

Parent Survey 2018

We were thrilled with the response rate and responses from our families. We received feedback from almost 1/2 of the families (46) and there was a nice distribution from all programs, Toddler - Middle School. Many families shared their appreciation for what Hilltop offers, and some had useful suggestions for how we could improve. Below is a summary of the responses along with additional information to share.

1. Have you used the school's web site to answer a question you have had in the past six months?

76 % of respondents replied YES, noting that they had used the school's website.

2. Did you use the school's web site prior to deciding to send your child to Hilltop as the means to answer any questions you had?

Over half of the respondents used the website during the admissions process. This shows that while the website is an important source of information for potential families, word of mouth is still a critical place for families to learn about Hilltop. We appreciate you all spreading the word.

3. The newsletter is our primary means of communicating with you.

ALL of the respondents read the newsletter to some extent, with 1/3 rd reading every word! While this is obviously a self-selected group of the folks who are taking the time to respond to an online survey and therefore using this medium to communicate, we still find it rewarding to hear how much people rely on and appreciate the newsletter. Teachers and staff spend a great deal of time sharing classroom and school happenings, and it is gratifying to hear of people so enjoying it. One respondent said, *"The newsletter is basically the highlight of my entire week. I get very excited when it arrives and read every bit!"* Another respondent noted that there have been a *"couple of dates and times that have been listed incorrectly and that has been problematic, as I schedule things around School functions."* *There have been a couple of mistaken details despite our concerted efforts to get it all straight. Duly noted and we will continue to strive for consistency and accuracy.*

4. The school clearly and effectively communicates and lives up to its mission, values, and goals.

Hilltop Montessori School's mission is for students to practice responsible independence in a caring community of curious, critical learners and thoughtful citizens.

1 = Strongly Disagree , 2 = Disagree , 3 = Agree , 4 = Strongly Agree

Overall Score: 3.7%

It was rewarding to see families so strongly agree that they know the schools mission and feel that we "live up to it". One commenter said, *"The curriculum morning in February was particularly helpful in communicating this."* Another noted that they *"wish for less pressure around academics... specifically reading... and more trust in the process. 'Students will come to maturity and integrity according to their individual rhythm, pace, and style."* We work to balance "following the child" with the generally accepted advice of early intervention being critical. It is a delicate balance.

5. Teachers, administrators, and specialists treat students with respect, fairness and dignity.

1 = Strongly Disagree , 2 = Disagree , 3 = Agree , 4 = Strongly Agree

Overall Score: 3.9%

We are thrilled with this result and acknowledgment. One commenter noted, *“This is my favorite part of Hilltop, and is something I distinctly notice when I go to other schools and child care places as part of my work. I wish all teachers and caregivers treated children with the same dignity and respect that I hear from Hilltop faculty and staff!”* One respondent replied that they were “unsure” of this and that “teachers have been rude and unfair to my student” We do not know to what this referring and would want to rectify any situation immediately. We hope the family brings this up to the teachers and/or administration.

6. There is a strong sense of community at the school.

1 = Strongly Disagree , 2 = Disagree , 3 = Agree , 4 = Strongly Agree

Overall Score: 3.6%

While the rating is quite high, the comments note room for improvement. One commenter noted a difference in the community feeling after their child moved from Children’s House to Lower Elementary. This is something we are aware of, and it is part of the child’s development to be more independent, not having parents as directly involved as they transition to this stage of development is appropriate. We certainly note the difference that the circle drop off and independent arrival to the classroom provides in Elementary. We continue to work on other opportunities to further grow the sense of community as children transition to the Elementary years.

One commenter noted that lives and busy and there are lots of things to attend to, *“I think there is a growing sense of community but feel that this could be improved upon - perhaps it is different among parents of older children and so have been involved with the school for longer? In my limited experience I think there's a lack of excitement generally about school events, fundraising etc. This is not a criticism, more a comment about real life ... everyone's busy and it's not easy to get excited about someone else's project.”* We will continue to work to develop enticing events to participate in and welcome any and all involvement!

7. Teachers and administrators promptly and effectively address concerns parents bring to the school.

1 = Strongly Disagree , 2 = Disagree , 3 = Agree , 4 = Strongly Agree

Overall Score: 3.6%

Most “strongly agree” that concerns are being addressed appropriately and in a timely manner. One comment said it all, *“Yes! I so appreciate the quick response time.”*

8. How satisfied are you with how the school supports your child's academic progress?

1 = Very Dissatisfied , 2 = Dissatisfied , 3 = Satisfied , 4 = Very Satisfied

Overall Score: 3.8%

The vast majority of responding parents feel satisfied with the academic support their child receives. Some respondents are also interested in developing independence and confidence throughout the younger years. Some parents report the Montessori approach is working at home as well. Several responds were grateful for the extra support given at each program level.

One commenter noted that something came up in a parent/teacher conference that they wished they had known more about sooner. This is something we've increasingly worked to do. We say there should be "no surprises" at conferences. We will keep working on that!

9. How satisfied are you with how the school supports your child's social progress?

1 = Very Dissatisfied , 2 = Dissatisfied , 3 = Satisfied , 4 = Very Satisfied

Overall Score: 3.9%

Hilltop is strong in supporting social progress! And, we will continue to work to address challenges of exclusion and peer conflict in the adolescent years. It is wonderful to hear that the teachers are available (and families feel comfortable) to speak to them when issues arise.

10. The school provides meaningful roles for parents in the life of the school that promote a culture of participation, responsibility, and commitment.

1 = Strongly Disagree , 2 = Disagree , 3 = Agree , 4 = Strongly Agree

Overall Score: 3.6%

Despite a strong overall score of 3.6, responding parents noted they wish there were more opportunities to be involved and enjoy volunteering and assisting in the classroom. Family involvement is necessary for Hilltop to succeed at every level. Some examples include, Parent Orientation Night, Community Work Party, Children's House and Lower Elementary Parent Work Shares and other community events throughout the year. While we recognize that parents are usually busy during the work day, we always welcome a parent presenter to give a lesson at any program level. Please let us know if you are interested.

11. Have you noticed any potential areas for improvement that an individual teacher, staff person or the Head of School might focus on?

Respondents report improvement is needed regarding social emotional skills, racial justice, and athletics. Social emotional skills in the Elementary years needs to be more of a focus, reinforcing respect for all teachers and peers. Suggestions were made to incorporate classes from “The Root” to educate staff on racial justice. Staff friendliness could improve and be more welcoming (not waiting for the parent to say hello). We held professional development for all of the Elementary and Middle School faculty and staff in Restorative Justice/Practice. Several teachers and administrative staff members have also attended classes at “The Root” which included “Classism in the Classroom” and “Race, Class and Gender in Early Learning” An increased focus on proper welcoming between staff, faculty, students and parents continues to be practiced. We welcome the suggestion and improvement in this area which are currently being incorporated at all program levels.

12. Do you think that the school represents good value for money?

A majority of respondents (87%) think the school represents good value for the money. Many families understand the value in a Montessori education, whereas others feel it is a stretch, but appreciate the educational value. Financial sustainability, in the higher grades (as tuition increases) is challenging for some families where a multiple family discount would be appreciated. Additionally, foreign language added to the curriculum would offer a better value for some. We have identified more incorporation of additional languages as part of our 5 year strategic plan. Initial steps have been having Mariam and Marco use their native languages of French and Spanish with the toddlers and Children’s House students. We’ve also offered Spanish and French classes after-school for the elementary years. We have plans for further offerings in the works for implementing our 5 year plan!

13. With the broad economic diversity of our families, the tuition cost effects family budgets differently. Select the option(s) that best describe how your family affords Hilltop.

- 21.7% easily able to fit tuition into our family budget.
- 56.5% prioritize education costs, foregoing nonessential purchases
- 34.7% receive Financial Aid (state or school)
- 21.7% receive support from extended family
- 4.3% forgoes essential expenses (i.e. car repair & food choices) for our child to attend Hilltop.

The majority of responding parents note prioritizing educational costs and family expenses.

**Please keep in mind respondents selected all that apply. Percentage will not equal 100%.*

14. The role of the Board of Trustees is to determine and oversee policies that support the mission of the school and to ensure the school's fiscal stability. Do you think our current Board of Trustees ([link](#)) effectively serves as ambassadors for the school community?

Almost half of our families who responded (52%) are not sure if the Board of Trustees effectively serves as school ambassadors. *“From a regular parent’s perspective, it’s not really clear what the Board does, or if they are doing it well.”* Clearly, we need to improve the communications of the Board of Trustees. One family responded, perhaps more events partnered with Board information sharing in the community will help in this respect. A suggestion: *“A quiz night about how our school works/board of trustees involvement and job”* Reciprocally, 46% Feel the Board of Trustees serve the Hilltop community effectively.

15. Were you able to attend the Board of Trustees' Meet and Greet/Chili Cook off in March?

24% Attended / 74% heard about it, but could not attend / 2.2% didn’t hear about it.
Respondents noted that the Chili Cook Off was a fun social event!

16. Do you have suggestions for types of events that you would be likely to attend in order to get to know the functions of the Board of Trustees? Please share your ideas. Thank you.

Thank you for the creative responses! We understand families are super busy. In the future, partnering events together is a solid model we will strive for.

“I think pairing a board event with Kids Night Out was a great idea!”

“My suggestion would be, rather than an additional event, have board members selectively attend other events that are planned. It’s hard to schedule an extra meeting and often times the more organic interactions work better.”

17. Are you aware of our Strategic Plan?

78.2% of respondents replied YES / 19.5% of respondents replied NO / 2.3% did not respond

18. How did you learn about our Strategic Plan? Check all that apply.

Respondents replied evenly across the board

33.3% Read the hard copy / 30.9% Read it on the website

28.5% Talked to another parent or staff / 26.1% Attended an informational meeting last year.
Other respondents read about it in the newsletter & attended the Chili Cook-off

**Please keep in mind respondents selected all that apply. Percentage will not equal 100%.*

19. The school provides an environment where students and families of all socioeconomic, racial/ethnic, LBGTQ, religious, or other backgrounds feel they are fully part of the community.

With a rating score of 4.45, parents understand that the school works hard to be inclusive and the area we live in influences the racial diversity of the school. The “Other” category was quite strong noting the desire for more economic diversity. Affordability of After school Programs is also a concern of some responding parents. One respondent noted:

“I think it's great that Hilltop is working hard to broaden the socioeconomic diversity of the school. I wonder how lower income families are finding out about the school?”

The number one way people find out about Hilltop is by word of mouth. School representatives are in the community at regular open houses/information sessions around our area and beyond.

We work hard to encourage diversity through the application and admissions process. We are looking at reframing “Financial Aid” to be “Indexed Tuition” as a means of addressing economic diversity. If anyone is interested in helping with this project, please email Tamara at tmount@hilltopmontessori.org.

20. The school curricula offers a variety of experiences to reflect the diversity of the students enrolled.

1 = Strongly Disagree , 2 = Disagree , 3 = Neutral , 4 = Agree , 5 = Strongly Agree,

With a rating score of 4.6, many believe it is encouraging that Hilltop is reflecting on this aspect of the curriculum and hopeful that the school will continue to diversify in many ways.

Responding parents note that sharing each others cultural experiences in the classroom may alleviate possible stereotypes. We agree this is important for our students to learn and several staff members have shared their own experiences with the classroom. Mariam, Marco and Amelia have all shared with the Lower Elementary class this year and Nara Iams has shared aspects of Korean culture with the Willow Room. We welcome everyone to share their experiences at all program levels. If you are interested in sharing your cultural experiences we encourage you to discuss options with your child’s program teachers.

21. The school offers a variety of curricula experiences that reflect the multi-cultural nature of society and the world.

1 = Strongly Disagree , 2 = Disagree , 3 = Neutral , 4 = Agree , 5 = Strongly Agree

Between Socioeconomic, Racial / Ethnic, LBGTQ, and religious, the overall average of responding parents was 4.6. Most agree that Hilltop offers a variety of experiences for the students to explore other cultures. Improvements needed on social justice (see #11) was noted as well.

22. In the five year Strategic Plan, the goal of increasing exposure to an additional language is defined as "increasing exposure in an integrated way in the classroom and in after school programs." We have made progress towards this with having multi-lingual staff members and after school programs for older students. Are there other ways you would like to see additional language integrated?

Parent respondents would like to see languages integrated into the core curriculum, using computer programs to assist. Some responding parents suggested learning songs in different languages.

"I am happy with the additional language exposure I have witnessed Marco use with children."
We are so pleased that you recognize the work that Mariam and Marco accomplish with their native languages (French and Spanish respectively) in the classroom. In the future, we will also be working with digital world language classes, Middleburg Interactive. Middlebury Interactive is an international leader in language pedagogy. This self-paced training utilizes a pedagogy and teaching method that has been refined over decades that include real-world reading, writing, listening, and speaking activities combined with immersive learning to accelerate language acquisition.

23. In the five year Strategic Plan, the Board affirmed the importance of integrating technology into the curriculum and providing extracurricular technology instruction. Do you:

Overwhelmingly, 93% of responding parents support the importance of technology integration, 6.6% strongly DO NOT support this initiative.

Some respondents are concerned with how to properly integrate technology, noting concern of balance between flashy, exciting technology, more screen time and the importance of basic writing and language. Respondents also noted the essential need for students to be prepared for the future. Some comments included:

"I hope that Hilltop will continue to keep the younger classrooms as technology free as possible. In this day and age it is impossible to limit technology's reach as kids get older. I like that technology literacy is being integrated - for both kids and parents."

"Tablets, and computer programming should be a part of the core curriculum. All students should be learning to code even just a little so that they understand the new world."

We have been working to provide coding opportunities, including SummerFun camp sessions in previous years, Upper Elementary electives using coding languages/programs, and several students have done in class projects that included programming. We are working on more ways to integrate these languages of technology.

24. Which of the following would you like to know about Montessori education and philosophy?

Responding parents overwhelmingly (71.4%) would like to know about how to use Montessori practices at home to be consistent with school.

Some suggestions include, a parent night focussed on addressing challenging behavior at home, prioritizing respectful communication, and regulated behavior and rules.

Other respondents noted that attending parent nights, orientations and work shares provide ample opportunities to learn about Montessori curriculum, in the classroom and at home.

25. How likely are you to recommend Hilltop Montessori School to other families?

1 = Not likely , 2 = Somewhat likely , 3 = Likely , 4 = Very likely , 5 = Definitely

Overall Score: 4.4

Many respondents have been recommending Hilltop for years, “*singing praises to anyone who will listen*”. Others would like an open forum to talk about ideas or improvements needed at Hilltop. The annual Open Board Meeting can be an opportunity for this and we will work to create more.

26. Is there anything else you would like to comment on?

There were some great suggestions, most of which are things in the works! Great minds think alike. . .

Some comments included improvements need in after school team sports programs, increasing integration with public and other private schools.

Mace is working on this and successfully added Twin Valley and The Bement School to our competitors this past basketball season. He has plans to grow the volunteer coaching staff and be able to build a solid set of teams to play other schools.

One suggested increasing “green” cleaning products. With care and consideration for the health of the students and staff, we use an environmentally conscious line of cleaning products, Enviro-Solutions. The primary solution used is Hydrogen Peroxide based; we also use a disinfectant solution as is required by the DCF Childcare Licensing Regulations. We have reached out to our distributor to see if there are any new products available since we last reviewed their options. Thank you for your feedback and the prompting to ensure we are using the safest options that meet our intersecting needs of sanitation, environmental impact and fragrance sensitivities.

One comment suggested using healthier, organic snack options and another pointed to having an organic community garden. We balance considerations of what most children will choose to eat, what we want to present to entice a wider selection of choices, cost, and practicality. When our gardens are bursting with cherry tomatoes we are in good shape! We always welcome donations of organic food options and greatly appreciate the regular donations of organic yogurt from Green Mountain Creamery via the Humfeldts! AND, we do have a community organic garden of sorts springing up. A couple of parents and Kegan are preparing a plot in the field on the right on the way up the hill. If you’d like to join, contact Kegan at krefalo@hilltopmontessori.org. Last year it produced a bumper crop of squash that contributed well for the Middle School soup business.

Childcare alternatives on in-Service days, half days and parent/teacher conferences were suggested. A few years ago we did add childcare as a possibility for all students during conference days, and that is an ongoing offering that seems to be greatly appreciated. For in-service days, we are not able to provide childcare as that is one of the few times that we are able to get the whole staff together for a topic. For example, this last in-service day we discussed the propensity of students to roughhouse and how to allow safe and appropriate contact, while ensuring “consent” and safety. This looks different at different program levels and is an important topic for all staff to consider.

Thank you for taking the time to complete the survey and read these comments. Your time and dedication to your child’s education is so important. If there is anything you would like to discuss further, please contact me, Tamara - tmount@hilltopmontessori.org