Agenda of September Curriculum Advisory Committee Meeting

The Board of Trustees
New Hope-Solebury School District

A September Curriculum Advisory Committee Meeting of the Board of Trustees of New Hope-Solebury School District will be held Thursday, September 3, 2026, beginning at 5:00 PM District Office Conference Room, 180 West Bridge Street, New Hope, PA 18938.

1. **Meeting Opening**
Description: Procedural

    1.A. Call to Order
    Description: Procedural

        1.A.1. 01 Notice of FERPA and Audio Recording of Meeting

2. **Approve Minutes**

    2.A. Approve Minutes from the May 7, 2026 meeting

3. **Old Business**

4. **Public Comment**

5. **New Business**

    5.A. Approval of New Committee Members
    Description: Kathleen Given
    Robert Whelen

    5.B. 2026-27 Educational Initiatives and Curriculum Advisory Committee Topics

    5.C. 2026-27 Assessment and Professional Development Calendar
    Description: Calendar

    5.D. Approval of Middle School Speaker
    Description: Approval of Chris Balme, Zero Circle Labs, Speaker for Middle School Advisory Initiative proposed by MS Principal

    5.E. 2026-27 Equity Goals
    Description: Update by Dr. Lentz and Equity Coordinators

    5.F. 2026-27 Federal Programming
    Description: Program Update

6. **Adjournment**

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Curriculum Advisory Committee (Thursday, May 7, 2026)

Generated by Nazaneen Khalilnaji-Otto on Friday, May 8, 2026

Sign In Sheet

1. Call to Order

Member Tracy Costigan called the meeting to order at 5:00 PM and stated that, per Board Guideline 006.2, all public meetings of the Board of Directors, including committee meetings, are audio recorded.

2. Approve Minutes

Minutes: 2.01 April 2026 Minutes
Ms. Costigan asked if there was any discussion regarding the April 2026 Curriculum Advisory Committee minutes. No comments or revisions were offered. A motion was made and seconded to approve the minutes.

April 2026 minutes approved.

3. Public Comment

Melvin Band of Solebury

- Mr. Band commented on differences he observed between recent Advisory Committee meetings, specifically regarding how public comment was introduced and facilitated. He commented on the wording used by Board Member during the public comment portion of meetings and questioned whether public participation was being viewed as a meaningful opportunity for engagement or as a procedural requirement to move through quickly.
- Mr. Band referenced a recent Right-to-Know request related to handwriting and cursive instruction. He stated that materials he received from the Pennsylvania Department of Education indicated that handwriting, grading, and instructional decisions are determined locally by school districts rather than mandated by the PDE. Mr. Band shared a concern on transparency and communication related the grading practices for handwriting.
- Mr. Band questioned how handwriting and cursive instruction are currently implemented in the district as a self-directed activity in the library and that students who need additional handwriting support should receive direct instruction from an actual teacher and not self-directed.
- No additional public comments were made.

Ellen Stiefel, Board Member asked a question not related to agenda items. Ms. Stiefel asked if a similar survey about computer use at the Lower Elementary School would be carried out for the other building, especially Upper Elementary and Middle Schools.

Dr. Amanda Benolken, school administrator, response that the district will share at back-to-school nights how devices are used at school and resources for parents to support monitoring of devices at home. Dr. Benolken added that Teacher on Special Assignment, Dr. Cait Keiper, will have a technology scope and sequence of skills by grade level bands.

4. Old Business

No old business was discussed.

5. New Business

5.01 Education Office Update

An Education Office update was provided by Dr. Benolken.

Field Trips
Dr. Benolken reported that the district is approaching approximately 50 field trips during the 2025–2026 school year.

Recent and upcoming field trips discussed included:

- Honey Hollow Nature Center trips for Kindergarten and 3rd Grade students;
- A middle school band and orchestra Broadway trip and music master class scheduled for May 27
- A 1st Grade trip to Shady Brook Farm;
- A 5th Grade Camp Kweebec trip;
- A 2nd Grade trip to the New Jersey Museum; and
- The high school senior trip to New York City.

Dr. Benolken stated that the district has seen increased participation in field trips across grade levels and departments.

5.02 Fall 2027 Central Europe Overnight Trip Proposal

Dr. Benolken introduced Mr. Fred Achenbach to present the proposed Fall 2027 Central Europe overnight trip.

Dr. Benolken stated that committee materials included the overnight field trip request form and the EF Tours proposal packet. She also noted that 2 additional travel company proposals had been reviewed administratively.

Mr. Achenbach explained that this proposal replaced the previously discussed Rwanda/Africa trip proposal as recruitment for the Africa trip was difficult.

Mr. Achenbach stated that the Central Europe proposal aligns most directly with courses including:

- AP European History;
- European History; and
- History of Fascism and World War II.

Committee had further discussion that included:

- Enrollment and recruitment challenges for international trips;
- Student interest in curriculum-connected travel opportunities;
- Financial considerations for families; and
- The role of experiential learning in history instruction.

Discussion also included the district's broader approach to international travel opportunities and curricular alignment.

5.03 Spring 2028 Netherlands Overnight Trip Proposal

Mr. Dave Bachart joined the meeting virtually to present the proposed Spring 2028 Netherlands music and arts trip.

Mr. Bachart stated that the proposed trip is scheduled for April 1–8, 2028.

Mr. Bachart stated that the group has been invited to perform at the Tulip Festival in the Netherlands and that additional performances are planned in Rotterdam and Amsterdam.

Mr. Bachart discussed planned cultural experiences including:

- The Anne Frank House;
- The Van Gogh Museum;
- Canal tours; and
- Travel to surrounding cities.

Mr. Bachart stated that Amsterdam would serve as the primary location for the group, with day trips planned to other areas.

Discussion also focused on cost-management strategies. Mr. Bachart noted that the initial proposal reflects higher-end estimates to ensure all costs are accounted for conservatively. However, the group is exploring the use of smaller travel groups and public transportation options to help reduce expenses.

Performance expectations discussed included:

- Approximately two orchestra performances;
- Multiple jazz ensemble performances;
- Combined ensemble performances; and
- Approximately four to six total performances across the eight-day trip.

Mr. Bachart stated that the goal is not simply performance travel, but full cultural immersion through music, art, and shared experiences.

Committee members discussed:

- Interdisciplinary opportunities between music and visual arts;
- Student access to international arts experiences;
- The logistics of managing multiple international trips within similar timelines;
- The importance of broad communication and student recruitment;
- Financial accessibility for families; and
- Building stronger curricular connections before and after travel experiences.

Committee members also reflected positively on the recent France trip and discussed student growth, cultural learning, and the district's handling of student safety and emergency situations during travel.

Suggestions were shared for increasing awareness of international travel opportunities, including promoting trips through curriculum nights, course selection materials, classroom discussions, and broader district communications.

5.04 Updated Global Travel Plan 2026–2030

Dr. Benolken reviewed updates to the district's Global Travel Plan for 2026–2030.

Discussion focused on the district's effort to create a more intentional and balanced approach to international travel programming across departments and grade levels.

Topics discussed included:

- Expanding travel opportunities beyond traditionally travel-heavy programs;
- Creating stronger curricular alignment between travel and academic coursework;
- Exploring future opportunities connected to world languages, history, STEAM, music, and visual arts;
- Potential future travel to Poland and other European destinations;
- Continued partnership opportunities connected to the Dominican Republic; and
- Strategies for staggering trips to avoid competing financial demands on families during the same school years.

Committee members discussed how international travel opportunities can increase student engagement and interest in academic coursework while also broadening cultural awareness and experiential learning opportunities.

Additional discussion emphasized the importance of ensuring travel experiences are connected to meaningful academic preparation and reflection rather than functioning solely as tourism experiences.

5.05 Title I Funding End-of-Year Report

Dr. Rose Minniti provided a Title I funding end-of-year report.

Dr. Minniti stated that the district's combined funding allocation totaled approximately $71,926 following a minor funding adjustment. Dr. Minniti explained that this total amount is combining all the district's Title I, Title II, and Title IV funding.

Dr. Minniti stated that the funding is currently used to support instructional and small group the Lower Elementary School and that the district plans to continue with the same support model next year if funding remains available.

Dr. Minniti shared that future federal Title funding is yet undetermined. She also stated that regardless of federal potential funding reductions will continue the small-group reading instruction.

6. Adjournment

Dr. Benolken also announced that there will not be a Curriculum Advisory Committee meeting in June.

With no further business to discuss, the meeting adjourned. Dr. Benolken reminded members that there will be no June Curriculum Advisory Committee meeting.

New Hope-Solebury School District Committee Member Application

Name: Katie Given Phone: [redacted]

Address: [redacted]

Email: [redacted]

Occupation: _____

Committee(s) Interested in:

- [x] Curriculum Advisory
- [ ] Policy/Human Resources
- [ ] Facilities
- [ ] Finance
- [ ] Equity

Please state the reason(s) for your interest in participating in a Committee(s):

As a reading specialist and RELA curriculum lead, I would like to serve on the Curriculum Advisory Committee to help shape an evidence-based literacy framework that serves all learners across our district. Daily experience delivering targeted interventions and collaborating with classroom teachers gives me a grounded perspective on how district curriculum choices impact real-world instruction. Bringing a data-driven approach and a passion for student success, I welcome the opportunity to collaborate with district leaders and educators to refine and advocate for high-quality curricula.

Kathleen Given 8/12/26

Signature Date

New Hope-Solebury School District Committee Member Application

Name: Robert Whelen Phone: [redacted]

Address: [redacted]

Email: [redacted]

Occupation: _____

Committee(s) Interested in:

- [x] Curriculum Advisory
- [ ] Policy/Human Resources
- [ ] Facilities
- [x] Finance
- [ ] Equity

Please state the reason(s) for your interest in participating in a Committee(s):

Please see Curriculum Committee and Finance Committee letters on next pages.

RGWhelen 8/3/2026

Signature Date

To: New Hope-Solebury School District
From: Robert Whelen
Subj: Curriculum Advisory Committee Application
Date: August 3, 2026

Dear Committee Members,

I am writing to apply for a seat on the Curriculum Advisory Committee.

My family relocated to New Hope to years ago after moving out of state for career reasons. We specifically chose New Hope for the quality of schools and independence of the district. Three of my children will pass through this district. The oldest just started second grade and her younger siblings follow over the next three years, which puts us here for roughly two decades. I want to help steward this district and take part in the decisions it makes, because I am not sure anything else we do as a family will matter more to how they turn out.

Whatever this committee helps decide is what my kids will actually sit through, day after day, for twenty years. That alone would be reason enough to want a seat. The pace of change makes it more pressing. I have spent much of this year reading and thinking about how artificial intelligence is and will impact the our kids' futures, and have found little agreement in what is best. I believe this committee faces critically important questions today that will shape the outcomes of all the children learning in the district. When something is proposed here, I would want to understand what problem it solves, how we would know a year later whether it worked, and what we want our kids to be able to do without a machine in front of them.

Artificial intelligence happens to be a significant part of my professional life, from two directions. I use these tools every day, and I evaluate and invest in the companies building them. Being that close has made me unromantic about it. Most of my job is separating a real track record from a well-built pitch, which means asking what a result actually measured, over what period, against what alternative, and whether it would hold up outside the conditions that produced it. Instructional programs arrive with claims of exactly that shape. While none of that gives me a view on what New Hope-Solebury should do, it would make me useful in the room.

Beyond that, my daughter and I are both level 1 Autistic. When a program is adopted I pay attention to how it works for the children who are not in the middle of the class, and I would want that question raised routinely, while a decision is still being made rather than after the fact. It is the same question I started with, asked about a smaller group. What we adopt for everyone is also what we adopt for them.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

_____

Robert Whelen



PROPOSAL

Date: 8/3/2026
Revised

Chris Balme
Zero Circle Labs
650-722-4976
chbalme@gmail.com

6 Sequoia Way
Pacifica, CA 94044
USA

Client: New Hope School District

Program: The following set of activities are intended to develop the skills for excellent advisory programming at the middle school level. All events and work will be delivered by Chris Balme, drawing on his experience and research, his book *Finding the Magic in Middle School*, and his Argonaut trainings supporting advisory practices at schools around the country.

Why Advisory: High-quality middle school advisory programs have been documented to increase student belonging and connectedness to school, lower rates of disciplinary issues and emotional distress, develop social and emotional skills, increase student engagement with school and prosocial behavior in school, and improve academic progress. For specific research references, see Argonaut Advisory Training Manual, page 5.

Events include:

- **Full Day on November 3rd, 2026 including parent event.** This day has three main components, intended to help faculty hone the skills of excellent advisory facilitation, develop a solid foundation of adolescent developmental knowledge, and also engage parents with similar knowledge around how middle school brains work. The day includes 4 hours of faculty training, plus consultation meetings with key faculty and staff around advisory implementation, and finally an evening speaking for parents, titled *Finding the Magic in Middle School.* Focal points for the faculty training include 5 Facilitation Principles, tools to create safe spaces and manage sensitive conversations, and exploration of advisory curricula and conversation topics.

- **Full Day on February 12, 2027.** In this second in-person workshop, faculty will deepen their advisory facilitation skills through (1) further grounding in adolescent developmental science, equipping faculty with the skills to understand students' developmental needs in their advisories and set appropriate conditions; (2) tools to respond to challenges and peer conflicts in and through advisory, ensuring that conflicts aren't left to fester and can instead be learned from; and (3) skills to improve student connectedness to peers and schools through advisory. These skills are applicable in classroom spaces as well. In addition to a 4-hour faculty training, the day includes consultation time with faculty and key staff to discuss

emerging needs and opportunities with advisory, tuning the program two months after the original training to ensure a successful implementation.

- **Virtual Introductory Session.** Balme will deliver an online introduction to these topics, based on the research and methods in his book *Finding the Magic in Middle School*, for faculty and staff. This talk will provide a baseline of adolescent developmental science knowledge, focusing on how puberty causes neurological changes, which cause adolescents to prioritize certain experiences and mindsets above others. The talk focuses on three core drives that emerge from these brain changes, with specific application for how that guides us to understand, teach and facilitate middle schoolers.

In addition to the events above, this contract includes up to 3 hours of meetings with Chris Balme, before and/or after the talks, to tailor them to the community's needs and support follow-up.

Fee:

- $15,000 workshop fees (covering all activities above)
- $2,000 in travel costs, covering all costs including flights, hotel, incidental expenses, etc.

Payment Terms:

- Half of the above fees ($8,500) are due within 30 days of contract signing. The remaining half ($8,500) will be billed in January 2027, payable within 30 days. Payment can be accepted by check, credit card or bank transfer.

Materials Provided

- Chris Balme bio and headshot for PR purposes, and blurbs for the talks and workshops are available to be shared. W-9 for Zero Circle Labs is also available.
- Electronic copies of the *Argonaut Advisory Manual*, a 110-page guide to excellent advisory practices, will be shared for general use, as well as digital copies of all training presentations and materials.

Limitation of Liability

Each party's total and cumulative liability for direct damages arising out of or in connection with this agreement shall in no event exceed the fees payable by Client to Zero Circle Labs under the applicable contract that gave rise to such claim. Notwithstanding anything to the contrary in this agreement, in no event will Client or Zero Circle Labs be liable for any indirect, incidental, consequential, special or punitive damages (including without limitation lost profits) even if it has been advised of the possibility of such damages.

Force Majeure

Notwithstanding any other provision of this Agreement, neither party is liable for any failure to perform, or delay in performing, any particular obligations under this Agreement where the failure or delay arises from any cause or causes beyond its reasonable control, including without limitation fire, flood, earthquake, elements of nature, acts of God, acts of war, terrorism, riots, strikes, serious labor disputes, civil disorders or rebellions ("Force Majeure Event"). In the event of a Force Majeure Event, the both parties agree in good faith to reschedule within two months (as soon as possible). Either party may terminate this Agreement by giving the other party written notice if the other party fails to perform those obligations for thirty (30) days due to such Force Majeure Event.

Photography, Video & Audio Recording

If the Client wishes to make an audio or video recording of this event, it may be used within the school or parent communities involved in the event, but may not be posted in any online location which can be accessed publicly without password. Client may take photographs of the event to be used for their purposes such as a website, client-managed social media accounts, or other client-created materials.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the parties have caused this Agreement to be executed by their duly authorized representatives.

THE ABOVE INFORMATION IS AGREED TO AND ACCEPTED BY:

Zero Circle Labs:

_____ _____

Chris Balme Date

Client: New Hope School District

_____ _____

Authorized Signer Date

_____

Printed Name and Title of Authorized Signer