Minutes Regular Meeting January 29, 2026

CALL TO ORDER: 6:30 PM

FLAG SALUTE

NOTICE OF MEETING:

Pursuant to the Open Public Meetings Act, adequate notice of this meeting has been provided as follows: by having the time, date and place of the meeting posted on the bulletin board in the Administration Building January 6, 2026; by sending a copy of the meeting notice to the Star Ledger Newspaper and The Local Source on January 12, 2026; and by filing a copy with the Township of Hillside and Hillside Public Library January 6, 2026.

ROLL CALL:

Best	6:30 p.m.		Parks	6:30 p.m.	
Egwaikhide	6:30 p.m.		Shapiro	6:31 p.m.	
Estremera	6:30 p.m.		Dr. Howard	6:30 p.m.	
Hargrave	6:30 p.m.		Dr. Pérez	6:30 p.m.	
Horton-Givens	6:30 p.m.		Hamlin	6:30 p.m.	
Okai	6:32 p.m.		McNeil	6:30 p.m.	

Announcements

A Human Trafficking Awareness event was announced. The Board acknowledged the maintenance staff for snow removal efforts.

Superintendent's Report

The Superintendent acknowledged the maintenance staff for snow cleanup efforts.

Presentations

- **Student Representative Report** – Provided updates on current school activities.
- **Student Band** – Introduced by Evelyn Okparaeke.
- **Student Data Presentation** – Kristy Tuminelli presented NJSLA data.

Public comment opened at **7:21 PM** motioned by Ms. Parks and seconded by Ms. Best.

Candy Dale-Rawls
Expressed gratitude and appreciation for those who participated in the toy drive, noting that over 1,000 families were served.

Angela Lawler
Presented a resolution opposing the charter school application submitted to open in Hillside.

Aruna Mathura
Announced that in March she will be hosting a female empowerment luncheon.

Public comment were closed at **7:32 PM**. Motioned by Ms. Best and seconded by Ms. Parks.

Committee Reports

- Finance – Reported by Ms. Egwaikhide
- Buildings & Grounds – Reported by Mr. Okai
- Labor – Reported by Ms. Best
- Education – Reported by Ms. Horton-Givens

Motion was made by Ms. Parks and seconded by Mr. Okai to enter Executive Session at **7:34 p.m.** for the purpose of discussing matters permitted under the Open Public Meetings Act.

The Board returned to Open Session at **8:28 p.m.**

FINANCE – Shapiro/Egwaikhide/Hargrave

1. Motion to approve the minutes of the Regular Meeting held on December 17, 2025.

2. Motion to approve line-item transfers.

3. Motion to approve the payment of bills subject to the availability of funds.

4. Motion to approve September 2025 & October 2025 Board Secretary's Reports.

5. Motion to approve the September 2025 & October 2025 Cash Reports.

6. Motion to approve the acceptance and appropriation of $500,000 in district-specific additional State Aid for the 2025–2026 school year, as awarded pursuant to the FY26 Appropriations Act, P.L.2025, c.74, for Capital Improvements, as authorized by the New Jersey Department of Education letter dated July 24, 2025.

   Be it further moved that, pursuant to N.J.A.C. 6A:23A-13.3(d), the Board of Education approves the appropriation of this unbudgeted State Aid and authorizes the School Business Administrator/Board Secretary to:

   - Record the revenue as Other State Aid, account 10-3190, and
   - Appropriate and transfer the funds to the Capital Projects Fund (Fund 30) in accordance with applicable accounting standards and NJDOE guidance.

   Be it further moved that the School Business Administrator/Board Secretary is authorized to make all necessary budgetary and accounting entries and to comply with all required NJDOE reporting and data collection requirements related to the use of these funds.

FINANCE – Shapiro/Egwaikhide/Hargrave (continued)

Motion: Mr. Shapiro Second: Ms. Egwaikhide

	Yes	No	Ab.		Yes	No	Ab.
Best	X			Okai	X		
Egwaikhide	X			Parks	X		
Estremera			X	Shapiro	X		
Hargrave	X			Dr. Howard	X		
Horton-Givens	X						

Motions 1 to 6 carried. 8 Yes 0 No 1 Abstention

BUILDINGS & GROUNDS – Egwaikhide/Best/Okai

1. Motion to approve the following resolution:

Whereas the Hillside Board of Education advertised for bids for the Auditorium HVAC Upgrades at Hillside High School, and

Whereas on December 16, 2025 the Board one bid received six bids for the Project;

Whereas upon review of the bid by the Board attorney, the bid received from EACM Corp. in the amount of $1,130,000.00 with alternate bid with a deduction of $138,000.00 was determined to be non-responsive, pursuant to N.J.S.A. N.J.S.A. 18A:18A-2(y) for failure to list sub-contractors and include the Affidavit of Non-Collusion; and

Whereas upon review of the bid by the Board attorney, the bid received from Reiner Group, Inc. in the amount of $1,188,000.00 with alternate bid with a deduction of $162,000.00 was determined to be non-responsive, pursuant to N.J.S.A. N.J.S.A. 18A:18A-2(y) for failure to provide SDA Pre-Qualification or Bidder Certification for a sub-contractor and DBC Form 701 "Total Amount of Uncompleted Contracts" for another; and

Whereas upon review of the bid by the Board attorney, the bid received from TM Brennan Service, Inc. in the amount of $1,192,000.00 with alternate bid with a deduction of $165,000.00 was determined to be non-responsive, pursuant to N.J.S.A. N.J.S.A. 18A:18A-2(y) for failure to provide Affidavit of No Material Adverse Change for multiple sub-contractors; and

Whereas the bids received from Envirocon LLC in the amount of $1,212,500.00 with alternate bid with a deduction of $143,400.00; AMCO Enterprises in the amount of $1,382,000.00 with alternate bid with a deduction of $182,000.00; and K&D Contractors LLC. in the amount of $1,628,520.00 with alternate bid with a deduction of $104,550.00, were determined to exceed the project budget;

Now therefore, be it resolved that the Board hereby rejects the bids for the Project as non-responsive and/or in excess of the project budget;

Be it further resolved that the Business Administrator and Architect is hereby authorized to re-bid the Project.

BUILDINGS & GROUNDS – Egwaikhide/Best/Okai (continued)

Motion: Ms. Egwaikhide Second: Ms. Best

	Yes	No	Ab.		Yes	No	Ab.
Best	X			Okai	X		
Egwaikhide	X			Parks	X		
Estremera	X			Shapiro	X		
Hargrave	X			Howard	X		
Horton-Givens	X						

Motion 1 carried. 9 Yes 0 No 0 Abstentions

EDUCATION - Horton-Givens/Best//Okai

1. Motion to accept the recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools and approve the Training and Seminars, Conventions and Conferences for the district. The board has determined that the travel is directly related to and within the scope of the employees' duties or responsibilities; that participation in the program or event is critical to the instructional needs of the district or furthers the efficient operation of the district; and that the travel is in compliance with the district policy on travel.
   (Attachment ED#1-01/26).

2. Motion to accept the Superintendent's Report of Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying (HIB): zero (0) cases for December 17, 2025, through January 29, 2026.

3. Motion to accept the recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools and approve the Special Education request for Related Services/Out of District Placements as attached. (Attachment ED#2-01/26)

4. Motion to approve the placement of Student #4622420323 at Alif Muhammed's Nia School for the
   2025–2026 school year, at a tuition cost not to exceed $2,000, subject to the receipt and review of a fully executed contract satisfactory to the Board Attorney and School Business Administrator, and to authorize the district to provide or arrange for student transportation in accordance with district policy and applicable law. Transfer date effective February 2, 2026.

5. Motion to approve the placement of Student #7506821663 at Alif Muhammed's Nia School for the
   2025–2026 school year, at a tuition cost not to exceed $2,000, subject to the receipt and review of a fully executed contract satisfactory to the Board Attorney and School Business Administrator, and to authorize the district to provide or arrange for student transportation in accordance with district policy and applicable law. Transfer date effective February 2, 2026.

6. Motion to accept the recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools and approve the Hillside Public Schools District School-Based Fundraisers. (Attachment ED#3-01/26).

EDUCATION - Horton-Givens/Best//Okai (continued)

7. Motion to accept the recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools and approve the Hillside Public Schools District Class Trip Requests. (Attachment ED#4-01/26).

8. Motion to accept the recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools for the School Board's first reading and approval of the World Language K - 12 Curriculum Guides for the Hillside Public Schools District. (Attachment ED#5-01/26)

9. Motion to accept the recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools and approve the Alternative High School Agreement between the Hillside Board of Education and Union County Vocational -Technical School District to provide a suitable specialized alternative educational program for students with drug and alcohol dependencies for the 2025 – 2026 school year. This agreement shall be for a term of one year ending June 30, 2026. (Attachment ED#6-01/26)

10. Motion to accept the recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools and approve the agreement between the Hillside Public Schools District and Mission Driven Education and Leadership Strategies for Individual School Leader Support. Effective February 2026, through June 2026, at a total cost not to exceed $5,000. (Attachment ED#7-01/26)

11. Motion to accept the recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools and approve Hurden Looker Elementary School's nomination submission to be selected for a Starlab visit to explore immersive STEM learning, Earth science, meteorology, astronomy, and more --- free of charge. No cost to apply.
(Attachment ED#8-01/26)

12. Motion to accept the recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools and apply for the New Jersey Learning Acceleration Program: High-Impact Tutoring Grant - Cohort 3. The grant project term is from May 1, 2026, through May 31, 2027. The total grant amount is $160,000. No cost to apply.
(Attachment ED#9-01/26)

13. Motion to accept the recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools and apply for the Sustainable New Jersey Grants Program funded by PSE&G. The total grant amount is $10,000. No cost to apply.
(Attachment ED#10-01/26)

14. Motion to accept the recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools and apply for the Climate Literacy for Community Resilience Continuation Grant. The grant project term is from June 1, 2026, through May 31, 2027. The total grant amount is $160,000. No cost to apply.(Attachment ED#11-01/26)

EDUCATION - Horton-Givens/Best//Okai (continued)

15. Motion to accept the recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools and approve Hurden Looker Elementary School's application for the NJSBF Peer Mediation Mini-Grant (2025-2026). Grant awards are available in amounts up to $500. Awards can be used for training supplies, materials, awards, giveaways, snacks, refreshments, or stipends for students. (Attachment ED#12-01/26)

16. Motion to accept the recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools and approve Hurden Looker Elementary School's application for an NJ STEM Month Mini-Grant (March 2026). Grant amounts are available in amounts up to $500 to amplify the impact of school events and programming. Activities can include hosting costs such as snacks, meals, transportation, and materials. (Attachment ED#13-01/26)

17. Motion to accept the recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools and approve Hurden Looker Elementary School's acceptance of grant awards from Young Audiences Arts for Learning through the Frank & Lydia Bergen Foundation Classical Music Grant. Young Audiences will provide two live music performance assemblies (Musiquita) on Friday, February 20, 2026. (Attachment ED#14-01/26)

18. Motion to accept the recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools and approve the purchase of the Genesis Lesson Planner at a total cost of $1687.50. Teachers will have access to the Oncourse lesson planner until June 30, 2026. Genesis Lesson Planner will be the main lesson planning tool for the Hillside Public Schools District for the 2026-2027 School Year. (Attachment ED#15-01/26)

19. Motion to accept the recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools and approve the agreement between the Hillside Board of Education and Sage Thrive, Inc. (Thrive, Thrive Alliance Group) to provide one full-time school-based mental health clinician to provide counseling services to students in the Hillside Public Schools District, effective January 1, 2026, through June 30, 2026.
(Attachment ED#16-01/26)

20. Motion to accept the recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools and approve KGC Consulting, Inc. to provide trauma-informed professional development services to Hillside Public Schools District, focused on strengthening staff capacity to understand and respond to student behavior through a trauma-informed lens at a total cost of $9600. Funding from the disproportionality account. Effective Period: January 2026 – June 2026. (Attachment ED#17-01/26)

21. Motion for the Hillside Board of Education to present a Resolution at a Human Trafficking Awareness program taking place at the Hillside Township Recreation Center. The program is hosted by the New Jersey Coalition Against Human Trafficking, Winceyco, and the New Jersey Office of the Attorney General to raise awareness about the signs and consequences of human trafficking. The Board supports the goals and ideals of observing a Month of Human Trafficking Prevention Awareness during January of each year. (Attachment ED#18-01/26)

EDUCATION - Horton-Givens/Best//Okai (continued)

22. Motion to approve the following resolution:

RESOLUTION OPPOSING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE HILLSIDE CHARTER SCHOOL

RESOLVED by the Hillside Board of Education, County of Union, State of New Jersey, that:

WHEREAS, on or about January 2026, unknown parties began advertising for the Hillside Charter School, which has not yet been approved by the State of New Jersey; and

WHEREAS, opening a charter school could divert resources and students from our existing public schools, potentially leading to a decline in their quality and services; and

WHEREAS, the Hillside Public Schools are already excellent; and

WHEREAS, our town prides itself on its strong sense of community and unity, and introducing a charter school might create divisions among residents, particularly those with vested interests in our public school system; and

WHEREAS, the Hillside community at large has repeatedly revisited the issue of establishing a charter school over the past three years, and there is widespread fatigue and frustration with continuing to debate a proposal that has not demonstrated clear benefits for our students or our district; and

WHEREAS, we have not seen compelling evidence or data indicating a pressing need for an additional school in our town, and our public schools, while not perfect, have consistently shown commitment to addressing the diverse needs of our students; and

WHEREAS, charter schools operate with a degree of autonomy, which raises concerns about transparency, accountability, and adherence to educational standards and regulations; and

WHEREAS, the overall evidence regarding charter school academic performance is mixed, and there is no guarantee that a new charter school in Hillside would offer superior educational outcomes compared to existing public schools; and

WHEREAS, resources should be directed toward strengthening and supporting our existing public schools rather than establishing a new charter school;

BE IT RESOLVED that the Hillside Board of Education urges all parties to consider the broader implications and potential consequences of introducing a charter school and hereby stands in opposition to the proposed Hillside Charter School.

EDUCATION - Horton-Givens/Best//Okai (continued)

Motion: Ms. Horton-Givens Second: Ms. Hargrave

	Yes	No	Ab.		Yes	No	Ab.
Best	X			Okai	X		
Egwaikhide	X			Parks	X		
Estremera	X			Shapiro	X		
Hargrave	X			Dr. Howard	X		
Horton-Givens	X						

Motions 1 to 22 carried. 9 Yes 0 No 0 Abstentions

LABOR RELATIONS – Best/Shapiro/Hargrave

Resignations/Retirements/Terminations

1. Motion to accept the resignation of Jennifer Gaymes, Nurse at APM/ECC, effective January 31, 2026. (D.O.H. 9/1/25) posting #1665-1/13/26
2. Motion to accept the resignation of Ashley Gabriel, Secretary at HIA, effective February 1, 2026. (D.O.H. 9/1/25)
3. Motion to accept the resignation of Grezel Gonzalez, aide at APM/ECC, effective December 30, 2025. (D.O.H. 9/7/22)

Upon the recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools:

Appointments – For all new hires, employment is conditioned upon completion of a criminal history background check pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:6-7.1 of N.J.S.A. 18A:6-7.1(b)

4. **WHEREAS,** this Board of Education accepts the recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools, and approves the appointment of the listed personnel for the 2025-2026 School Year and that these appointments shall be charged to the appropriate line-item account pursuant to the negotiated agreement with the Hillside Education Association; and

   WHEREAS, these appointments are subject to criminal history background checks, effective as indicated, and subject to sixty (60) day termination notice; and

   WHEREAS, N.J.S.A. 18A:6-7.6 et seq., requires school districts to review the employment history of prospective employees to ascertain allegations of child abuse or sexual misconduct; and

   WHEREAS, the following prospective employees in the Hillside School District have provided the necessary information regarding his/her employment history for review by the district in accordance with N.J.S.A. 18A:6-7.7; and

   WHEREAS, the Hillside Board of Education has commenced, but not concluded, a review of these employees' employment history; and

   WHEREAS, these employees have provided a written certification/statement concerning his/her employment history as required by N.J.S.A. 18A:6-7.7; and

   WHEREAS, these employees have received notice that if he/she has willfully provided false information or willfully failed to disclose any information required by N.J.S.A. 18A:6-7.7, et

seq., he/she is subject to all penalties provided by law, including, but not limited to N.J.S.A. 18A:6-7.8.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Hillside Board of Education hereby appoints the following employees to their respective positions in the district, subject to the above enumerated conditions:

Certificated

a) Anjali Modi, Speech Therapist for Student Support Services, at an annual salary of $79,520 Step 9, MA Guide prorated for the period to be determined through June 30, 2026, pending completion of all required pre-employment clearances, including receipt of fingerprints. (Replacing C. Sadat-Ketabchi)

b) Amatullah Foushee, PreK Teacher for APM/ECC, at an annual salary of $74,820 step 10, BA Guide prorated for the period to be determined through June 30, 2026, pending completion of all required pre-employment clearances, including receipt of fingerprints. (Replacing R. Jackson)

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that this Board hereby approves the extension of a provisional offer of employment to each of the aforementioned individuals for a period not to exceed ninety (90) days pending complete review of his/her employment history pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:6-7.10.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that notwithstanding the above provisions, no prospective employee shall begin work in the district without completion of the criminal history background check.

5. Motion to appoint Denazia Swan as a Paraprofessional for APM/ECC at an annual salary of $37,445 Step 5, HAP Guide prorated for the period beginning February 2, 2026 through June 30, 2026. (Replacing J. Nacipucha)

6. Motion to appoint Ana Baldassari as a lunch aide for Hurden Looker a rate of $15.92 per hour effective upon completion of all required pre-employment clearances, including fingerprints. (Replacing T. Byrd)

~~7. Motion to appoint ____ as a special education aide for Hillside High School at an annual salary of $___ Step __, Para Guide prorated for the period to be determined through June 30, 2026, pending completion of all required pre-employment clearances, including receipt of fingerprints. (New Position)~~

8. Motion to appoint the following as substitute teachers for the 2025-2026 school year at a rate of $200.00 per day, effective upon completion of all required pre-employment clearances, including receipt of fingerprints:

    a) Michelle Blake
    b) Margaret Kondoleon
    c) Ashley Gabriel

9. Motion to appoint the following staff members as SPARK tutors for the middle school during the 2025-2026 school year at rate of $51.88 per hour, not to exceed two hours per week effective January 2026 through May 2026:

    a) Tracy Goglia
    b) Lakisha Zamot-Giro
    c) Birdie Cheung
    d) Zachary Koch
    e) Aruna Mathura
    f) Alexandrina Mignone
    g) Williams Powers
    h) Eric Strumph

10. Motion to appoint the following staff members for NJIT eSTEM Challenge Coach during the 2025-2026 school year at a rate of $51.88 per hour, not to exceed 20 hours each:

a) Alissa Valiante	HL
b) Grace Petroccia	HL
c) Rachel Fernandes	DTA
d) Rhonda Dixon-McQueen	DTA

11. Motion to approve the following reclassifications effective February 1, 2026:

	From:	To:	Salary:
a) Trecia Genius	BA	MA	$86,206 Step 13
b) Elina Koval	MA	MA+30	$86,270 Step 11
c) Kayla Penn	BA	MA	$83,720 Step 12
d) Rachel Pribish	BA	MA	$74,970 Step 7
e) Melissa Ullrich	BA	MA	$76,970 Step 8
f) Khary Williams	BA	MA	$73,070 Step 6
~~g)~~			

Transfers/Amendments

12. Motion to transfer Lindsay Williams from BCBA to Special Education Teacher at OECS effective February 2, 2026. (Replacing A. Gossett)

13. Motion to amend maternity leave dates for Employee #3240 from July 28, 2025 through March 6, 2026 to July 15, 2025 through June 30, 2026 utilizing accumulated days. The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) will cover the period beginning July 15, 2025 through October 14, 2025.

Leaves

14. Motion to extend the unpaid medical leave for Employee #0443 effective January 1, 2026 through February 27, 2026.

15. Motion to extend the medical leave for Employee #0397 effective January 30, 2026 through June 30, 2026 utilizing accumulated days.

16. Motion to approve medical leave for Employee #3474 under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) effective January 12, 2026 through February 13, 2026 utilizing accumulated days.

17. Motion to approve an intermittent leave of absence under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) for Employee #0279 effective October 1, 2025 through June 30, 2026 utilizing accumulated days.

LABOR RELATIONS – Best/Shapiro/Hargrave (continued)

18. Motion to approve an unpaid maternity leave for Employee #1112 effective April 13, 2026 through June 30, 2026.
19. Motion to approve medical leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) for Employee #1026 effective February 2, 2026 through February 20, 2026 utilizing accumulated days.
20. Motion to approve unpaid medical leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) for Employee #3589 effective January 16, 2026 through February 27, 2026.
21. Motion to approve maternity leave for employee 2863 effective February 19, 2026 to June 30, 2026 utilizing accumulated days which may be covered under the Family Medical Leave Act and or the New Jersey Family Leave Act if applicable.

Other

22. Motion to terminate employee EJ effective 30 days from January 30, 2026.

Motion: Ms. Best Second: Mr. Shapiro

	Yes	No	Ab.		Yes	No	Ab.
Best	X			Okai	X		
Egwaikhide	X			Parks	X		
Estremera	X			Shapiro	X		
Hargrave	X			Dr. Howard	X		
Horton-Givens	X						

Motions 1 to 22 carried. 9 Yes 0 No 0 Abstentions

Old/New Business – None

Board Representative Comments

Board Member Ms. Horton-Givens provided commentary regarding the Human Trafficking Awareness event between the Township and the District.

Adjournment

Motion by Ms. Best, seconded by Ms. Horton-Givens, to adjourn the meeting.

Motion carried. Unanimous voice vote.

The meeting adjourned at 8:39 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Mr. Dwayne McNeil
Business Administrator/Board Secretary