

Hill Country Montessori April 21, 2009 Board Meeting Agenda

• = Agenda Item

OUR VISION

Hill Country Montessori is a place where students, teachers, parents, and administrators work cooperatively to guide a diverse group of students towards their potential as happy, healthy, contributing members of their community while maintaining their optimism about their ability to change the world for the better.

Through a model place-based Montessori educational program, the students' creative, personal, social, academic, and spiritual needs are met as they grow to respect themselves, others, and their world.

OUR MISSION

The mission of HCM is to operate a pre-K through 12th grade place-based community school founded on Montessori educational principals, in an atmosphere of cooperative, active, "real world" learning. The school encourages diversity among its students and within its educational programs. The school's educational objectives are measurable, and its culture is supportive of teachers who want to work there and students who want to study there. The participation of teachers in the governance of HCM is a founding principle of the school and critical to its success. The school's facilities are aesthetically pleasing and contribute to its academic success.

OUR UNIQUENESS

Our foundation rests upon a deep respect for the individual child. Each student's own learning styles, interests, and motivations guide us as we teach, coach, encourage, and challenge our students to do and be their best academically, socially, and emotionally. Mistakes are natural steps in the learning process, not as a reason for personal condemnation. Sharing struggles is part of education.

Our students discover the stories of home by investigating local natural and cultural surroundings. We actively form partnerships with local social and environmental organizations striving to study, enhance and protect the natural and cultural landscapes of the Hill Country region. This "sense of place," the connection, familiarity, and intimacy with our local surroundings teaches us the consequences of our actions and deepens our commitment to making a positive impact on our local, national, and global community.

HCM believes in the preeminence of community. We seek out and explore differences as we learn to bridge these variances among individuals, places and ideas. We actively seek diversity in all categories. We all work to help our fellow classmates and do not define our work through competition or struggling for preeminence.

We actively model life-long learning by offering integrated adult education programs administered by Institute for Place-Based Education. Students experience first-hand adults coming together to learn, study, and share the interests and knowledge. We offer opportunities for adults to engage with both the pedagogy of place and the complex stories contained in our home place on the Piedmont of Georgia. We offer opportunities for teachers to learn how to integrate our best practices within their own educational institutions.

The faculty at HCM believes we are a world-class institution home to world-class students, who will further their education at world-class colleges and universities.

FUNCTIONAL AREAS

These areas come from Tim Seldin of the Montessori Foundation. All of these areas are interrelated and some tasks do not fit neatly into just one of them. But discussing these different areas reminds us that we must strive to improve in each and every one of these areas.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

The top priority is to maintain an model educational program bounded in core Montessori principles with an emphasis on providing each student a strong Sense of Place. Our Educational Program will be constantly evaluated and improved using researched methods that give our students every opportunity to explore their creative, intellectual, and personal growth. All aspects of our environment will reflect an abiding commitment to Montessori principles by placing the child's needs first. This area shall maintain precedence over the other areas.

- Educational Program Update
 - Need: Establish a committee focused on pedagogy made up of the headmaster and lead teachers. Should meet regularly. Unresolved difference may be brought to the Board for discussion.
 - Necessary classroom materials for the 09-10 school year total \$5135.
 - Neinhaus orders need to be placed before end of school year.
 - Pmt. at delivery – incorporate into monthly cash flow projections.
 - All proceeds from May Day fundraiser will go toward materials.

FACULTY

HCM will continue its practice of hiring superior faculty. In addition to a strong respect for children, the faculty will demonstrate exceptional mastery of Montessori pedagogy and curriculum. Faculty members will embrace opportunities to extend their learning, which will be offered in an ample variety of formal and informal avenues. Faculty members who want to pursue research, publishing and dissemination opportunities will be encouraged and supported. Salaries, benefits and working conditions will combine to ensure minimal faculty turnover and a consistent experience for students. Faculty will be involved in helping to determine the policies of HCM. HCM is committed to giving teachers the resources they need to fulfill their mission towards every child, including those with special needs. Teachers should have adequate and equitable classroom planning and preparation time.

- Faculty Update
 - Current full-time teachers: Lisa Miles, primary; Mary Bradner, primary; Kelly Whisenhunt, lower elementary; Jennifer Dorrell, upper elementary.
 - Current part-time teachers: Leonard Presberg, middle; Cliffard Blizard, middle & place-based education; Jodi Henderson, art; Katie Schnell, spanish; Rachel Shaw, music.
 - Note: Ms. Whisenhunt and Ms. Dorrell also participate in middle school part time. Middle school is taught by a team of part-time specialists.
 - School is pursuing an opportunity to bring an U.G.A. Ph.d. Student onto the middle school teaching team.

ADMINISTRATION

The administration of Hill Country Montessori will meet the highest standards of education, certification and professionalism. The professional development and personal growth of administrative staff are supported enthusiastically. Clear lines of communication will help ensure that the administration is attuned to the needs of children, parents, faculty and the broader community.

- Administration Update
 - Current: Leonard Presberg, Head Master; Shon Henderson, Operations Coordinator; Cynthia Gill-Wall, Administrative Assistant.
 - Need: Establish an organizational chart.

GOVERNANCE

The Board will consist of a mix of individuals who collectively possess the skills necessary to fulfill the needs of the school. The board will be nominated through a careful selection process, matching their skills to the needs of the school, balancing their expertise and experience, and for their willingness to commit time and other resources to HCM. Board members serve as ambassadors of the school and take an active role in cultivating community partnerships as well as in fundraising. The Board provides strategic long-term leadership and hires the Headmaster to implement the school's goals.

- General Guidelines on Board Role (See Attached)
 - Need: Establish transparency of Board functions to school community.
 - Minutes to be recorded by Operations Coordinator, Shon Henderson.
 - Minutes to be posted on school info bulletin board and website.
 - Need: Summarize decisions made and decisions outstanding at the close of each Board meeting to ensure clarity and agreement on issues.
- Board Development
 - Current Board members and roles: Leonard Presberg, Headmaster; Clifford Blizzard, Place-Based Education; Jennifer Dorrell, academics; John Miles, financial committee; Clint Pardue, financial committee; Tom Reed, community development.
 - Need: Officially document Board members.
 - Discussed the need to be able to attract new Board members from the community who will be able to provide expertise and assist with a capital campaign.
- School Committees
 - Current: Financial; Montessori Parents' Group
 - Need to be established: Pedagogy; Enrollment; Development-Capital Fund; Facilities

SCHOOL COMMUNITY/PARENTS

Parents will choose HCM because they understand our approach to education and believe it is in the best interest of their child or children. Parents will participate in all aspects of the operation of the school, from governance through volunteering in the classroom. Parents will participate in educational programs designed to help them understand our approach to education and how it can best be supported in the home from infancy through adolescence. Parents will be well informed of what is going on at the school and in the community.

- Montessori Parent Group
 - Was established in March 2009. Kathleen Barlow is President.
 - Meets a critical need for a liaison between the school and the parents.
 - Fundraising events such as May Day fall under this committee.

ADMISSIONS

HCM will strive to enroll students of families that are a match for our vision and programs and will thrive in our self-directed, multi-age, Montessori learning environment. The student body will mirror the rich economic / cultural / ethnic / racial / linguistic diversity of metro Atlanta.

- Enrollment Figures

	2008-2009	2009-2010 paid or committed
Half-Day Primary	6	2
Full-Day Primary	6	8
Lower Elementary	10	10
Upper Elementary	10	11
Middle	5	6

- Enrollment Projections and Goals
 - Need: Real projection numbers for coming year and future growth.
- Developing a Marketing Committee
 - Should be an Enrollment Committee which encompasses marketing.

DEVELOPMENT

HCM shall generate sufficient financial resources to insure the sustained ability of the School to provide the highest-quality Montessori education to the broadest possible spectrum of children. The school should serve all elements of its community, regardless of ability to pay.

- Mayday Update
 - Plans for event are complete. There are not enough parent volunteers at this point to fill positions.
 - Discussed possibility of adding volunteer requirements to parent enrollment contract.

- Developing a Fundraising Committee
 - Should be a Development Committee to focus on establishing a Capital Fund.

FINANCE

The Board and administration will fully understand the need to make decisions that ensure the on-going financial health and viability of the school, including planning for unforeseen contingencies. Decisions about the growth of the school will prudently balance the need for additional revenue, the necessity of keeping tuition affordable, and the desire to keep HCM a small community with close relationships. A detailed facilities maintenance and expansion plan will help guard against catastrophic unbudgeted expenses. HCM will endeavor to turn away no child solely for lack of financial resources and shall endeavor to provide its teachers a reasonable salary and benefits package. Procedures will allow for accurately monitoring spending and comparing to projected figures. All legal and financial requirements will be met.

- Current Year Financial Reports
 - Cash is available to cover operating expenses through the start of the 09-10 school year.
 - Discussed possibility of increase in pre-paid tuition discounts to increase cash flow for capital improvements.
 - Need: Establish method to accept credit cards for tuition.
- 2009-2010 Operating Budget
- Capital Budget
 - Ballpark estimate for necessary building improvements, septic work, modular classrooms, and site work is \$50,000-60,000.
 - Need to address cash flow issue. Will have to pull revenue together and possibly finance a portion of the work.

PHYSICAL PLANT

All building/physical space efforts should be made with the following overall principles:

- Support the educational program. The educational program and needs of the child are the foremost priority*
- Be Green. All efforts should be made to ensure the most environmentally responsible/sustainable buildings and materials are used.*
- Value Aesthetics. Aesthetics are important. Children should be surrounded by beauty. (And it helps in marketing)*
- Maintain Seamlessness between the Indoor and the Outdoor. All spaces should be designed to provide usable outdoor spaces and allow the children free access to the outdoors.*

- Facilities Update
 - Septic system design work by SEI has begun. School is waiting on rough design. After school approval, soil tests will be completed and the final design will be drawn. SEI will apply for Fulton County permit at which time the School will begin the bid process.
 - Architectural plans underway: Necessary renovations to current buildings; DHR specific plans for Primary bldg.; Modular classrooms and common area/entrance; Site work and improvements.

- Bids and estimates to be completed for each plan and compiled into Capital budget.
- Discussed several possibilities for classroom arrangement within current buildings and proposed modular classrooms.
- Facilities committee will be formed as becomes needed.

TACTICAL PLANNING MEETING

- What: A working meeting to address school goals, organization, finances, enrollment, facilities and other issues.
- When: Friday, May 8th at a conference room to be determined. Time tbd.
- Who: Board members, Headmaster, lead teachers, Op. Coordinator, MPG president.
 - Substitutes needed for teachers during school hours.

GENERAL GUIDELINES ON BOARD ROLE

In general, the board:

- determines ends, not means
- provides strategic leadership, not operational decision-making, and,
- monitors performance, not manages operations.

Specifically, the Board:

- defines the Mission of the school and the school's guiding principles based on the Montessori philosophy
- develops and regularly reviews the strategic plan in conjunction with stakeholders and management and regularly evaluate operating plans, programs and activities against the overall direction
- provides direction and planning for the whole school overall to translate the school's vision and mission into objectives and goals that can be accomplished and measured.
- establishes specific long-term priorities
- ensures effective operational management by selecting the school's Headmaster and acting as a sounding Board for the Headmaster
- defines overall operating policies and guidelines when requested by the headmaster
- reviews and, once suitable, approves the Annual Budget consistent with the Strategic Plan in order to ensure adequate resources are available to meet goals and objectives
- monitors the use of resources through regular financial and other reports and in connection with budgets and through familiarity with the school's operating environment
- assumes a key role in fund raising for the school.
- serves as ambassadors for the school, developing positive public awareness to ensure a healthy and accurate public image for the school and the Montessori approach to education
- governs with one voice with an emphasis on long term goals.