HYBRID WORKSHOP/VOTING MEETING MINUTES
HIGHLAND PARK BOARD OF EDUCATION
HIGHLAND PARK, NEW JERSEY

September 14, 2026

6:30 p.m. via Zoom - https://zoom.us/j/94217817160 and in-person at the Middle School

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AGENDA:

1. Call to Order

2. Announcement of Notice

Ms. Ann Vardeman, President, called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. The New Jersey Open Public Meetings Act was enacted to ensure the right of the public to have advance notice of and to attend the meetings of the public bodies at which any business affecting their interest is discussed or acted upon. In compliance with the Open Public Meetings Act, the Highland Park Board of Education has caused notice of this meeting setting forth the time, date, and location to be submitted for publication to the Home News Tribune and Courier News and posted on the Board's website at least 48 hours in advance of this meeting. Members of the public who wish to address the Board will be given the opportunity to do so before the Board adjourns for the evening.

3. Roll Call

Members Present: Ms. Ann Vardeman, President; Ms. Marilyn Pruce, Vice-President; Dr. Dan Battey; Mr. Francisco Maldonado; Dr. Sara Pixley; Dr. Ethan Schoolman and Ms. Nicole Stanio.

Absent: Ms. Allison Casal-Dunn and Dr. Monique Coleman
Arrived: Dr. Monique Coleman 6:47p.m.

Also Present: Dr. Kristina Susca, Superintendent
Mrs. Denise DeRosa, Business Administrator/Board Secretary

Student Representatives Absent: N/A

4. Pledge of Allegiance

5. Public Comment

The Highland Park Board of Education welcomes public participation and has reserved this time for your comments on any school related issue or topic. (Board Policy #0167 establishes and regulates the right of the public to participate in public meetings.)

Max Warren, South Second Avenue - Expressed concern about the Bartle Media Specialist and School Nurse staffing. Concerned about New Jersey staffing in general for media specialists and nursing. He asked the board to clear up a few questions about these issues.

6. New Business

Ann Vardeman - Bartle Media Specialist position is going to be discussed during the committee meeting on September 15, 2026. Dr. Susca explained that the position was posted twice and she could not discuss the personnel challenges. More information will be forthcoming after the committee meeting. Dr. Schoolman asked about the funding for the position. Dr. Pixley asked about the application pool.

Dr. Schoolman raised a concern from comunications using “Lady Owls” as a reference to the girls sports teams. They found it not necessary and offensive. Dr. Susca has reassured that it was a one time event and they are not referred to as such going forward. Dr. Schoolman communicated that the publicity for the football team is getting more attention than other teams on social media. Ms. Vardeman said the social media policy will be reviewed at the Equity and Excellence meeting to cover this issue. Dr. Susca followed up that we need to have a stronger policy on this issue to implement continuity.
Dr. Battey expressed his opinion on how the board engages with the public and is concerned about misinformation spread to the public. Ms. Pruce explained how public comment is conducted during a meeting and that section is for the public to speak. The new and old business section of the meeting is where answers can be addressed or email communications would be sent at a later date if there is not a quick answer at that point. The board discussed communications with the public and will decide how they will go forward.

7. Old Business

Ms. Stanio - Mentioned the difference in technology usage between Bartle and Middle School with chromebooks. Dr. Susca found that the damage to the chromebooks is significantly higher at the Middle School versus Bartle School. Leadership decided not to have students bring chromebooks during lunch and recess to minimize damage and engage in games and structured play at the middle school. Bartle already has that set up. If a student needs a chromebook for homework during lunch or recess then they are working that out. It is a work in progress with the new procedures. The board discussed culture and climate restrictions on devices across the district to be consistent and would discuss in committee.
Ms. Vardeman followed up with the AI question in google docs. Dr. Susca explained that Gemini is not enabled in our workspace environment. Gemini settings look like it's turned on but we do not pay for this application and hope that this clarifies the questions. More investigation is possibly needed.
Ms. Stanio - Mentioned Bartle start time is still difficult for families. Dr. Susca explained walking and transportation is an ongoing conversation with the state for funding and the mayor for hazardous transportation. Attendance is better at Bartle than it's been in 2 years but she can review with leadership. Discussion about AI usage among board members.

8. Recess to Executive Session

The Board of Education recessed the meeting at 7:18 p.m.

Be It Resolved, pursuant to the Sunshine Act, N.J.S.A. 10:4-12 and 13, the Highland Park Board of Education will now meet in closed session to discuss matters related to a personnel matter. These exemptions are permitted to be discussed in closed session in accordance with N.J.S.A. 10:4-13. Information regarding the Board’s closed session discussion will be disclosed to the public as soon as the need for confidentiality no longer exists. Please note, the Board will be adjourning from the executive session.

9. Adjournment

The Board of Education adjourned the meeting at 7:59 p.m.

Moved: Ann Vardeman Seconded: Dan Battey Vote: 8-0-1
Absent: Ms. Allison Casal-Dunn

Respectfully submitted,

Denise M. DeRosa
Business Administrator/Board Secretary

Acknowledged by:

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Board President

2026-2027 Highland Park Board of Education Goals

Accountability for Student Achievement

The Highland Park Board of Education will support the Pathways to Excellence 2025-2026 Strategic Plan by working in collaboration with district leadership to systematically review and enhance the district's action plans developed to support our strategic goals, ensuring alignment with our district's vision, mission, and objectives.

The Board will:

- Review policies or new recommended policies (e.g. attendance, academic integrity, use of A.I.), and make necessary revisions based on current research, data, and recommendations to promote positive academic, social and emotional outcomes.
- Approve curricula updates and/or professional development plans that:
    - Provide essential learning tools, technology and rigorous curricula.
    - Expand equitable access to challenging coursework.
    - Create inclusive, culturally responsive, identity-affirming environments, and include evidence-based and measurable strategies to reduce racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic disparities.
- Analyze district academic, attendance, and climate data several times per year to evaluate current strategies.
- Meet with the mayor’s office several times during the 2025-2026 school year to exchange information on district facility needs, documenting outcomes and action items.

Communication of Vision & Goals

The Highland Park Board of Education will strengthen communication efforts to ensure the vision, mission, and goals are clearly articulated to all district stakeholders and progress updates are communicated.

The Board will:

- Publish a monthly public update through the district website, email list, and social media summarizing key board actions and upcoming opportunities for community input.
- Highlight staff and student achievements in several public communications (newsletter, social media, or board meeting recognitions) during the school year.
- Share updates on district challenges and progress at every regular board meeting.
- Increase family participation in surveys, focus groups, and advisory groups with targeted outreach to historically underrepresented groups.