

Montessori Tenets: Smaller v. Bigger Class Size

Attending the American Montessori Society conference last week was inspiring. It was a wonderful reminder of the benefits of the true Montessori programs we offer. One feature, imperative to implementation of the Montessori philosophy, is class size.

In traditional classrooms, one teacher serves as a "muse" who needs to capture and keep the attention of all the students and keep them - quite literally - on the same page. Montessori classes are designed to have a larger mix of students to reap the benefits of the Montessori method.

At Hilltop Montessori School, we have a student to staff ratio averaging less than 10-1. Yet, we have class sizes of 20-30+ depending on the age and program. (Except for the Toddler Program with a ratio of 4-1 and a class size of eight). By having two to three teachers with a larger group, students gain the advantages of a larger classroom but have the attention of a teacher when they need it. Some benefits of a larger class size include:

More Learning Opportunities for differing learning levels - With more than one teacher circulating throughout the group giving individual and small group lessons, opportunities are available beyond the whole group learning one topic at the same level. This allows for different learning styles and paces to be naturally accommodated.

Allowing for Learning from Others - With a larger group, students are learning independently from a range of materials, as well as from each other. Older children solidify their learning by teaching younger, and younger are motivated by what older students are working on.

More Social Opportunities - A larger group allows students to work on their social skills with a greater variety of personalities and ages.

Trusting Relationships with Adults - Having a two or three year cycle with the same teachers allows for deeper relationships to develop. Having more than one teacher provides an opportunity for students to learn to work with different personalities.

Development of Self-Management Skills - The larger group allows for students to develop their time-management skills and to further their drive to learn from within, not from someone imposing demands on them. When children need more guidance in these skills, the teachers can adapt their level of focus based on the needs of each student. Children who have developed more independence with these critical executive function skills are free to work at their level.

Growth of Independence and Confidence - If there is not an adult immediately at hand to help a child, they are more likely to develop and demonstrate the skill themselves or to ask a friend to help.

The larger groups certainly bring challenges - planning, management, noise, etc. However, the benefits make it well worth these challenges. Our classrooms stimulate wonderfully busy, independent learning. If it has been some time since you had the chance to see and appreciate the classrooms firsthand, please attend work shares, set up a time to observe in a classroom, and/or join a school tour. There is beautiful learning going on in these programs. We want all the families to understand the educational experience your children are having here at Hilltop.

[This article](#) also points out the benefits of our larger class sizes and some of the challenges of reduced class size.

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