations of bullying or retaliation, the Head of School, Director of Teaching and Learning, and/or Behavior Support Coordinator will take steps to assess the need to restore a sense of safety to the alleged target and/or to protect the alleged target from possible further incidents. Responses to promote safety may include, but not be limited to, creating a personal safety plan; pre-determining seating arrangements for the target and/or the aggressor in the classroom, at lunch, or on the bus; identifying a staff member who will act as a "safe person" for the target; and altering the aggressor's schedule and access to the target. The Head of School, Director of Teaching and Learning, and/or Behavior Support Coordinator will take additional steps to promote safety during the course of and after the investigation, if necessary.

Where it is determined that inappropriate conduct has occurred, HCCPS will act promptly to eliminate the conduct and will impose corrective action as necessary, which may range from requiring the aggressor to work with school personnel on better behavior, the recommendation for the provision of counseling or other therapeutic services and/or disciplinary action where appropriate, up to and including suspension, expulsion and/or court involvement.

Additionally, consistent with state law, if it is determined that bullying or retaliation has occurred, the Head of School or Director of Teaching and Learning shall:

- (i) notify local law enforcement if school administration believes that criminal charges may be pursued against the aggressor
- (ii) take appropriate disciplinary action
- (iii) notify the caregivers/guardians of the aggressor; and
- (iv) notify the caregivers/guardians of the target/victim, to the extent consistent with state and federal law, of the action taken to prevent any further acts of bullying or retaliation.

Furthermore, if it is determined that a student has knowingly made a false accusation of bullying or retaliation, they shall be subject to discipline, up to and including suspension, expulsion and/or court involvement.

All students shall be afforded the same protection regardless of their status under the law.

In notifying the caregivers/guardians of the target and the aggressor, the Head of School, Director of Teaching and Learning, and Behavioral Support Coordinator must comply with the confidentiality requirements of the Massachusetts Student Record law and regulations and the Federal Family Education Rights and Privacy Act and corresponding regulations.

More specifically, school administration may not disclose information from a student record of a target or aggressor to a caregiver/guardian unless the information is about the caregiver/guardian's own child.

The Head of School or Director of Teaching and Learning may disclose a determination of bullying or retaliation to a local law enforcement agency without consent of a student or their parent/guardian, but the school administration shall communicate with law enforcement officials in a manner that protects the privacy of targets, student witnesses and aggressors to the extent practicable under the circumstances.

Additionally, if the Head of School, Director of Teaching and Learning, and/or Behavioral Coordinator has determined that there is an immediate and significant threat to the health or safety of the student or individuals, school administration may disclose student record information about a target or aggressor to appropriate parties in addition to law enforcement in connection with a health or safety emergency if knowledge of the information is necessary to protect the health or safety of the student or other individuals. In this latter situation, the disclosure is limited to the period of the emergency and the Head of School and/or the Director of Teaching and Learning must document the disclosure and the reasons that the Head of School and/or Director of Teaching and Learning determined that a health and safety emergency exists.

#### **4. Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan**

The Head of School and/or Director of Teaching and Learning will develop and keep updated on at least a biennial basis, as required by law, a plan to address bullying prevention and intervention. Such a plan shall, as required by law, be developed in consultation with teachers, school staff, professional support personnel, school volunteers, administrators, community representatives, local law enforcement agencies, students, parents, and guardians.

The HCCPS' Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan will address training and professional development for staff and will also address sharing information with parents/guardians and students about bullying, including information on prevention of bullying, reporting of bullying, and the potential legal consequences of engaging in bullying. Additionally, the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan will include specific steps that schools will take to support vulnerable students and to provide all students with the skills, knowledge, and strategies needed to prevent or respond to bullying and harassment.

Hilltown provides annual professional development about bullying that includes training for all staff members including, but not limited to educators, administrators, school nurses, bus drivers, athletic coaches, advisors to extracurricular activities and teaching assistants, to prevent, identify and respond to bullying. The content of such professional development shall include, but not be limited to:

(i) developmentally appropriate strategies to prevent bullying incidents; (ii) developmentally appropriate strategies for immediate, effective interventions to stop bullying incidents; (iii) information regarding the complex interaction and power differential that can take place between and among a aggressor, target and witnesses to the bullying; (iv) research findings on bullying, including information about specific categories of students who have been shown to be particularly at risk for bullying in the school environment; (v) information on the incidence and nature of cyberbullying; (vi) Internet safety issues as they relate to cyberbullying.

All bullying prevention education is communicated to families through regular updates from the school adjustment counselor. This includes information about (i) how parents and guardians can reinforce the curriculum at home and support the school district or school Plan; (ii) the dynamics of bullying; and (iii) online safety and cyberbullying.

## **Appendix J: Due Process for Suspensions**

### **EMERGENCY REMOVAL**

A student may be temporarily removed prior to notice and hearing when a student is charged with a disciplinary offense and the continued presence of the student poses a danger to persons or property, or materially and substantially disrupts the order of HCCPS and, in the Head of School or Director of Teaching and Learning's judgment, there is no alternative available to alleviate the danger or disruption. The temporary removal shall not exceed two (2) school days, following the day of the emergency removal.

The Head of School or Director of Teaching and Learning may not remove a student from school on an emergency basis until adequate provisions have been made for the student's safety and transportation.

During the emergency removal, the Director of Teaching and Learning or Designee shall make immediate and reasonable efforts to orally notify the student and student's parent/guardian of the emergency removal and the reason for the emergency removal. The Director of Teaching and Learning or Designee shall also provide the due process requirements of written notice for suspensions and provide for a hearing which meets the due process requirements of a long-term suspension or short-term suspension, as applicable, within the two (2) school day time period, unless an extension of time for the hearing is otherwise agreed to by the Director of Teaching and Learning, student, and parent/guardian.

A decision shall be rendered orally on the same day as the hearing, and in writing no later than the following school day. The decision shall meet all of the due process requirements of a Director of Teaching and Learning's determination in a long-term suspension or short-term suspension, as applicable.

### **NOTICE OF PROPOSED SUSPENSION**

Except in the case of an emergency removal or disciplinary offense defined under M.G.L. c. 71, §§37H or 37H½ or an in-school suspension as defined by 603 CMR 53.02(6), HCCPS shall provide the student and parent/guardian with written and oral notice of the proposed out-of-school suspension, an opportunity to be heard at hearing, and the opportunity to participate at the hearing. Notice shall set forth in plain language:

- A. the disciplinary offense;
- B. the basis for the charge;
- C. the potential consequences, including the potential length of the student's suspension;
- D. the opportunity for the student to have a hearing with the Director of Teaching and Learning concerning the proposed suspension, including the opportunity to dispute the charges and to present the student's explanation of the alleged incident, and for the parent/guardian to attend the hearing;
- E. the date, time, and location of the hearing;
- F. the right of the student and student's parent/guardian to interpreter services at the hearing if needed to participate;

The Director of Teaching and Learning shall make reasonable efforts to notify the parent/guardian orally of the opportunity to attend the hearing. In order to conduct a hearing without the parent/guardian present, the Director of Teaching and Learning must be able to document reasonable efforts to include the parent/guardian. Reasonable effort is presumed if the Director of Teaching and Learning sent written notice and documented at least two attempts to contact the parent/guardian in the manner specified by the parent/guardian for emergency situations.

All written communications regarding notice of proposed suspension shall be either by hand delivery or delivered by first-class mail, certified mail, or email to address provided by the parent/guardian for school communications (or other method agreed to by the Director of Teaching and Learning and parent/guardian) in English, and in the primary language in the home if other than English, or other means of communication where appropriate.

**GENERAL REQUIREMENTS PRIOR TO SUSPENSION UNDER M.G.L. CHAPTER 71, §37H¾**

A student may not be suspended under M.G.L. Chapter 71, §37H¾, unless one or more of the following apply:

- A. Alternative remedies have been employed and their use and results documented, following and in direct response to a specific incident or incidents.
- B. There are documented specific reasons why alternative remedies are unsuitable or counterproductive.
- C. The situation is such that the student’s continued presence in school would pose a specific, documentable concern about the infliction of serious bodily injury or other serious harm upon another person while in school.

**SHORT-TERM SUSPENSIONS: HEARING AND DIRECTOR OF TEACHING AND LEARNING DETERMINATION**

A short-term suspension is the removal of the student from HCCPS premises and regular classroom activities for ten (10) consecutive days or less. Out-of-school short-term suspensions which do not cumulatively over the course of the HCCPS year exceed ten (10) days of suspension shall be conducted in accordance with this section.

Director of Teaching and Learning Hearing.

The purpose of the hearing with the Director of Teaching and Learning is to hear and consider information regarding the alleged incident for which the student may be suspended, provide the student an opportunity to dispute the charges and explain the circumstances surrounding the alleged incident, determine if the student has committed the disciplinary offense, the basis for the charge, and any other pertinent information. The student shall have an opportunity to present information, including mitigating facts. A parent/guardian present at the hearing shall have the opportunity to discuss the student’s conduct and offer information, including mitigating circumstances.

Based on the available information, including mitigating circumstances, the Director of Teaching and Learning will make a determination whether the student committed the disciplinary offense, and if so, the consequence. The Director of Teaching and Learning will provide notification in writing of their determination in the form of an update to the student and parent/guardian, and provide reasons for the determination. If the student is suspended, the Director of Teaching and Learning shall inform the parent/guardian of the type and duration of the suspension, and shall provide an opportunity for the student to make up assignments and other school work as needed to make academic progress during the period of removal.

If the student is in grades pre-k through 3, the Director of Teaching and Learning shall send their determination to the Head of School and explain the reasons prior to imposing an out-of-school suspension, before the short-term suspension takes effect.

All written communications regarding the hearing and Director of Teaching and Learning determination shall be either hand delivery or delivered by first-class mail, certified mail, or email to the address provided by the parent/guardian for school communications (or other method agreed to by the Director of Teaching and Learning and parent/guardian) in English, and in the primary language in the home if other than English, or other means of communication where appropriate.

## **LONG-TERM SUSPENSIONS: HEARING AND DIRECTOR OF TEACHING AND LEARNING DETERMINATION**

A long-term suspension is the removal of a student from HCCPS premises and regular classroom activities for more than ten (10) consecutive school days, or for more than ten (10) school days cumulatively for multiple disciplinary offenses in any school year. The purpose of the hearing with the Director of Teaching and Learning is to hear and consider information regarding the alleged incident for which the student may be suspended, provide the student an opportunity to dispute the charges and explain the circumstances surrounding the alleged incident, determine if the student has committed the disciplinary offense, the basis for the charge, and any other pertinent information. The student shall have an opportunity to present information, including mitigating facts, that the Director of Teaching and Learning will consider in determining whether alternatives to suspension such as loss of privileges, detention, an apology, a student contract, restitution, and/or probation are appropriate.

Additionally, the student shall have the following additional rights:

1. In advance of the hearing, the opportunity to review the student's record and the documents upon which the Director of Teaching and Learning may rely in making a determination to suspend the student or not;
2. the right to be represented by counsel or a lay person of the student's choice, at the student's and or parent's/guardian's expense;
3. the right to produce witnesses on their behalf and to present the student's explanation of the alleged incident, but the student may not be compelled to do so;
4. the right to cross-examine witnesses presented by HCCPS district;
5. the right to request that the hearing be recorded by the Director of Teaching and Learning. All participants shall be informed that the hearing is being recorded by audio. A copy of the audio recording will be provided to the student or parent/guardian upon request.

Based on the evidence submitted at the hearing the Director of Teaching and Learning shall make a determination as to whether the student committed the disciplinary offense, and, if so, after considering mitigating circumstances and alternatives to suspension (the use of evidence-based strategies and programs, such as mediation, conflict resolution, restorative justice, and positive interventions and supports) what remedy or consequence will be imposed. If the Director of Teaching and Learning decides to impose a long-term suspension, the written determination shall:

1. Identify the disciplinary offense, the date on which the hearing took place, and the participants at the hearing;
2. Set out key facts and conclusions reached by the Director of Teaching and Learning;
3. Identify the length and effective date of the suspension, as well as a date of return to school;
4. Include notice of the student's opportunity to receive a specific list of education services to make academic progress during removal, and the contact information of a school member who can provide more detailed information;
5. Inform the student of the right to appeal the Director of Teaching and Learning's decision to the Head of School or their designee (only if a long-term suspension has been imposed) within five (5) calendar days, which may be extended by parent/guardian request in writing an additional seven (7) calendar days;
6. There will be a good faith effort to include the parent in the hearing and to send written notice to the

parent of the date, time and location of the hearing;

7. If requested, arrange for an audio recording of the hearing, a copy of which shall be provided to the student and the parent, and the superintendent's responsibility to inform all parties before the hearing that an audio copy will be made of the hearing

The long-term suspension will remain in effect unless and until the Head of School decides to reverse the Director of Teaching and Learning's determination on appeal.

If the student is in grades pre-k through grade 3, the Director of Teaching and Learning shall send their determination to the Head of School and explain the reasons prior to imposing an out-of-school suspension, whether short-term or long-term, before the suspension takes effect.

All written communications regarding the hearing and Director of Teaching and Learning determination shall be either hand delivery or delivered by first-class mail, certified mail, or email to the provided by the parent/guardian for school communications (or other method agreed to by the Director of Teaching and Learning and parent/guardian) in English, and in the primary language in the home if other than English, or by other means of communication where appropriate.

### **APPEAL OF LONG-TERM SUSPENSION**

A student placed on a long-term suspension (more than 10 consecutive school days) has the right to appeal the Director of Teaching and Learning's decision to the Head of School within five (5) calendar days of the suspension determination. A good faith effort shall be made to include the parent/guardian at the hearing. The hearing shall be held within three (3) school days of the appeal, unless the student or parent/guardian requests an extension of up to seven (7) additional calendar days, which the Head of School shall grant.

The following procedure outlines the process for disciplinary hearings conducted by the Head of School (acting as Superintendent) in accordance with M.G.L. c. 71, § 37H3/4. The hearing process ensures due process and fairness when reviewing appeals of long-term suspensions or expulsions.

#### **I. Hearing Notification and Scheduling**

1. Right to Appeal
  - A parent/guardian may request an extension of up to seven (7) additional calendar days for filing the appeal.
2. Hearing Schedule
  - The hearing must be held within three (3) school days of receiving the appeal request, unless an extension of up to seven additional calendar days is granted.
3. Notification Requirements
  - The school will provide written notice of the hearing, which must include:
    - Date, time, and location of the hearing
    - The right of the student and parent/guardian to present evidence and witnesses
    - The right to be represented by counsel or an advocate at their own expense
    - The right to review the student's record and documents relied upon by the school before the hearing
    - The right to an interpreter, if necessary.

## **II. Conduct of the Hearing**

1. Hearing Officer
  - The Head of School will act as the Hearing Officer and preside over the appeal.
2. Rights of the Student & Parent/Guardian
  - The student and parent/guardian shall have the same rights as they did in the initial hearing with the Director of Teaching and Learning, including:
    - The right to cross-examine witnesses presented by the school
    - The right to present witnesses and evidence on their behalf
    - The right to have the hearing recorded (audio recording available upon request).
3. Evidence and Deliberation
  - The Head of School will review the case based on the preponderance of evidence and may consider mitigating circumstances, alternative disciplinary measures, and the student's academic record and behavior.

## **III. Decision & Notification**

1. Written Determination
  - Within five (5) calendar days of the hearing, the Head of School will issue a written decision, which must include:
    - The disciplinary offense and hearing details
    - A summary of key facts and findings
    - The length of the suspension and expected return date (if applicable)
    - Any alternative educational services available to the student during the suspension
    - A final determination of the consequences, which may uphold, reduce, or overturn the Director of Teaching and Learning's decision.
2. Finality of Decision
  - The decision of the Head of School is final and not subject to further appeal within the school.

## **IV. Special Considerations**

1. Emergency Removals
  - In cases where a student is removed on an emergency basis, the Director of Teaching and Learning must conduct a formal hearing within two (2) school days unless an extension is agreed upon.
  - The Head of School may review emergency removals through this appeal process if a long-term suspension or expulsion follows.
2. Educational Services During Suspension
  - Students suspended for more than ten (10) days are entitled to access educational services as outlined in the school's Education Services Plan to continue making academic progress.
3. Students with Disabilities
  - Additional procedural protections apply to students with disabilities under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.
  - If a student has an IEP or a 504 Plan, the school must hold a Manifestation Determination Review (MDR) before implementing a suspension that exceeds ten (10) cumulative school days

If the Head of School determines the student committed the disciplinary offense, the Head of School may impose the same or a lesser consequence than that of the Director of Teaching and Learning. The Head of School's decision shall be final.

#### **IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION UNDER 603 CMR 53:02(6) & 603 CMR 53.10**

In-school suspension is defined as the removal of a student from regular classroom activities, but not HCCPS premises, for not more than ten (10) consecutive school days, or no more than ten (10) school days cumulatively for multiple infractions over the course of HCCPS year.

The Director of Teaching and Learning may impose an in-school suspension as defined above according to the following procedures:

The Director of Teaching and Learning shall inform the student of the disciplinary offense charged and the basis for the charge, and provide the student an opportunity to dispute the charges and explain the circumstances surrounding the alleged incident. If the Director of Teaching and Learning determines that the student committed the disciplinary offense, the Director of Teaching and Learning shall inform the student of the length of the student's in-school suspension, which shall not exceed ten (10) days, cumulatively or consecutively, in a school year.

On the same day as the in-school suspension decision, the Director of Teaching and Learning shall make reasonable efforts to notify the caregiver orally of the disciplinary offense, the reasons for concluding that the student committed the infraction, and the length of the in-school suspension. The Director of Teaching and Learning shall also invite the caregiver to a meeting to discuss the student's academic performance and behavior, strategies for student engagement, and possible responses to the behavior. Such meetings shall be scheduled on the day of the suspension if possible, and if not, as soon thereafter as possible. If the Director of Teaching and Learning is unable to reach the caregiver after making and documenting at least two (2) attempts to do so, such attempts shall constitute reasonable efforts for purposes of orally informing the caregiver of the in-school suspension.

The Director of Teaching and Learning shall send written notice to the student and caregiver about the in-school suspension, including the reason and the length of the in-school suspension, and inviting the caregiver to a meeting with the Director of Teaching and Learning for the purpose set forth above, if such meeting has not already occurred. The Director of Teaching and Learning shall deliver such notice on the day of the suspension by hand-delivery, certified mail, first-class mail, email to an address provided by the caregiver for school communications, or by other method of delivery agreed to by the Director of Teaching and Learning and the caregiver.

#### **SUSPENSION OR EXPULSION FOR DISCIPLINARY OFFENSES UNDER M.G.L. 71 §§37H and 37H½**

The due process notification and hearing requirements in the preceding sections do not apply to the following disciplinary offenses:

##### **Possession of a dangerous weapon, possession of a controlled substance, or assault of staff**

A student may be subject to expulsion if found in possession of a dangerous weapon, possession of a controlled substance, or the student assaults a member of educational staff, and the Director of Teaching and Learning determines the student's continued presence in school would have a substantial detrimental effect on the

general welfare of HCCPS.

The Director of Teaching and Learning shall notify the student and parent(s)/guardian(s) in writing of the opportunity for a hearing, and the right to have representation at the hearing, along with the opportunity to present evidence and witnesses. After said hearing, a Director of Teaching and Learning may, in their discretion, decide to levy a suspension rather than expulsion. A student expelled for such an infraction shall have the right to appeal the decision to the Head of School. The expelled student shall have ten (10) days from the date of the expulsion in which to notify the Head of School of their appeal. The student has the right to counsel at the hearing before the Head of School. The subject matter of the appeal shall not be limited solely to a factual determination of whether the student was guilty of the alleged offense.

### **Felony complaint or issuance of felony delinquency complaint**

Upon the issuance of a criminal complaint charging a student with a felony, or the issuance of a felony delinquency complaint against a student, the Director of Teaching and Learning may suspend a student for a period of time determined appropriate by the Director of Teaching and Learning if the Director of Teaching and Learning determines that the student's continued presence in school would have a substantial detrimental effect on the general welfare of HCCPS.

The Director of Teaching and Learning shall notify the student in writing of the charges, the reasons for the suspension (prior to such suspension taking effect), and the right to appeal. The Director of Teaching and Learning will also provide the student and parent(s)/guardian(s) the process for appealing the suspension to the Head of School. The request for appeal must be made in writing within five (5) calendar days. The hearing shall be held within three (3) days of the request. The suspension shall remain in effect prior to any appeal hearing before the Head of School. At the hearing, the student shall have the right to present oral and written testimony, and the right to counsel. The Head of School has the authority to overturn or alter the decision of the Director of Teaching and Learning. The Head of School shall render a decision on the appeal within five (5) calendar days of the hearing.

### **Felony conviction or adjudication/admission in court of guilt for a felony or felony delinquency**

The Director of Teaching and Learning may expel a student convicted of a felony, or has an adjudication or admission of guilt regarding a felony, if the Director of Teaching and Learning determines that the student's continued presence in school would have a substantial detrimental effect on the general welfare of HCCPS.

The student shall receive written notification of the charges and reasons for the proposed expulsion. The student shall also receive written notification of his right to appeal the decision to the Head of School, as well as the appeal process. The expulsion shall remain in effect prior to any appeal hearing conducted by the Head of School. The student shall notify the Head of School in writing of their request for an appeal of the decision no later than five (5) calendar days following the date of the expulsion. The Head of School hearing shall be held with the student and parent(s)/guardian(s) within three (3) calendar days of the expulsion. At the hearing, the student shall have the right to present oral and written testimony, and shall have the right to counsel. The Head of School has the authority to overturn or alter the decision of the Director of Teaching and Learning. The Head of School shall render a decision on the appeal within five (5) calendar days of the hearing.

Any student expelled from school for such an offense shall be afforded an opportunity to receive educational services and make academic progress.

## Appendix K: Policy Concerning Discipline of Students Receiving Special Education Services

### Disciplinary Actions and Due Process

Whether or not a student receives special education, HCCPS shall comply with its discipline policy if and when a student misbehaves and violates the school code of conduct. In all situations, discipline must be fair and even-handed.

In general, any student may be suspended or removed from school for disciplinary reasons for a short time, which is no more than 10 days. Before any removal or suspension the Director of Teaching and Learning shall inform the student of the accusations against them. The student shall also provide the student with the opportunity to provide their side of the story. Unless an emergency situation that may affect the safety and well-being of the school, prior to any meeting with a student concerning disciplinary action, the Director of Teaching and Learning shall attempt to notify the parent(s)/guardian(s) of the student, both orally and in writing, of the disciplinary meeting and shall invite the parent/guardian to attend the meeting.

In every case of student misconduct for which suspension may be imposed, the Director of Teaching and Learning shall exercise discretion in deciding the consequence for the offense; consider ways to re-engage the student in learning; and avoid using long-term suspension from school as a consequence until alternatives have been tried. Alternatives may include the use of evidence-based strategies and programs such as mediation, conflict resolution, restorative justice, and positive interventions and supports

All notices to parent(s)/guardian(s) concerning short-term (less than 10 days) suspensions, shall be in the primary language of the home, if other than English and shall set forth:

- The disciplinary offense;
- The basis for the charge;
- Potential consequences, including potential length of a suspension;
- Notice of the opportunity of the student to have a hearing with the Director of Teaching and Learning concerning the proposed suspension or disciplinary action;
- Notice of the date, time, and location of such hearing; and
- Notice of the right to have an interpreter service attend the hearing

If a student may receive a long-term suspension (more than 10 consecutive school days or a suspension that would amount to the 11th non-consecutive day of suspension during one school year), the notice must include those items listed above, **and** the following:

Notice of the following rights at the hearing:

- Opportunity to review the student's record and the documents upon which the Director of Teaching and Learning may rely upon during the hearing, prior to the hearing;
- Right to be represented by counsel or a lay person chosen by the student during the hearing (at the student's or parent/guardian's expense);
- Right to produce witnesses on behalf of the student and to present the student's explanation of the

alleged incident;

- Right to cross-examine witnesses presented by the school; and
- Right to request that the hearing be recorded by the Director of Teaching and Learning and to receive a copy of the record
- Notice of the right to appeal the Director of Teaching and Learning's Decision to the Board of Trustees

All disciplinary determinations shall be made in writing and sent to the parent(s)/guardians.

### **Manifestation Determination**

HCCPS shall follow the special disciplinary rules for students with disabilities who have been found eligible for special education. These special disciplinary rules apply as soon as a student is removed from their current education placement (whether at HCCPS or off the premises) for more than 10 days in a row, or if a student is removed for disciplinary reasons for more than a total of 10 days in any school year and there is a pattern of removal for comparable behaviors. The Director of Teaching and Learning shall notify the student's parent/guardian as soon as the decision is made to remove the student from their education placement for more than 10 days.

Thereafter, the student's IEP Team shall meet within 10 days of the school's decision to impose the discipline. At this meeting, called a "manifestation determination," the IEP Team, including the student's parent(s)/guardian(s) shall determine if the misbehavior was caused by or had a direct relationship to the student's disability, or was the direct result of the school's failure to provide the services required by the student's IEP.

In making the manifestation determination, the IEP Team must consider relevant information from the student's file, including the student's IEP, your and the teachers' observations of the student's behavior, and any relevant information that the parent(s)/guardian(s) provide.

If the IEP Team determines that the student's behavior **was not** caused by or directly related to the student's disability or the failure to properly implement the IEP, then a student with a disability can be disciplined in the same manner and for the same length of time as other students are disciplined for the same offense.

The IEP Team, however, must determine the interim alternative educational setting ("IAES") where the student will be placed and the educational services that will be provided. An IAES is a setting other than the student's current placement that enables the student to continue to receive educational services according to their IEP. School personnel may consider the student's unique circumstances in determining whether a change in placement is appropriate for a student with a disability.

If the IEP Team determines that the student's behavior **was** caused by or directly related to the student's disability or the failure to properly implement the IEP, then the student must be returned to the last approved IEP placement unless the IEP Team decides on a different placement. The student shall also undergo a functional behavioral assessment. A functional behavioral assessment is a comprehensive assessment of behavior that provides the IEP Team with information about the student's behavior and identifies behavioral intervention services and program modifications that are designed to address the behavioral violation so it does not recur.

If the student has already had a functional behavioral assessment and has a behavioral intervention plan, then the IEP Team shall determine if any changes should be made to the behavioral intervention plan. If the behavior

was caused by the failure to properly implement the IEP, the school shall take immediate steps to remedy the deficiencies.

If the student possessed or used a weapon or drugs, or caused serious bodily injury to another person on school property or at a school event, the student may be placed by the Director of Teaching and Learning in an IAES for up to 45 school days without regard to whether the behavior is determined to be a manifestation of the student's disability. The IEP Team will determine the IAES and the appropriate educational services that will be provided to the student while they are in the IAES.

### **Instruction Provided to a Student Removed from School**

During a short disciplinary removal, the school is not required to provide instruction to a disabled student unless it does so for non-disabled students.

However, once a student with a disability has been removed from the school or from their placement for more than 10 cumulative days during the school year the student must receive educational services that will allow the student to continue to participate in the general education curriculum and to progress toward the goals set out in their IEP. The Director of Teaching and Learning shall consult with at least one of the student's teachers to determine what services are necessary. These services shall begin on the 11th school day of a student's disciplinary removal during the school year and continue during the disciplinary removal.

### **Appeal of a Disciplinary Decision**

If a parent/guardian disagrees with the Director of Teaching and Learning's decision, the parent/guardian may appeal to the Board of Trustees. The Board of Trustees shall hold a hearing within three (3) school days upon receipt of the notice of appeal, unless the parent/guardian/student requests an appeal of up to 7 additional calendar days. The Board of Trustees shall send written notice of the time, date, and location of the hearing parent(s)/guardian(s).

During the Board of Trustees' hearing, the student shall have all of the same rights and due process as enumerated in Section 1 of this Policy. The Board of Trustees shall issue a written decision within five (5) calendar days of the hearing.

If a parent/guardian disagrees with the Board of Trustee's decision regarding placement of their student under the disciplinary provisions or disagrees with the manifestation determination, or if HCCPS believes that maintaining the current placement of the student is substantially likely to result in an injury to the student or to others, either the parent or HCCPS may appeal the decision by requesting a hearing with the Board of Special Education Appeals ("BSEA").

The BSEA will convene a hearing on a disciplinary placement or manifestation determination on an expedited schedule. During the appeal of a disciplinary placement or manifestation determination, the student must remain in the IAES until the hearing officer makes a decision or the disciplinary period is completed, unless the caregiver and the school district agree to a different placement.

## Appendix L: Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Gender Identity

**Guiding principle:** Consistent with Massachusetts law, HCCPS is committed to providing an educational environment that is safe and free from discrimination for all students, regardless of sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression, and to guaranteeing that every student and staff member has equal access to HCCPS’s educational programs and activities.

**Definitions:** Understanding the terminology associated with gender identity is important to providing a safe and supportive school environment for students whose rights are protected under the law. The definitions below are intended to assist in understanding HCCPS’s legal obligations. The term “gender identity” is specifically defined in the Mass. General Laws, as amended by *An Act Relative to Gender Identity*.

- **Gender expression:** the manner in which a person represents or expresses gender to others, often through behavior, clothing, hairstyles, activities, voice, or mannerisms.
- **Gender identity:** as defined in part at G.L. c. 4, § 7, shall mean a person's gender-related identity, appearance or behavior, whether or not that gender-related identity, appearance or behavior is different from that traditionally associated with the person's physiology or assigned sex at birth. Gender-related identity may be shown by providing evidence including, but not limited to, medical history, care or treatment of the gender-related identity, consistent and uniform assertion of the gender-related identity or any other evidence that the gender-related identity is sincerely held as part of a person's core identity; provided, however, that gender-related identity shall not be asserted for any improper purpose.
- **Gender nonconforming (GNC):** a term used to describe people whose gender expression differs from stereotypical expectations of gender appropriate behavior or ways men and women are expected to act.
- **Transgender:** an umbrella term used to describe a person whose gender identity or gender expression is different from that traditionally associated with their assigned sex at birth.
- **Nonbinary:** describes any gender identity which does not fit the traditional male and female binary.
- **Gender expansive:** refers to a wide range of gender identities and expressions beyond the binary categories of male and female.

**Bias-based conduct, discrimination, and harassment:** It is the policy of HCCPS to maintain a safe and supportive learning environment that is free from bias-based conduct, discrimination, and/or harassment on the basis of sex, sexual orientation, and/or gender identity or expression. Reports of bias, discrimination, and/or harassment based on a person’s actual or perceived gender identity or gender expression will be handled in the same manner as other reports of identity- and bias-based conduct. *This includes deliberately and/or persistently misgendering a student, continuing to utilize a student’s given name and/or pronouns after information has been provided to do otherwise, and/or intentionally or persistently outing a student.*

If intended or unintended harms occur (e.g., a student is consistently misgendered by a teacher or peer, despite that person’s best efforts to use correct pronouns), HCCPS will provide opportunities for repair, such as using restorative practices in collaboration with, and consent from, the student who experienced harm.

**Names and pronouns:** Massachusetts law recognizes common law name changes. An individual may adopt a name that is different from the name that appears on their birth certificate provided the change of name is done for an honest reason, with no fraudulent intent. A court-ordered name or gender change is *not* required, and the student does *not* need to change their official student record; nothing more formal than usage is required. Consistent with this state law, when requested, HCCPS will accurately record a student's chosen name on all records when possible, regardless of whether the student, parent, or guardian provides the school with a court

order formalizing a name or gender change. Additionally, HCCPS teachers, administrators, and staff will use a student's chosen name and pronouns appropriate to their gender identity, regardless of students' assigned birth sex. At HCCPS, students can request a name and/or gender change and appropriate pronoun use formally (i.e., requesting a change to student records) or informally, and upon doing so, HCCPS personnel will be informed of the chosen name and appropriate pronouns, and will be required to use them.

To request a name change, please contact the Head of School, Director of Teaching and Learning, School Psychologist, or Adjustment counselor. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has a procedure in place to update name changes and gender markers in the Student Information Management System (SIMS) upon request. The document *Assigning State Assigned Student Identifiers (SASIDs) to Massachusetts' Public School Students* guides schools through changing names and gender markers on school records. The document can be found [here](#) to support school personnel and district leaders.

**Privacy and confidentiality:** Under Massachusetts law, information about a student's assigned birth sex, gender transition, name change associated with transition, medical or mental health treatment related to gender identity, or any other related information is part of the individual's student record (for more information, see the Massachusetts Student Records Regulations, 603 CMR 23.00). As such, HCCPS student records, including information related to a student's gender transition and/or identity, are confidential and kept private and secure, except in limited circumstances, such as when authorized school personnel require the information to provide administrative, teaching, counseling, nursing, or other services to the student in the performance of their official duties. Authorized school personnel may include, but are not limited to, individuals such as the Head of School, Director of Teaching and Learning, school nurse, classroom teacher(s), social worker, and/or guidance counselor.

*When a student is using a chosen name, the birth name is considered private information and may be disclosed only with authorization as provided under the Massachusetts Student Records Regulations.* If the student has previously been known at school and/or in school records by their birth name, school personnel must use the student's chosen name once requested.

**Restrooms:** In accordance with Massachusetts law, all students are entitled to have access to restrooms that are consistent with students' gender identity; and transgender, nonbinary, gender expansive, and/or gender nonconforming students who prefer not to use a gender-segregated restroom must be provided with a safe and adequate alternative. All-gender restrooms are located on the second floor of the HCCPS school. If it is burdensome or not feasible to get to these restrooms (e.g., if a Prisms student is in science class, which is located on the opposite side of the building on the first floor), transgender, nonbinary, gender expansive, and/or gender nonconforming students can use the single-stall restroom located on the first floor, just outside of the Community and Family Engagement Coordinator's office.

**Education and training:** To further a safe and supportive school environment for all students, HCCPS will incorporate regular education and training about transgender, nonbinary, gender expansive, and/or gender nonconforming individuals when possible into its curriculum, student leadership training, and required staff professional development. HCCPS will include education about gender identity, nondiscrimination, and legal protections in the annual mandatory training for all staff.

# Appendix M: Physical Restraint Policy & Procedures

## 1. Introduction

It is the policy of HCCPS to promote a safe and productive workplace and educational environment for its employees and students and to ensure that every student in HCCPS is free from the use of physical restraint in compliance with the applicable Department of Elementary and Secondary Education regulations.

This policy shall not be construed to limit the protection afforded to students under other federal and state laws, including those laws that provide for the rights of students who have been found eligible to receive special education services. Additionally, this policy shall not be construed to preclude any teacher, employee, or agent of HCCPS from using reasonable and necessary force to protect students, other persons, or themselves from assault or imminent, serious, physical harm.

What follows are the legal citations, procedures and guidelines that include: (1) appropriate responses to student behavior that may require immediate intervention; and (2) alternative methods that should be used first when seeking to prevent student violence, self-injurious behavior and/or de-escalating potentially dangerous behavior occurring among groups of students or with an individual student, including alternative methods in emergency situations that avoid resorting to physical restraint.

## 2. Definitions

- **Consent** shall mean agreement by a parent/guardian who has been fully informed of all information relevant to the activity for which agreement is sought, in their native language or other mode of communication, that the parent/guardian understands and agrees in writing to the carrying out of the activity and understands that the agreement is voluntary and may be revoked at any time.
- **Mechanical restraint** shall mean the use of a physical device to restrict the movement of a student or the movement. A protective or stabilizing device ordered by a physician shall not be considered a mechanical restraint. The use of a mechanical restraint is prohibited unless explicitly authorized by a physician and consented to in writing by the parent/guardian of the student.
- **Medication restraint** shall mean the administration of medication for the purpose of temporarily controlling behavior. The use of medication restraint is prohibited unless explicitly authorized by a physician and consented to by the parent/guardian of the student.
- **Physical escort** shall mean a temporary touching or holding, without the use of force, of the hand, wrist, arm, shoulder, or back for the purpose of inducing a student who is agitated to walk to a safe location.
- **Physical restraint** shall mean direct physical contact that prevents or significantly restricts a student's freedom of movement. Additionally, physical restraint does not include: providing brief physical contact, without force, to promote student safety or limit self injurious behavior, providing physical guidance or prompting when teaching a skill, redirecting attention, providing comfort, or a physical escort.
- **Prone restraint** shall mean a restraint in which a student is placed face down on the floor or another surface, and physical pressure is applied to the student's body to keep the student in the prone position. The use of prone restraint shall be prohibited except on an individual student basis and only under the circumstances of 603 CMR 46.03(1)(b)(1-6).
- **Restraint** shall mean limitation on a student's physical movement using force against the student's

resistance.

- **Seclusion** shall mean the involuntary confinement of a student alone in a room or area, with or without adult supervision, from which the student is not permitted to leave. The term does not include: a classroom or school environment where, as a general rule, all students need permission to leave the room or area, such as to use the restroom; a behavior support technique that is part of the district's, school's, or program's designated procedures for behavior support, which involves the monitored separation of a student in an unlocked setting, from which the student is allowed to leave and it is implemented for the purpose of calming; or placing a student in a separate location within a classroom with others or with an instructor, so long as the student has the same opportunity to receive and engage in instruction.
- **Time-out** shall mean a behavioral support strategy in which a student temporarily separates from the learning activity or the classroom, either by choice or by direction from staff, for the purpose of calming. During time-out, a student must be continuously observed by a staff member in an unlocked setting from which the student is permitted to leave. Staff shall be with the student or immediately available to the student at all times. Time-out shall cease as soon as the student has calmed.

## 2. Alternatives To Physical Restraint

HCCPS works to foster strong, healthy relationships between faculty/staff and students. Central to the mission of HCCPS is to create and sustain a strong community. This is achieved through a host of structures that include: regular morning meetings; mixed age groupings; weekly All School assemblies; proactive teaching and modeling of positive behavioral expectations; direct teaching of social skills by classroom teachers, speech and language teachers, and the school counselor. In addition, the school provides school-wide professional development focused on identifying and preventing student violence, self-injurious behavior, and suicide, including de-escalation of potentially dangerous behavior occurring among groups of students or with an individual student.

In addition, grade specific SERS (Special Education & Related Service) teams meet bi-weekly and include regular and special education teachers, the school counselor, occupational therapist, speech and language therapist, and administration. The purpose of these bi-weekly meetings is to plan appropriate interventions and support for students.

For any student with a history of significant emotional or behavioral challenges—including at-risk behaviors such as harm to self or others—or for any student who has required physical restraint, the Team must develop a Safety Behavior Intervention Plan. This plan should outline targeted strategies and supports, which may include de-escalation techniques, counseling services, monitoring protocols, data collection, and frequent review meetings to assess progress and make necessary adjustments. Teams are also encouraged to recommend supportive family outreach, emphasizing regular communication and collaboration with caregivers.

In conjunction with these efforts, school personnel should remain vigilant and, whenever possible, promptly notify school administrators, the administrative response team, and/or other appropriate staff if a potentially dangerous situation arises, so that additional support can be provided without delay.

The following strategies are utilized to help students manage behavior, de-escalate potentially dangerous behavior occurring among groups of students or with an individual student, and maintain a safe and

secure school environment:

- Time-out: Students who are removed from class activities, whether directed to do so or by their own volition, must be supervised during this “time out.” Time out may take place in the classroom or in a different location . Alternate locations for time out must be safe and appropriate to calming. Time out lasting more than half of the school day will be considered an In School Suspension, regardless of whether the student chose to leave or was told to do so by staff.
- Physical Escort: Physical escort is not considered to be physical restraint. Physical escort is defined as a temporary touching or holding, without the use of force, of the hand, wrist, arm, shoulder, or back for the purpose of inducing a student who is agitated to walk to a safe location.
- Remove Other Students: If it is not feasible to have a student experiencing distress move to a more private and safe area in order to de-escalate, consider the feasibility of having other staff assist and monitor the removal of other students to another area within the school until the student de-escalates.

Other restraint preventions designed to prevent student violence, self-injurious behavior and suicide include:

- Active listening
- Use of a low non-threatening voice
- Limiting the number of adults providing direction to the student
- Offering the student a choice
- Not blocking the student's access to an escape route
- Suggesting possible resolutions to the student
- Verbal prompt - A verbal prompt is communicating what is expected behavior by clearly stating instructions and expectations.
- Physical Redirection -A physical redirection is done by temporarily placing one hand on each of the student's shoulders, without force, and redirecting the student to the learning activity, classroom or safe location.

### **3. Use/Prohibition of Restraint**

Hilltown Charter is committed to maintaining a safe and supportive learning environment for all students. Physical restraint is considered an emergency procedure of last resort and is only used when a student’s behavior poses an immediate threat of serious harm to self or others. The following outlines the conditions under which restraint may be used, as well as the procedures and prohibitions in accordance with state regulations (603 CMR 46.00)

(a) Mechanical restraint, medication restraint, and seclusion shall be prohibited in public education programs.

(b) Prone restraint shall be prohibited in public education programs except on an individual student basis, and only under the following circumstances:

1. The student has a documented history of repeatedly causing serious self-injuries and/or injuries to other students or staff;
2. All other forms of physical restraints have failed to ensure the safety of the student and/or the

- safety of others;
3. There are no medical contraindications as documented by a licensed physician;
  4. There is psychological or behavioral justification for the use of prone restraint and there are no psychological or behavioral contraindications, as documented by a licensed mental health professional;
  5. The program has obtained consent to use prone restraint in an emergency as set out in 603 CMR 46.03(1)(b), and such use has been approved in writing by the principal; and,
  6. The program has documented 603 CMR 46.03(1)(b) 1 through 5 in advance of the use of prone restraint and maintains the documentation.

(c) Physical restraint, including prone restraint where permitted, shall be considered an emergency procedure of last resort and shall be prohibited in public education programs except when a student's behavior poses a threat of assault, or imminent, serious, physical harm to self or others and the student is not responsive to directives or other lawful and less intrusive behavior interventions, or such interventions are deemed to be inappropriate under the circumstances.

(d) All physical restraints, including prone restraint where permitted, shall be administered in compliance with 603 CMR 46.05.

(2) Physical restraint shall not be used:

- (a) As a means of discipline or punishment;
- (b) When the student cannot be safely restrained because it is medically contraindicated for reasons including, but not limited to, asthma, seizures, a cardiac condition, obesity, bronchitis, communication-related disabilities, or risk of vomiting;
- (c) As a response to property destruction, disruption of school order, a student's refusal to comply with a public education program rule or staff directive, or verbal threats when those actions do not constitute a threat of assault, or imminent, serious, physical harm; or
- (d) As a standard response for any individual student. No written individual behavior plan or individualized education program (IEP) may include use of physical restraint as a standard response to any behavior. Physical restraint is an emergency procedure of last resort.

(3) Limitations on use of restraint. Physical restraint in a public education program shall be limited to the use of such reasonable force as is necessary to protect a student or another member of the school community from assault or imminent, serious, physical harm.

(4) Referral to law enforcement or other state agencies. Nothing in 603 CMR 46.00 prohibits:

- (a) The right of any individual to report to appropriate authorities a crime committed by a student or other individual;
- (b) Law enforcement, judicial authorities or school security personnel from exercising their responsibilities, including the physical detainment of a student or other person alleged to have committed a crime or posing a security risk; or
- (c) The exercise of an individual's responsibilities as a mandated reporter pursuant to M.G.L. c. 119, § 51A. 603 CMR 46.00 shall not be used to deter any individual from reporting neglect or abuse to the appropriate state agency.

#### **4. Proper Administration of a Physical Restraint**

Whenever possible, only trained school personnel should administer physical restraints. Trained personnel are those who have completed the in-depth or basic training as outlined in applicable regulations. When feasible, the restraint should be witnessed by at least one additional adult who is not directly involved in the physical intervention.

In situations where physical restraint is necessary, staff must use only the amount of force reasonably necessary to protect the student or others from immediate physical harm. The method used should prioritize safety, be appropriate to the situation, and comply with the safety requirements outlined in this policy. All restraints must be discontinued as soon as the student is no longer an immediate danger, shows signs of respiratory distress, or exhibits indications of severe physical or emotional distress (e.g., difficulty breathing, sustained crying, or coughing).

While the school aims to ensure that restraints are administered only by trained personnel, the law allows any school employee to use reasonable and necessary force in emergency situations to protect students, staff, or others from assault or imminent, serious physical harm.

At an appropriate time after a student has been released from a restraint, the Student Behavior Support Coordinator or their designee will ensure that follow-up procedures are implemented. These include:

- Reviewing the incident with the student to help them process the event and address the behavior that led to the restraint;
- Debriefing with the staff members who administered the restraint to confirm that proper procedures were followed and to identify any areas for improvement;
- Providing support to any students who witnessed the incident, which may include teacher- or counselor-led debriefs or restorative practices as appropriate; and
- Ensuring written notification of the incident is submitted to the Head of School and the Director of Teaching and Learning.

These steps are critical to ensuring student and staff safety, promoting learning and reflection, and maintaining a culture of accountability and care.

#### **5. Safety Requirements**

No restraints shall be administered in such a way that a student is prevented from breathing or speaking. During the administration of a restraint, school personnel shall continuously monitor the physical status of the student, including skin color, temperature, and respiration. Any and all restraint shall be immediately released upon a determination by the school personnel administering the restraint that the student is no longer at risk of causing imminent physical harm to himself, herself or others.

Additionally, restraints shall be administered in such a way as to prevent or minimize physical harm. If, at any time during a physical restraint the student demonstrates difficulty breathing or significant physical distress, including but not limited to, trouble breathing or prolonged coughing or crying, the student shall be released from the restraint immediately, and school staff shall take steps to seek medical assistance. School personnel shall review and consider any known medical or psychological limitations and/or behavioral

intervention plans regarding the use of physical restraint on an individual student, as well as known or suspected trauma history.

At any time during the administration of a physical restraint, school personnel may take steps to seek medical assistance if it appears that the student is demonstrating significant physical distress.

## **6. Documentation, Reporting and Follow-up Procedures**

Every instance of physical restraint must be documented in writing and reported to the Head of School. Documentation must include the name of the student restrained, the circumstances leading to the restraint, the de-escalation strategies attempted, the type and duration of restraint used, the names of staff involved, and any injuries or medical care provided. The Head of School shall maintain an ongoing log of all reported instances of physical restraint.

The staff member who administered the restraint must verbally inform the Head of School, Director of Teaching and Learning, or their designee as soon as possible, and no later than the end of the school day on which the restraint occurred. A written report must be submitted to the Head of School no later than the following school day. If the Head of School administers a restraint, they must complete the written report and submit it to a designated team appointed by the Board of Trustees for review.

- **Notification to Parents/Guardians**

The Head of School or designee must verbally inform the student's parent or guardian of the restraint as soon as possible, and no later than 24 hours after the incident.

A written report must be sent to the parent or guardian within three (3) school working days of the restraint. This may be sent by email or postal mail and should be dated to reflect delivery. The written report must include all required elements under 603 CMR 46.06(4). Parents and guardians must be offered an opportunity to respond in writing to the report and the incident.

- **Student Support Team Review**

If a student is restrained the Head of School or designee will convene a Student Support Team to assess the student's needs. The team must:

- Review all written reports and any comments from the student or their family,
- Analyze the circumstances of each incident (e.g., time of day, staff involved, antecedents), and
- Develop a plan to address underlying causes and prevent future restraint. This plan should include alternative strategies, such as de-escalation techniques, behavioral supports, and any necessary changes to the student's support plan or IEP.

The Head of School or designee must ensure that a record of each such review is maintained and made available to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) upon request.

### **Monthly Schoolwide Review**

The Head of School must conduct a monthly review of all schoolwide restraint data. This review must consider:

- Frequency, timing, and patterns of restraint,
- The number and duration of incidents per student,
- Any resulting injuries, and

- Staff members involved.

Based on this analysis, the Head of School may determine whether updates are needed to policies or procedures, whether additional training is warranted (e.g., in positive behavioral interventions and supports), or whether other steps should be taken to reduce or eliminate the use of physical restraint.

### **DESE Reporting**

If a restraint occurs, the school must submit a report to DESE within three (3) school working days via the Security Portal. The school must also maintain a 30-day rolling log of all restraints, which must be made available to DESE upon request.

## **7. Training Requirements**

### **A. All Program Staff**

Within the first month of each school year, School Administration shall provide all program staff with training on restraint prevention and behavior support.

The training shall consist of the following: (a) this policy and related procedures and guidelines; (b) interventions that may preclude the need for restraint, including de-escalation of problematic behaviors and other alternatives to restraint in emergency circumstances, including use of time-out as a behavior support strategy distinct from seclusion; (c) when behavior presents an emergency that requires physical restraint, the types of permitted physical restraints and related safety considerations, including information regarding the increased risk of injury to a student when any restraint is used, in particular a restraint of extended duration; (d) administering physical restraint in accordance with known medical or psychological limitations and/or behavioral intervention plans applicable to an individual student, including known or suspected trauma history; (e) the role of the student, staff and family in preventing use of restraint; and (f) identification of program staff who have received in-depth training in the use of physical restraint.

Additionally, for all new school employees that are hired after the start of the school year, School Administration shall within the first month of their employment provide the new employees with training on this policy.

### **B. Staff Authorized to Serve As a School-Wide Resource on the Proper Administration of Physical Restraints**

At the beginning of each school year, the Head of School and Director of Teaching and Learning shall identify program staff that are authorized to serve as a school-wide resource to assist in ensuring proper administration of physical restraint.

The content of the in-depth training shall be competency-based and at least sixteen (16) hours in length. Such individuals shall participate in at least one refresher course during subsequent school years of no less than eight (8) hours in length. Training shall include, but not be limited to: (a) appropriate procedures for preventing the use of physical restraint, including the de-escalation of problematic behavior, relationship building and the use of alternatives to restraint; (b) description and identification of specific dangerous behaviors on the part of students that may lead to the use of physical restraint and methods for evaluating the risk of harm in individual

situations in order to determine whether the use of restraint is warranted; (c) the simulated experience of administering and receiving physical restraint, instruction regarding the effect(s) on the person restrained, including instruction on monitoring physical signs of distress and obtaining medical assistance; (d) instruction regarding documentation and reporting requirements and investigation of injuries and complaints; (e) instruction regarding the impact of physical restraint on the student and family, recognizing the act of restraint has impact, including but not limited to psychological, physiological, and social-emotional effects; and (f) demonstration by participants of proficiency in administering physical restraint.

## **8. Complaint Procedures**

### **A. Informal Resolution of Concerns About the Use of Physical Restraint**

Before initiating a formal complaint procedure, a student or their parent/guardian who has concerns regarding a specific use of a physical restraint, may seek to resolve their concerns regarding a specific use of a physical restraint by raising the issue with the Head of School. The student and/or their parent/guardian should direct their concerns regarding a specific use of a physical restraint to the Head of School within ten (10) days of the parent/guardian's receipt of the written report from the school as detailed herein. The Head of School shall attempt, within their authority, to work with the individual to resolve the complaint fairly and expeditiously. If the student and/or their parent/guardian are not satisfied with the resolution, or if the student and/or their parent/guardian does not choose informal resolution, then the student and/or their parent/guardian may proceed with the formal complaint process detailed herein.

### **B. Formal Resolution of Concern About the Use of Physical Restraint**

A student or their parent/guardian, who has concerns regarding a specific use of a physical restraint, may seek to resolve their concerns regarding a specific use of a physical restraint by submitting a written complaint to the Board of Trustees. The student and/or their parent/guardian should submit this letter to the Board of Trustees within twenty (20) days of the parent/guardian's receipt of the written report from the school as detailed herein. The written complaint shall include (a) the name of the student; (b) the name of the school where the physical restraint allegedly occurred; (c) the name of the individuals involved in the alleged physical restraint; (d) the basis of the complaint or concern; and (e) the corrective action being sought.

C. The Board of Trustees, through its designees, shall conduct an investigation into the complaint promptly after receiving the complaint. In the course of its investigation, the Board of Trustees and/or its designees shall contact those individuals that have been referred to as having pertinent information related to the complaint. Strict timelines cannot be set for conducting the investigation because each set of circumstances is different. The Board of Trustees and/or its designees will make sure that the complaint is handled as quickly as is feasible. After completing the formal investigation, the Board of Trustees shall contact the individual who filed the complaint regarding the outcome of its investigation and its determination as to whether any corrective action is warranted.