

HCCPS Board of Trustees

Meeting Agenda

January 16, 2024 6:30pm

HCCPS, 1 Industrial Pkwy, Easthampton, MA 01027

Also: Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83679293502?pwd=bjZya3FvVTFmd216WlkvZDVPLzhjZz09>

Meeting ID: 836 7929 3502

Passcode: 7dvsWu

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

Facilitator: Kathleen Hulton

Topic (estimated time)	Who	Action	Estimated Time
Welcoming (read mission statement): (5 min) <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Announcements, appreciations, acknowledgements● Agenda Check: Appoint timekeeper, list keeper● BOT Visibility this month● Approve minutes from previous BOT meeting	Kathleen H.	Decision	6:30
Public Comment (5 min)	Kathleen H.		6:35
Teaching and Learning Updates (10 min) <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Staffing Update●● General Teaching and Learning Updates	Rebecca	Update	6:40
Head of School Updates (15 min)	Chris	Update	6:50

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Charter Renewal Update ● Family and Community Engagement ● General School Updates 			
Board Goals (10 mins)	Lily	Update and Discussion	7:05
Grade Realignment (25 mins)	Chris, Rebecca and Kathleen	Discussion and Decision	
Remote Work Policy (10 mins)	Tala	Discussion and Decision	
Committee Report questions (5 min)	Kathleen H.		8:30
Meeting Wrap-up (5 min) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Minutes Finalization ● Snacks + Drinks for next meeting ● Newsletter Blurb ● New business for next Board meeting ● Review action items 	Kathleen H.		8:35
Adjournment			8:40

Hilltown Cooperative Charter Public School

Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes DRAFT– Wednesday, December 11, 2024, 6:30pm

Location: HCCPS and Zoom

Present:

In-person: Chris Kusek, Emily Boddy, Kathleen Hulton, Ben Carlis, Grace Mrowicki, Rebecca Belcher-Timme, Andrea Hermans, Neal Teague, Kelly Vogel, Kathleen Szegda, Kylan Mandile, Lily Newman, Kate Aleo, Tala Elia

By Zoom:

Regrets:

Guests: **In-person:** Steve Sell

By Zoom:

Facilitator: Kathleen Hulton

Notetaker: Emily Boddy

List keeper: Lily

Timekeeper: Kathleen S.

Mission statement read by: Kelly

Topic	Discussion	Action (if necessary)
<p>Welcoming (read mission statement) (Kathleen H.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Announcements, appreciations, acknowledgements ● Agenda Check: Appoint timekeeper, list keeper ● BOT Visibility this month 	<p>Announcements, Appreciations, Acknowledgements:</p> <p>Emily announced that Kate Aleo will be collecting photos and short bios for our website and entryway board. This is in part as a result of a MCPSA training on onboarding where it was communicated as a standard practice for charter school boards.</p> <p>Appreciation for Tiffany and the winter fair. And for all the people and ways people contributed, including teachers, staff, families.</p> <p>MCPSA is sponsoring facilitated board retreats for no cost, facilitator Julia Bowen who has been supporting Chris in his transition. Kathleen will be in touch about next steps for the board.</p> <p>Agenda Check - Assigned roles, no changes.</p> <p>Board Visibility:</p>	

	Winter Solstice Coffee Hour Dec 13.	
Approve minutes from previous BOT meeting, 11/13/24	Amendments: None.	Lily motioned to approve 11/13 meeting minutes with amendments; Kathleen S. seconded; the Board approved meeting minutes by consensus.
Public Comment (Kathleen)	None.	
Teaching and Learning Updates (Rebecca) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Student Council update ● Partnership with Smith College: student teaching and dissemination of practices ● General Teaching and Learning Updates 	Student Council: Prisms and Purples. Underway now with 24 committed participants; Because of high interest, students came up with committees so everyone can participate in committees and then send one rep for a whole council meeting for 11 on larger council. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Social events - dances, fundraising ● Governance and policy committee (including lower grade advocacy, All School, ● JEDI/Equity Committee (inc peer mediation) Committees had to find meeting time, advisory and space. Many have met. Grade realignment is a hot topic with lots of communication happening; visited 4th/5th graders, made powerpoint, survey results. Smith College Relationship: Part of charter school's purpose is dissemination, so partnering with teaching programs is a great way to teach teachers who may utilize practices in other schools. 3 fellows in January, and another 1 later in the year. Coordinator at Smith invited Rebecca and Tiffany to speak with student teachers doing family communication, including engaging in this practice	

	<p>at Hilltown.</p> <p>Professional development with TAs, helping to support them understand roles, purpose in practice, get to know the TAs a little bit better.</p> <p>Teachers wrote reports today as well during the half day PD time</p>	
<p>Head of School Updates (Chris)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Grade Reconfiguration Update ● Family and Community Engagement ● General School Updates 	<p>Chris explained the purpose and practice of the Director’s report, which is included in the packet.</p> <p>Community updates on behalf of Tiffany: Winter Fair (Chris included the email Tiffany sent the community in his report). Money raised Last year net was roughly \$5,000. This year net will be closer to \$7300. Solstice on 12/20. MLK JR 1/17 Family bingo 1/31.</p> <p>General School Updates: LRP - Last spring adjustments were made to the timeline. Chris and Rebecca reviewed again with Board Leadership about further adjustments, making priorities aligned with Chris’ goals. Full description is in the Director’s report, included in the packet. Efforts to address climate/culture continue. Moving close to finalizing 1/24, 23 to finalize the TMI project coming to the school. Planning to host them for a film screening of Documentaries with panel discussion, and hoping to collaborate with Safe Passage. This is aimed at Purples and Prisms students and families, and any community member adults who want to come. This will also include a PD for all staff the day after the screenings. Have had positive meetings ‘Say Something’ to recreate what EHS is doing to support 8th graders with health affiliated curriculum centered on healthy relationships. Focusing time and energy on bullying and harmful language issues, including multiple investigations. Our Consultant supporting Jess was here to observe a full day which was helpful for her to develop supports. A parent connected us with the Construction Union</p>	

	<p>to help us with the playground demo, which will save us a lot of money. It is likely that they will need to do this in April/May. Considering a new student info system for next year to replace Rediker.</p> <p>Grade Reconfiguration: Full summary in the Director’s Report. In terms of the timeline from the LRP, this task has been delayed due to leadership changes at HCCPS. Survey to staff is in process, and individual meetings with teachers and staff are in progress. Staff meetings on 12/5 solicited feedback and considered 3 options. Recommendation will come through to the Board in January. Staff mainly split between stand alone 6th and stand alone K, with little support for stand along 8th grade. Staff meetings elicited several pros/cons for the favored outcomes. Rebecca reported that the student council reps took this matter very seriously. She read out the considerations that the older kids took into account, and gave some awesome and measured responses, much of which teachers/staff hadn’t centered in their responses. Suggestion that a special email with agenda alerting to the Grade Reconfiguration agenda item, particularly because the meeting is at an unusual time.</p>	
<p>Personnel 2024-25 Committee Goals, Tala (Update)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Evaluation of teacher prep time and related equity issues 2. Enhancing shared resources within the committee and effectively archiving 	
<p>Facilities Committee Goals, Kelly. (Report)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Evaluate the long and short term capital needs for the school to set proactive strategic priorities 2. Review ways to efficiently and sustainably address facilities issues; integrate this into plans going forward 	

	<p>3. Engage the community in the physical environment of the school for ownership and care</p>	
<p>Finance Committee Goals, Kylan (Report)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensure HCCPS has the funds necessary to address long term capital needs, including preventative maintenance and proactive strategies 2. Ongoing review and approval of balanced budget and audit of annual financials for Board review 3. Take specific steps to more effectively integrate JEDI into Finance Committee work 4. Recruit and onboard at least one new parent member 	
<p>New Member Onboarding, GABS Committee (Discussion, Decision)</p>	<p>GABS is proposing a midyear onboarding of new member, Steve Sell. Steve is a parent of a 6th grader and works in the Charter School space in MA. Resume included in the packet.</p> <p>Our bylaws state that we should endeavor to have not more than $\frac{2}{3}$ of our board capacity (15) be parents; however, GABS, with the support of Board and school leadership would like to onboard Steve early.</p> <p>One of our parents will have an abbreviated second term due to the graduation of her child, which was predetermined at the time of her onboarding for a second term. Therefore, there will only be 11 parents through June and then we will be back to 10.</p> <p>Steve spoke briefly about his background in education - teacher, and now in school leadership in a hybrid role at a Charter school in Eastern MA.</p>	<p>Kathleen S. motioned to approve. Roll Call taken to confirm:</p> <p>Ben Carlis - yes Kathleen Hulton -yes Kate Aleo - yes Kelly Vogel - yes Kylan Mandile - yes Neal Teague - yes Lily Newman - yes Kathleen Szegda - yes Tala Elia - yes Emily Boddy - yes</p> <p>Approved by roll.</p> <p>Emily will collaborate with Chris to send Steve's information to the state for final approval. Emily will do an orientation with Steve, and ensure his documents are completed.</p>

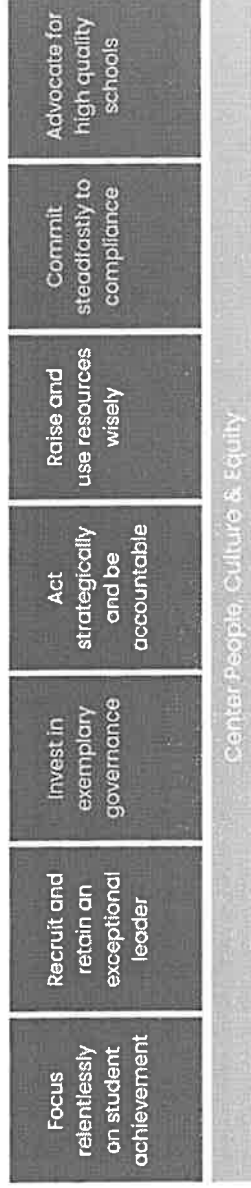
<p>Operationalizing and Measuring Board Goals, Lily. (Update and Discussion)</p>	<p>Lily shared a comprehensive planning document as a working document to ensure integration of all the goals. This working document will inform how we operationalize and measure board goals.</p>	
<p>Review of FY25 Q1 financials, Chris (Discussion and Decision)</p>	<p>Included in packet. Summary: Q1 is July through September, so the initial Q1 doesn't tell a big story. We are at projections and no reason to believe that we are off re budget projections.</p>	<p>Tala motioned to approve; Kylan seconded; the Board approved FY25 Q1 financials by consensus.</p>
<p>School Leadership Succession Plan , Tala (Update and Decision)</p>	<p>Included in packet. Tala reviewed the document, planning process around the different steps to succession. Broad framework is useful, but not with small details so the people in the roles have flexibility.</p>	<p>Lily motioned to approve; Emily seconded; the Board approved School Leadership Succession plan by consensus. Tala will send pdf final policy to Emily. Emily will file with policies.</p>
<p>Head of School Support and Evaluation, Kathleen H. (Update)</p>	<p>Kathleen and Chris meet once a week, and some additional communication happens as well. Working as a thought partner with Chris and Rebecca. In February/March a more formal mid year review process will happen for the Board and for Chris. Chris comments on the support from Board President, the Board and the MCPSA.</p>	
<p>Revision to HCCPS Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan, Chris and Rebecca (Update and Possible Decision)</p>	<p>State law dictates that bullying policy needs to be revised every 2 years. Proposed policy is included in the packet. Prior policy rested entirely on the Director of T&L, which was determined to be unsustainable. The new plan broadens the scope of who can do investigations, including HOS, D of T&L, Behavior Support Coordinator. Question asked about how/if school needs to handle matters that happen out of school, particularly with cyber-bullying. If any matter is creating hostile environment at school for a student,</p>	<p>Kathleen S. motioned to approve; Neal seconded; the Board approved the update Bullying prevention and intervention plan by consensus. Emily Will file in the board policies.</p>

	<p>the school has to investigate.</p> <p>This policy doesn't touch on discipline, but Chris provides a summary about implementation of after school detentions both when related to bullying or unkind behavior, but also to other disciplinary issues. These detentions utilize restorative principles.</p>	
Committee Reports - Questions, Kathleen H.	None	
Meeting Wrap-up <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Minutes Finalization ● Snacks + Drinks for next meeting ● Newsletter Blurb ● New business for next Board meeting 	<p>Next Meeting: <i>Thursday, January 16, 2025 6:30pm</i></p> <p>Facilitator: Kathleen H Snacks: Emily Drinks: Kathleen S Newsletter blurb: Emily</p> <p>New Business:</p>	
Review Action Items	<p>Reviewed action items.</p> <p>Next Meeting:</p> <p>Meeting about Grade Reconfiguration Board Goals, Lily Possible - GABS Annual Meeting Planning Possible Personnel, Remote Work policy</p>	
Adjournment	Meeting adjourned at 8:25pm	Kylan motioned to adjourn; Lily seconded; the meeting was adjourned.

HCCPS Board Goals - Draft and Notes SY 2024-2025

Important Links: [Role of the Board](#) [Draft Goals](#) [Committee Goals](#) [SY24-25 Self Evaluation](#) [LRP Tracker](#) [\(OLD SY23-24 Self-Eval\)](#)

ROLE OF THE BOARD (from MCPSA):



DRAFT GOALS SY24-25

Link to Slide Deck: [HCCPS Board Goals 2024](#)

Board Goals for SY24-26	BOT Role	LRP & Committee Alignment	Measures
<p>1. Communicate clearly and be effective messengers for HCCPS's mission:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Communicate clearly about the work of the BOT, the school direction and priorities b. Model the tone we want to set in the community c. Establish and share detailed BOT and committee roles, responsibilities, and decision-making 	Exemplary Governance	<p>LRP: Goal 1C Communication & Decision-Making</p> <p>GABS: A, C (Board Book Updates, Clear Roles, Committees, Etc.)</p> <p>All: B</p>	
<p>2. Promote school leaders' success with resources and supports aligned to their goals and needs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Collaborate with HOS to implement an effective performance review process and development plan, built on the recent model b. Support development of clear leader goals and metrics 	Leadership Retention	<p>BOT President: A, B, C Domain Council: B, C, D Finance: C</p>	

<p>c. Align resources and support to leader goals, including coaching, regular reflection and data review</p> <p>d. Track progress towards goals and leader experience to adapt effectively for success</p>		
<p>3. Advance JEDI work at all levels of HCCPS</p> <p>a. Ensure clear long term and immediate JEDI goals and actions are in place</p> <p>b. Ensure clear JEDI policies, procedures and roles are in place at the school and system level (e.g., in handbooks and job descriptions, in BOT and HOS roles)</p> <p>c. Enable JEDI goals and actions with resources, advocacy and support and consistent progress monitoring and reporting</p>	<p>High Quality Schools; Student Achievement</p>	<p>LRP Goal 2C Revise BOT structures aligned to JEDI</p> <p>JEDI: A, B, C Domain: ABC GABS: B</p>
<p>4. Catalyze school priorities through a dedicated investment in resource generation and sustainability</p> <p>a. Establish a focus and specific actions steps around BOT fundraising and collaboration with FOT</p> <p>b. Expand and diversify BOT membership to include fundraising capacity and community representation</p> <p>c. Establish meaningful local connections to increase the visibility of HCCPS and its connection to local arts and initiatives</p> <p>d. Finalize clear succession plans for the BOT and school leaders</p>	<p>Raise Resources</p>	<p>GABS: A, B, D Finance: A ALL: C Domain: D</p>

COMMITTEE GOALS

Committee	Goals	Strengthening Alignment	Measures
<p>GABS 2024-25 Committee Goals, Emily (Update)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recruitment and Succession Planning 2. Board book - finalize, determine where it 'lives', who maintains certain pieces, integrate 3. Establish board feedback process 4. Clarify board's role in Fundraising 		

<p>JEDI Committee Goals, Kathleen S. (Report)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create JEDI volunteer group to support school efforts 2. Engage families in JEDI 3. Support school leadership in JEDI work 		
<p>Personnel</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Evaluation of teacher prep time and related equity issues 2. Enhancing shared resources within the committee and effectively archiving 	<p>(From LRP: Integrate JEDI into all JDs;</p>	
<p>Facilities</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review ways to sustainably address facilities issues 2. Produce a document with long-term capital/component replacement needs 3. Use the created document to inform future capital spending priorities 		
<p>Finance</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensure HCCPS has the funds necessary to address long term capital needs, including preventative maintenance and proactive strategies 2. Ongoing review and approval of balanced budget and audit of annual financials for Board review 3. Take specific steps to more effectively integrate JEDI into Finance Committee work 4. Recruit and onboard at least one new parent member 		

BOARD SELF-EVALUATION: MCPSA will support this again with their tool from Bellwether in Jan/Feb 2025. See Board Resource Center

Board Effectiveness Diagnostic Survey

- This survey will be emailed to all board members and school leaders on **January 6th and will close on February 14th.**
- **Hilltown plans to complete the survey towards the end of the window given our goal setting timelines.**
- The data will be collected and given back to the Board as a comprehensive report.



HILLTOWN COOPERATIVE CHARTER PUBLIC SCHOOL

Grade Realignment Proposal and Summary Report

Submitted to community for consideration by Chris Kusek, HCCPS Head of School
January, 2025

History

While Hilltown Cooperative Charter Public School has had mixed age classrooms since its inception thirty years ago, there have been changes in their configuration and structure throughout that history. As summarized in a report presented by director Dan Klatz in April 2009, the last time grade alignment was collectively studied:

“HCCPS has always had mixed-age classrooms. During the first two years of the school (1995-97) students were not assigned grade levels, and the classrooms were generally a three year age span. Once the school began assigning students grade levels, classes were multi-graded and there was an overlap of grades between classes.

There are many reasons for having multi-age classrooms; the benefits of being both a younger and an older student, the opportunity to spend more than one year with the same teacher, and the opportunity to work with a wider range of skills and abilities to name a few. But the necessity for multi-age classrooms in our school is our size. As a small school that strives to have the kind of social mixing that children need, and realize the type of integrated, intimate community called for in our mission, we need to mix children beyond their own grade level. Otherwise, children would travel with the same small group for nine consecutive years.”

As that 2009 report goes on to detail,

“While there were many comments from teachers and parents about the strengths and weaknesses of the current configuration at all grade levels, Kindergarten generated the most discussion and conversation. There was considerable talk about the unique needs of Kindergarteners and how best to meet these needs... While teachers and parents could identify many possible improvements from changing the configuration, they could also identify qualities that would be lost if we changed configurations... Teachers agreed that while changing configurations might accrue some particular improvements in some areas of the program, there are unknown risks associated with a change of this magnitude.”

At that time, the community decided not to reconfigure grades, but rather “address the problems that were identified at various levels of the school using the current configuration and making necessary program, staffing, and facilities changes”. Since then, the school has been coping with several significant changes, such as a change of location, several leadership changes, and a global pandemic.

The HCCPS Long Range Plan, developed by a committee of teachers, parents, and administrators (including the aforementioned Dan Klatz) throughout the schools years 21-22 & 22-23, explicitly calls again for a thorough examination of grade realignment and configuration.

This directive is primarily found under **Goal 3, Action Step B**, which mandates a comprehensive review during the 2023-2024 school year, with recommendations due to the Board by May 2024 and potential implementation in Fall 2025.

The LRP strongly supports the need for this study by connecting it to several key areas:

- **Meeting Student Needs:** The plan emphasizes the "unique developmental needs at all levels" and acknowledges that current grade configurations might not be optimal for meeting the "developmental, academic, social, and emotional needs of all students."
- **Improving Literacy Instruction:** The school's commitment to the science of reading has implications for grouping students, and grade realignment could potentially improve the effectiveness of reading instruction.
- **Enhancing School Culture:** The LRP highlights the need to address social-emotional well-being and rebuild community after the pandemic. Different grade configurations could contribute to a more positive school climate.
- **Advancing Equity Goals:** The plan suggests that grade realignment could play a role in achieving Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) objectives by better serving marginalized groups, improving access, and addressing scheduling inequities related to the current half-day Wednesday model.

In short, the LRP positions the study of grade realignment not as an isolated initiative, but as a critical component of achieving the school's broader strategic goals related to student success, school culture, and equity. The plan provides a clear timeline and rationale, making grade configuration a significant priority for the coming years.

In Fall of 2023, the prior administration developed a grade configuration "roadmap" and a committee of teachers and administrators was formed and met throughout the 2023-24 school year. The full faculty also devoted time to this topic by including grade reconfiguration on the teacher meeting agendas of **November 30, December 14, January 4, March 28, and May 2nd** of the 23-24 school year.

Due to other pressing leadership changes, **no recommendations were made to the BoT in May or June and a decision was delayed until 2024-25.**

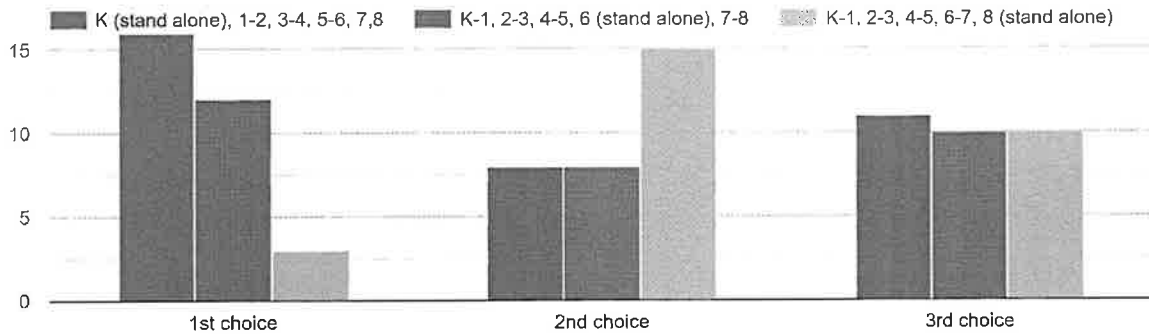
In November 2024, the new HCCPS administration took up this LRP initiative and gathered updated information and feedback from stakeholders including staff and students. A survey was distributed to staff in November and the pros and cons of potential grade realignment options were discussed in a facilitated way at a teacher meeting on **December 5th.**

Additionally, teachers were invited to meet with the Head of School individually or in small groups and dozens of individual meetings were held in December. The newly formed HCCPS student government also supported stakeholder engagement by meeting with each classroom to provide an overview of the rationale for various realignment options and collected feedback via a survey in the last two weeks before holiday vacation.

A brief summary of survey results and qualitative feedback are below:

Teacher survey (November 2024); sent out to all staff in November; 31 responses as of 12/20/24

Rank your preference on the multi-age grade realignment options below



Here are the major themes from the teacher survey responses, summarized in bullet points:

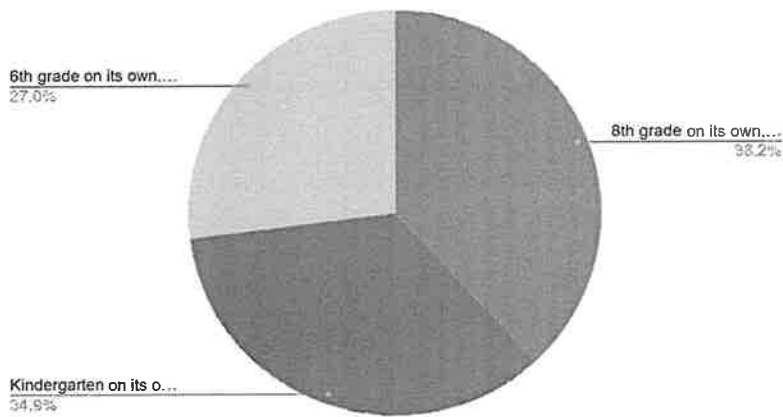
- **Concerns about Stand-Alone Grades:**
 - **Kindergarten:** Many teachers believe a stand-alone K allows for focused attention on foundational skills and acclimating to school, but some worry about the loss of mentorship from older peers and the potential for increased behavioral issues without this peer influence.
 - **Sixth Grade:** A stand-alone 6 is seen as a valuable transition to middle school, allowing students to adjust to multiple teachers and increasing academic demands. Some teachers, however, note that it can be isolating and sever friendships formed in earlier grades. There are also concerns about 6 being a less natural entry point than 5 or 7.
 - **Eighth Grade:** A stand-alone 8 is viewed as beneficial for high school preparation and a focused "capstone" year. However, there are concerns that it could lead to a smaller social pool for 8th graders.
- **Support for Mixed-Age Groupings:**
 - Many teachers strongly advocate for mixed-age groupings (1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8 or some variation) to foster mentorship, peer learning, and social-emotional development.
 - There's a belief that mixed-age groupings align with the school's philosophy and mission.
 - Several teachers highlight the benefits of students having the same teacher for two years in a mixed-age setting.

- **Developmental Considerations:**
 - Teachers emphasize the significant developmental differences between grades, particularly between K/1, 5/6, and 7/8.
 - There's a debate about whether 5th grade is more aligned with 4th or 6th grade developmentally.
 - The transition into puberty in 6th grade is seen as a major factor differentiating it from 5th.
- **Curriculum and Workload Concerns:**
 - Teachers express significant concerns about the workload involved in realigning curriculum, particularly in science and social studies.
 - There are worries about the time and resources needed for teachers to adapt to new grade bands and potentially new curricula.
 - Some teachers advocate for less departmentalization in the upper elementary grades to foster stronger classroom communities.
- **Enrollment and Community Issues:**
 - Teachers point out the high demand for K-5 and the lower demand for 6-8.
 - There's a concern about the "exodus" of students after 6th grade.
 - The impact of grade realignment on new student entry points and the lottery system is a recurring theme.
 - The social dynamics of the school, including friendships and class sizes, are considered crucial factors.
- **Logistical and Timing Concerns:**
 - The physical layout of the building poses challenges for certain configurations, particularly with science classes.
 - Some teachers feel the process is being rushed and that more time is needed for discussion, planning, and teacher buy-in.
 - There's a desire for clarity on the timeline and decision-making process.
- **Overall Sentiment:**
 - Many teachers express a sense that no single model is perfect and that all options have advantages and drawbacks.

- There's a strong desire to prioritize the school's mission and the social-emotional well-being of students.
- Some teachers question whether any realignment is necessary and advocate for maintaining the status quo or exploring options with all separate grades.
- There is a feeling among some that this initiative was on hold, and that the current timing is not ideal given recent leadership transitions and other changes.

Student survey (December 2024); student government led; 154 responses as of 12/20/24

Count of Which grade should be standalone?



Here's a summary of the themes from the student survey responses, presented in bullet points:

- **Support for Stand-Alone 8th Grade:**
 - **High School Preparation:** This is the most prevalent theme. Students believe a stand-alone 8th grade provides crucial preparation for the increased workload and different structure of high school.
 - **Maturity and Experience:** Some students feel that 8th graders, being the oldest and most experienced, are best suited to handle being a stand-alone grade.
 - **Maintaining Current Structure:** Several students prefer a stand-alone 8th grade because it would maintain most of the current grade structure.

- **Support for Stand-Alone 6th Grade:**
 - **Middle School Transition:** Some students see 6th grade as an important transition year into middle school, and a stand-alone structure helps them adjust to new expectations (like homework).
 - **New Student Entry:** A few students mention that 6th grade is a common entry point for new students and being stand-alone facilitates bonding within the grade.
 - **Maintaining Current Structure:** Some students prefer to keep 6th grade as it is, arguing that the current system is working well.

- **Support for Stand-Alone Kindergarten:**
 - **Unique Needs of Young Learners:** Students recognize that kindergarteners have distinct needs compared to 1st graders, particularly regarding learning to read and adjusting to a formal school environment.
 - **Transition challenges** - A few students mentioned that they were overwhelmed when they were in Kindergarten with older students mixed in.
 - **Preschool Preparation:** One student noted that kindergartners after covid need time to develop the skills they would have learned in preschool.

- **Other Considerations:**
 - **Friendship:** Several students express a desire to be in classes with their friends, and this motivates their preferences. For example, one student wanted to be with their 6th grade friends.
 - **Indifference:** Some students state that they don't really care about the grade configuration or that they don't know enough to have a strong opinion.
 - **Current Structure:** A few students explicitly state that they prefer the current grade structure as is.

- **Overall Sentiment:**

- The dominant theme is a desire to better prepare students for transitions, whether it's the transition to school (K), middle school (6th grade) or high school (8th grade).
- Students, like the teachers, recognize that different grade levels have different needs.
- Maintaining friendships and the current structure are also important factors for some students.
- Unlike the teachers, the students did not raise any concerns about curriculum, workload, or logistics.

As is clear from this feedback, there is no clear consensus on the grade realignment question and many thoughtfully articulated benefits and costs to any structural configuration. That being said, as the Head of School (as clearly defined in the job description), I feel that it is my responsibility to *“Guide the HCCPS community through implementation of the Long Range Plan, including establishing a clear shared vision of HCCPS going forward and the right structures and staffing for sustainability”*.

With all of this in mind, I offer the following recommendations, collaboratively developed with the Director of Teaching and Learning, to the Board of Trustees to consider in alignment with the LRP, along with an accompanying rationale.

- 1. I propose that HCCPS realign its grades in the following configuration: K, 1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8.**
- 2. HCCPS explore the possibility of adding an additional grade level (Kindergarten for 4 year olds, which other charter schools in the state call “K1”) and pair all grades in the future in the following configuration: K1-K2, 1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8.**

The rationale for this recommendation draws greatly from the themes detailed above, while also honoring the truism that there is no “one right way” to structure a school. There are many strengths, challenges, and opportunities in any model and what makes Massachusetts charter schools unique is their ability to experiment with models that are somewhat different and distinct from our district partners.

As I’ve tried to detail in communications with Hilltown families, faculty and friends in the last few weeks, there are key components in the HCCPS mission that make it unique and are recognized in its charter as existentially essential.

- *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.*

I feel that these foundational principles can best be served with the configuration proposed, which would also promote team building and structural changes that would support the school's sustainability.

Currently, there are trends in enrollment and equity that, if left unattended, could be a significant threat to HCCPS' educational and fiscal health.

From the 23-24 HCCPS annual report, pg 29,

A review of admissions trends shows that we have consistently received fewer applications for grades 7 and 8 than for grades K-6, and those numbers have declined a bit further in recent years. Furthermore, applicants for grades 7 and 8 have been more likely to decline if offered a spot. There have been several years, going back as far as 2017-18, where we have not been able to fill all the openings available in seventh and eighth grade.

Additionally, an initial budget analysis shows that HCCPS is spending nearly \$1470 (15%) per pupil more on its 6-8 programming than on its K-5 program with marginal return on investment in terms of retention.

Restructuring to a 5-8 upper grade model with multiple entry points can address some of these concerns while also directing support to early intervention initiatives in the areas of reading and mathematics. This could both benefit academic and social emotional student performance across the grade bands and mitigate rising special education costs at the upper grades, while hopefully supporting a more consistent K-8 culture.

By embracing this flexible grade-level pairing model, we can foster a dynamic learning environment that promotes collaboration, individualized instruction, and social-emotional growth for all students across our school. Furthermore, the consistency of this pairing configuration would allow students, teachers, and families to leverage the benefits of simultaneously being both mentors and mentees; fostering a strong sense of diversity, collaboration and community — values deeply ingrained in our mission—and could strengthen a chain of supportive relationships for every learner that is forged and linked on their individual journeys from the receipt of the turkey feather to their commencement bead.

Implementation pathways:

Though the implementation of any school policy is not typically in the domain of BoT governance, we recognize that it likely will be top of mind for both families and staff.

That being said, administration will be collaborating with faculty to consider three possible implementation pathways, if this recommendation is passed by the BoT in January.

Pathway 1: A full implementation in SY25-26.

- Teachers would receive support from the DoTL through Spring 25 and Summer 2026 (including stipends) with curriculum planning and alignment and a newly aligned master schedule would go into effect in August.

- Staffing decisions may be made for FY26 to prepare for implementation (e.g. 7-8 grouped in 3 homerooms).
- Prospective families would be notified of the model through enrollment season and new entry slots in 5th and 6th grade would be allocated accordingly.
- K would remain stand-alone and the potential to add an additional Kindergarten class would be explored and evaluated through SY25-26 with a possible opening in Fall 2026.

Pathway 2: A delayed implementation of model until SY26-27.

- Teachers would receive support from the DoTL in curriculum planning and alignment throughout SY25-26, though no grade pairings would change in SY25-26 (e.g. K, 1, & 6 would remain “stand alone”).
- Staffing decisions may be made for FY26 to prepare for implementation, but all gr 1-6 curriculum changes would be delayed (e.g. 7-8 groups in 3 homerooms).
- Prospective families would be notified of the model through enrollment season and all entry slots would remain the same until the 2026 lottery.
- K would remain stand-alone and the potential to add an additional Kindergarten class would be explored and evaluated through SY25-26 with a possible opening in Fall 2026.

Pathway 3: A hybrid implementation of the model in SY25-26 & SY26-27.

- Lower grade teachers would receive support from the DoTL in curriculum planning and alignment throughout Spring and Summer 2025 (including stipends), and newly aligned lower grade pairings (e.g. 1-2, 3-4) would go into effect in August ‘25.
- Upper grade teachers would delay implementation of model until SY26-27, allowing for additional time and support from the DoTL through SY25-26
- Staffing decisions may be made for FY26 to prepare for implementation, but upper grade pairings would follow a hybrid, temporary format for SY 25-26 only (e.g. 5 stand alone + 6 grade stand alone; with opportunities for mixing in specials classes; 7-8 grouped in 3 homerooms).
- Prospective families would be notified of the model through enrollment season and all entry slots would remain the same until the 2026 lottery.
- K would remain stand-alone and the potential to add an additional Kindergarten class would be explored and evaluated through SY25-26 with a possible opening in Fall 2026.



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Domain Committee Meeting Minutes – December 2, 2024 8:40 am

Meeting Location: HCCPS

Present: Kathleen Hulton, Lily Newman, Ben Carlis, Chris Kusek, Rebecca Belcher-Timme, Tiffany Ross

Guests:

Regrets:

Notetaker: Emily Boddy

Topic	Discussion	Action (if necessary)
Approve Last month's Minutes	No changes.	Ben moved to approve 11/4 minutes. Kathleen seconded. Minutes Approved by Consensus.
Head of School Updates	<p>Chris asked clarifying questions about meeting procedures, and Domain Council meeting/role.</p> <p>LRP was recently reviewed with school and board leadership to ensure progress on all the goals. The LRP is a living document and can shift in timeline/priorities as needed, and will be reported out as relevant. There will be a standing agenda item for board meetings where reports will be made regarding a specific goal.</p> <p>Efforts to deepen climate and culture concerns. Have been in touch with organizations: TMI Project, Call to Men. Hope partner with TMI to do a PD with teachers, train the trainers to bring to classes. In the evening, an event with film and discussion panel.</p> <p>Partner/Collaborate with Say Something (Safe Passage) for the event. Planning in progress. Date ideas: possibly January 24th. Grant application is ready, and waiting for final budget from TMI.</p>	



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	<p>Been working through Bullying and vandalism issues/reports. Rebecca and Chris will be reviewing roles and responsibilities around bullying and behavior.</p> <p>Addressing facilities and long term capital planning.</p> <p>Admin team considering whether Rediker is serving our needs, looking at alternatives.</p>	
Director of T & L Updates	<p>Student Council Efforts - core group of 6-8 interested in student leadership. 20+ kids came to the meeting, had a conversation about forming committees. A 6th grader brought up Equity as an issue, and a few kids are interested in a JEDI committee; some kids interested in Policy; kids interested in Events and community. Great to see so many kids engaged and excited about leadership.</p> <p>Teacher Leadership - started thinking about Grade Reconfiguration, how to use teacher meetings more effectively as a forum to address issues as they come up and increase attendance/engagement. Trying to figure out how to fit in all the PD that they need/want to do. Lily has offered to partner to come up with ideas for how to address these issues/concerns.</p>	
Community and Family Engagement Updates	<p>Winter Fair - great shape, happening Saturday. Need more shift 'owners'.</p> <p>Sweet Swap and Family Dance - went really well, about 90 people attended.</p> <p>Solstice is after winter fair, low ask on community, heavier ask on staff.</p> <p>Bingo possible date 1/31, Mattrey family.</p> <p>Tiffany and Rebecca meeting next week to discuss student recruitment.</p>	
Grade Reconfiguration Process Update	<p>Guided by recommendations of LRP, grade reconfiguration is being addressed. Looking at ways to gather input from all stakeholders. Outline of choices will</p>	



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	be sent to stakeholders, and then brought to the board, possibly by January.	
JEDI check-in	Integrated into discussion previously. Also, thinking about how to better recruit with this in mind. LRP discussions will address (next year, per timeline) our schedule, transportation, free/reduced lunch, after school care.	
HoS Support and Evaluation	Update will be provided at the board meeting.	
BoT Meeting Agenda Check	Kathleen went through items to be included on agenda.	
Agenda items for next month	Recruitment + Admissions Domain Council future.	
Next Meeting Date	Next Meeting: Monday, Jan 6 2025 Meetings start at 8:30. Upcoming Meetings: Monday, February 3 Monday, March 3 Monday, March 31 Monday, May 5 Monday, June 2	
Adjournment	9:45am	



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FINAL: Facilities Committee Meeting Minutes – Monday, Dec 2, 2024 3:15pm

Meeting Location: HCCPS, Greens Classroom

Present: Alex Porter, Chris Kusek, Kelly Vogel, Nan Childs, Rick Stultz

Guests:

Regrets:

Notetaker: Kelly Vogel, Chair

Topic	Discussion	Action (if necessary)
Check-in/ Announcements	Everyone checked in re: holiday Motion to add an item: boys bathroom maintenance (Kelly)	
JEDI	Woven into other conversations.	
Approve November Meeting Minutes	Approved	
Playground update	BOT approved financial allocation to move ahead for playground FOH will send appeal to families for fundraising Member of E'ton Conservation Committee (Eva Gerstle) to come to proposed playground site; Chris in touch with them re next steps. Omasta landscaping/install: They are approved by Compan (name of playground manufacturer) to install	



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	<p>Hilltown to separate site prep/leveling current playground & installation re: cost</p> <p>Possibilities: Union: proposal submitted; awaiting Constraints - apprenticeships stop June 1 Submitting a grant To meet in December re bidding OR: June: Community to demolition Liability Plan C: Landscaping company</p>	
Fix-it/punch list	<p>We reviewed/adjusted the fix-it list for more efficient notifications</p>	
Committee goals for 24-25	<p>Review ways to sustainably address facilities issues</p> <p>Producing a document (for April) with long-term capital/ component replacement needs</p> <p>Use the created document to create an updated facilities tool</p>	
Bathroom maintenance	<p>The window in the middle school boys' bathroom has been the site of ongoing vandalism and concern. After several repairs, a parent has stepped forward to repair it with plexiglass, which is hoped to be a permanent fix.</p>	
Review action items	<p>Reviewed</p>	
Agenda Items for Next Month	<p>HOS update Playground update</p>	



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	Fix it form - how is the new system working?	
Next Meeting Date/Time/Location	1/6/25 - 3:15 2/3/25 - 3:15 3/3 - 3:15 4/7 - 3:15 5/5 - 3:15 6/2 - 3:15	
Adjournment	4:30	

Facilities agenda items for this month's BOT meeting: Kelly/Chris will share committee goals.



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Finance Committee Meeting Minutes- December 4, 2024
8:30 am Zoom - Remote

Present: Chris Kusek, Ben Carlis, Carla Clark, Kylan Mandile, Lisa Plaza, Grace Mrowicki,
Andy Tilbe

Regrets: None

Topic	Discussion	Action
Approve Minutes	Carla motioned to approve September minutes, Chris seconded, minutes approved by consensus	Kylan will submit Nov. minutes for Dec. BoT packet
Capital Expenditure Plan	<p>Chris discussed the playground quotes received from Omasta Landscaping, Compon, and others. The school filed an application with the local union training program for them to do the demolition for free which would provide savings on the project in return for providing the trainees experience. While this will provide savings, the work will need to be done in May/June during the school year.</p> <p>If there is savings from what is budgeted, we need to decide if that is used for additional playground enhancements or if it is left in school reserves.</p> <p>There was a discussion among the committee about what permitting is required.</p>	<p>Chris will continue to coordinate with vendors and will put in a deposit for the equipment to secure a place in the contractor's schedule for the summer.</p> <p>Andy to check with the City of Easthampton regarding permitting requirements.</p>
Committee Goals	Discussed at the prior meeting	Kylan to present goals to BoT
New Business	None	None
Review action items	Done	
Next meeting time/date/location	January 8, 2025 at 8:30 am via Zoom	
Adjournment	9:30am	



HILLTOWN COOPERATIVE
CHARTER PUBLIC SCHOOL

Finance Committee Meeting Minutes- December 4, 2024
8:30 am Zoom - Remote

Present: Chris Kusek, Ben Carlis, Carla Clark, Kylan Mandile, Lisa Plaza, Grace Mrowicki,
Andy Tilbe

Regrets: None

Topic	Discussion	Action
Approve Minutes	Carla motioned to approve September minutes, Chris seconded, minutes approved by consensus	Kylan will submit Nov. minutes for Dec. BoT packet
Capital Expenditure Plan	<p>Chris discussed the playground quotes received from Omasta Landscaping, Compon, and others. The school filed an application with the local union training program for them to do the demolition for free which would provide savings on the project in return for providing the trainees experience. While this will provide savings, the work will need to be done in May/June during the school year.</p> <p>If there is savings from what is budgeted, we need to decide if that is used for additional playground enhancements or if it is left in school reserves.</p> <p>There was a discussion among the committee about what permitting is required.</p>	<p>Chris will continue to coordinate with vendors and will put in a deposit for the equipment to secure a place in the contractor's schedule for the summer.</p> <p>Andy to check with the City of Easthampton regarding permitting requirements.</p>
Committee Goals	Discussed at the prior meeting	Kylan to present goals to BoT
New Business	None	None
Review action items	Done	
Next meeting time/date/location	January 8, 2025 at 8:30 am via Zoom	
Adjournment	9:30am	



GABS Committee Meeting Minutes FINAL – Tues Dec 3, 8:30 am DRAFT

Meeting Location: HCCPS

Present: Emily Boddy; Tiffany Ross; Lindsay Fogg-Willits, Kate Aleo
Guests: Tara Brewster
Regrets: Sara Scheiffelin
Notetaker: Emily

Topic	Discussion	Action (if necessary)
Check-in/ Announcements	<p>Check-in</p> <p>Discussed Goal about fundraising as an overview for our guest, Tara Brewster. Tara notes that fundraising needs to be a priority as a throughline on the board, but recognizes that not everyone has this skill. Finding ways to engage people who aren't comfortable asking for money, eg sharing contacts with someone who is comfortable asking.</p>	<p>Emily will announce to BoT at Wednesday's meeting.</p>
JEDI	<p>Woven into other discussions</p>	
Approve Nov 2024 Minutes	<p>Approved by consensus.</p>	
Onboarding new member proposal for the BoT - Discussion and Decision.	<p>Steve Sell will be onboarded at our December meeting per the recommendation of GABS and with support from school leadership and board leadership.</p>	
Succession Planning + Recruitment, Discussion	<p>Tara asks: what is the dream list of who would be ideal community members. Has offered to help make introductions. Would like to see lists of</p>	<p>Tiffany will do parent/grandparent, staff lists for Tara.</p>



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	<p>people with relationships to the school: families, vendors, prior sponsors of events we've done.</p> <p>Tara contacted Owen Zaret regarding Lathrop.</p> <p>Start to compile an alum network and send a letter about needs - money, board, involvement.</p> <p>Emily will connect back with Jake Hooker re interest in joining our board as a community member.</p> <p>Tara asks about whether we host tours, eg to community members as prospective board involvement or funding. Highest success rate in terms of board members, committee members, donations has been through tours. Dates are set, and people populate the tours (eg about 10 people).</p>	<p>Tiffany will ask FoH provide previous sponsors to Tara.</p> <p>Emily will check with Carla about a vendor list to show to Tara.</p> <p>Tiffany will look into tour idea with school leadership.</p>
Annual Meeting Date and Event plan - Discussion and Decision	<p>Annual Meeting date poll went out and March 26 is the chosen date. Emily will announce at Dec board meeting.</p>	<p>Tiffany will connect with Nicole, Nick and Felicia about engagement.</p>
Board Book Organizational Plan, Discussion	<p>Table this until next month. Emily will connect with Kathleen about progress.</p> <p>Adjacent to this, Kate will get photos and bios and work with Grace to get onto the website.</p>	<p>Emily will connect about progress with KH on this.</p>
New Business	<p>Board Book Organizational Plan</p> <p>Update on Succession Planning action steps</p> <p>Annual Meeting Planning</p>	
Next Meeting Date/Time/Location	<p>Meeting dates for the year: Jan 7 ; Feb 4; Mar 4; April 1; May 6; June 3 @8:30am</p>	
Adjournment	<p>9:54 am</p>	



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Agenda items for next month:

GABS agenda items for next BOT meeting:



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JEDI Committee Meeting Minutes- Dec 5th, 2024
8:00 - 9:00 a.m.

Present: Kathleen Szegda, Garrett Washington, Seth Harwood, Tom Chang, Chris Korcazk

Guests: Grace Mrowicki, Emilie Woodward

Regrets: Rebecca Belcher-Timme

Topic	Discussion	Action
Approve November Minutes	Minutes approved	
Student JEDI Weekly Survey Question Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pre-teaching students – what counts as slur• Prepare staff – how to respond; cheat sheet• Tom created draft survey questions with team at his work• Ask if students if they would like to own with support• 3 committees for student council – JEDI is one	
Next Steps	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tom will work on refining the questions• Emilie run questions by students at JEDI committee – next mtg 12/10 11:30 – 12:10• Chris and Rebecca will work on finding time for staff with Tom	Kathleen or Garrett will try to attend student JEDI Committee meeting
Next meeting time/date/location	1/24 from 9:30 – 10:30 a.m.	
Adjournment	The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 a.m.	