

State Funding Helps Hilltop Increase Equity and Accessibility

There is much discussion, both nationally and in Vermont, about how to best support our education system. As conscientious educators who want to "make the world a better place" many of us at Hilltop think about these issues regularly. How can public and independent schools continue to work in tandem to best serve the variety of learners in our community. While this question is complex, here are the goals that we focus on, and work towards, at Hilltop:

- increasing our diversity and making Hilltop available to a broader economic spectrum
- serving students with different learning styles who can thrive in our environment when they might not be served as well in a traditional environment

We participate in programs that allow some state funding to help families cover the tuition for Hilltop, including the PreK funding for Vermont residents, Vermont's Child Care Financial Assistance Program, and vouchers from towns who do not have elementary or middle schools. This participation requires significant administrative efforts from teachers and administrative staff. The benefits of the programs make it worth the extra effort. We want to expand the economic diversity at our school and increase the access that lower income families have to an authentic Montessori education. By using some state funding and generous donations to reduce the portion of tuition necessary from families, more lower income families are able to come to Hilltop.

As a Montessori school, a wide spectrum of students can be successful in our environment. With our multi-age classrooms, children who are "ahead" or "behind" in an area, get the lessons they are best ready for. This can reduce some of the issues that can arise with these students in a more traditional school environment. We strive to capitalize on the aspects of the Montessori environment (work choice, movement in the classroom, mixed age classrooms, regular use of manipulative physical and kinesthetic materials, etc.) that enable a "different" learner to function well. We have many students who might need an Individual Education Plan (IEP) if they were in a traditional environment, but in a Montessori environment those accommodations are made naturally. Yet, some different learners will not fit in our environment because of the nature of the classroom. We work to incorporate the learners who will most benefit from our project-based, interdisciplinary, self-driven approach.

We respect and understand concerns about state funding for education. And, we work hard to have the state funding that we receive INCREASE access to high-quality education and feel confident that it helps us to "make the world a better place", one child at a time.

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