

Montessori Curriculum Morning: Summarizing Notes

Hilltop has had a strong and meaningful mission statement for the past 15 years. We all have loved that it has “responsible independence” at its core and that most students, parents, and certainly teachers, have it guide our daily activities.

We have taken the American Montessori Society accreditation self-study process as the opportunity to revisit the mission statement and make revisions. Staff, board members, and parents began meeting last spring to initiate the mission statement discussions. Five staff people from the initial mission statement development process were still part of our team, and we appreciated their efforts, as we worked to make updates and improvements.

The discussion focused around wanting:

- “responsible independence” to still be at the core of what we do and what we say
- needing to get “community” into the core statement also, to better reflect how we work together within the school and with the broader community and world
- wanting to focus on “practice” rather than “attain”

We put practicing independence at the center of our mission statement because a Montessori education isn't just about learning long division, writing a complete sentences, or understanding the periodic table. A Montessori education is preparation for life. As parents moved through different classrooms last Saturday morning, they saw lessons and works that teach children the skills of independence that they will use and need throughout their lives.

Independence begins with learning how to meet your physical needs- getting dressed, toileting, getting snack. Independence also involves learning how to access and take care of your physical environment - knowing where to get what you need, putting your materials away after a work, cleaning up after yourself if you spill.

Here at Hilltop, students practice organizing their time, making a plan for their day, and planning out the steps of a big project. As adults you know that these are skills that we all have to use everyday to do our jobs, take care of our family, and to meet our own goals in life, whether it's planning a garden or writing that great American novel.

Understanding yourself as a human and a learner is fundamental to being independent; to help ourselves, we need to know ourselves. So, we ask students to reflect on their work, to think about what they have done well and what they can improve upon. We ask them to think about what helps them meet their goals and what gets in their way.

As you know, it can be a lot easier to be independent in a space that is familiar and safe than in a space that is unfamiliar or a whole lot bigger than we are used to. As students get older, we give them opportunities to practice being independent in bigger and more varied communities outside of the classroom walls.

Our new mission statement reads, "to practice responsible independence in a caring community." We added that 'caring community' part because independence doesn't mean doing everything alone or by oneself. We believe that only within a community can we learn some of the really important parts of being independent - understanding how our behavior impacts others, accepting limits, and resolving conflicts peacefully. It is only by working with others that we learn how to be flexible, how to be humble, how to be compassionate. It's only through practice within a community that we learn how to use our voice even when we feel unsure or nervous. You can't learn to be a leader by living alone in the woods. Finally, true independence can only be learned within a community because it is, in large part, through our interactions with others that we learn about ourselves.

February 9, 2018