

Hilltop Child Development Center

2509 Town Center Drive / Lawrence, KS / 66047

Dear Hilltop Families,

Hilltop has a long-standing history of providing high quality early childhood education and the Board of Directors remains committed to honoring that mission and history. At the heart of our work and our mission are the children – their education, their care, and their safety.

As we communicated this past Winter, the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) investigated reports of abuse of children occurring in a Hilltop West classroom. Those allegations were substantiated, and the teacher is no longer employed with Hilltop. These events are deeply concerning and painful for our community. We recognize the trust you place in us and want to be clear: child safety and care is not negotiable. We continue to take this situation with the utmost seriousness.

Since then, the Board, KU, and our new Executive Director, Cori Berg, have begun to dig deep with a thorough review to understand the systemic and cultural barriers present at Hilltop that may have contributed to these incidents. Cori brings expertise in early childhood and elementary education, as well as considerable experience leading high-quality child development centers in an inclusive and nurturing environment. Cori has demonstrated experience with NAEYC, our national accreditation body, and childcare licensing regulations. Her leadership is a key part of moving Hilltop forward with integrity, care, and accountability.

Yesterday, you received word that Whitney Smith resigned from her Program Director role. Effective today, Whitney is no longer the Program Director for Hilltop West. We know sudden transitions like this are challenging. We remain focused on building a staff team that is unified in our mission and fully committed to creating a safe, nurturing, and academically rich experience for every child.

Changes in policies, practices, and training are underway to ensure Hilltop is the community we all expect and need it to be. Indeed, Hilltop must be a place where concerns are taken seriously and where all of us report child abuse promptly, even when it is difficult for us personally. Cori and the Board are moving quickly to get a new Program Director in place. We seek a warm and caring leader with the experience needed to move us forward in alignment with our mission.

We know this is a time of uncertainty and concern, and we remain committed to supporting children, staff, and families. If you have concerns or questions, we encourage you to first reach out directly to Cori Berg in her role as Executive Director. She is in the best position to hear your feedback and address your concerns.

Thank you for your continued support as we work together to ensure Hilltop is a place where every child can thrive.

Sincerely,

Casey Fraites-Chapes, President, Hilltop Board of Directors

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