

Learning from Home Handbook

April 2020

Table of Contents

A Vision of Learning from a Montessori Perspective	3
How do we establish this at home?	3
The Prepared Environment	4
Practical Life	5
The Uninterrupted Work Cycle	6
Ownership of Tasks and Sharing of Learning	7
Feeling of Responsibility and Contribution to the Community/Family	8
Toddler Program	9
Example TP Morning Schedule:	11
Children’s House	12
Example CH Morning Schedule:	13
Lower Elementary	14
Lower Elementary ZOOM Schedule:	15
Lower Elementary Daily Work Diet:	16
Upper Elementary	17
“Working” Upper Elementary Schedule:	19
Middle School	20
Middle School Schedule:	21
Office Hours and Contact Information for Teachers	22
Working Hours and Contact Information for Admin	23
FAQs	24

A Vision of Learning from a Montessori Perspective

"Our aim is not merely to make the child understand, and still less to force him to memorize, but so to touch his imagination as to enthuse him to his innermost core."

-Dr Maria Montessori

As we embark on a time of long-term 'remote learning,' our aim is to create a Montessori-based framework that serves our students while supporting parents as we all adapt to a different daily routine. It is important to us that student's activity during this time be enjoyable, thoughtful, challenging, and rewarding.

Replicating what happens in our classrooms is not something we can achieve during this period. Our goal is to work in collaboration with families to keep alive the culture of learning that is unique to Hilltop Montessori School (HMS) and provides families with support and activities that match the developmental needs and characteristics of the child.

How do we establish this at home?

The Montessori method is all about the process. While completion of work is important, it is our approach that makes all the difference. Learning is most effective when it is within a greater context. When we connect subjects and concepts, we establish meaning which fuels motivation in students. Above all, we want children to feel connected to their learning, not simply "complete assignments" while at home. Learning together with a sense of exploration, curiosity, and discovery results in deeper and more meaningful experiences for children. This instills a great sense of ownership and responsibility for the child.

It is important to us that we maintain a feeling of connectedness throughout this process. We will be in regular contact in a variety of ways, and continued communication between teachers and families is assured. The guidelines throughout this Handbook will outline how HMS teachers and administrators plan to support Hilltop families for the remainder of the semester (barring further unforeseen circumstances brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic).

The Prepared Environment

For Toddler and Children's House students, the learning environment is your home and surroundings. This means finding ways to support independence, engage in meaningful tasks, and supplement learning through various activities and lessons offered by teachers via Google Classroom, remote learning kits, general emails to families, specific emails to families, and consultation over phone/ZOOM.

For Elementary to Middle School students, this will mean all of the above, plus establishing a quiet work space, expectations, and routines for daily ZOOM meetings, classes, and assignments outlined on Google Classroom.

Where age-appropriate, you might like to discuss 'Learning from Home' with your child and include them in some decision-making processes:

- Ask them where to set up their space (if applicable)
- Make a schedule together that works for your family (when to take breaks / have time outdoors, etc)
- Gather ideas for activities and projects
- Organize materials for older students; it will be important for them to maintain their routine of handing in work and receiving feedback from their teachers (as appropriate and specified for each program).

Overall, we can approach this as an opportunity to be creative and collaborative - and we are here to support you through this process.

Practical Life

Practical Life is an important part of experiential learning; it is part of every Montessori classroom and can be mirrored at home (more easily than other parts of the classroom/school experience). These activities assist students in developing purposeful life skills for their continued growth and development. This includes refining fine motor and movement skills, practicing coordination, planning, and problem-solving. Practical life activities foster order and sequence, develop concentration, promote physical independence, foster the development of fine motor control, and provide opportunities for planning and carrying out tasks.

The Practical Life area also provides children with opportunities to contribute to family life. Inherent in these activities is the development of key executive functions: decision making, organization, problem-solving, impulse control, collaboration, and communication. These skills help to form the foundation of a child's academic learning. For example, sequencing a task is a pre-reading skill.

Examples of Practical Life work might include:

- Watering plants
- Tidying and organizing rooms
- Laundry (loading, unloading, simple folding)
- Sweeping/"swiffering" floors (a classic Swiffer handle can be shortened for younger students!)
- Using a spray-bottle, squeegee (or sponge) and washcloth to wash windows
- Preparing a snack/meal
- Set the table for meals. (For younger children, include an accessible place to "bus" dishes and put compost/food waste from snacks and meals. Use an

appropriately sized bin with some soapy water for dishes, and a bowl or container for food scraps.)

- Loading/unloading the dish-washer
- Planning an outing
- Helping with shopping lists/budgeting
- Taking care of pets
- Repairing a bicycle
- Planting a garden

Practical life is engaging for children at all stages of development, and tasks are designed according to their level of coordination and independence. You can organize a “job chart” or list of family projects as a way to help guide your child’s interests. Planning and gathering resources to complete the tasks is purposeful work. These ideas foster a sense of contribution, responsibility, shared experiences, and satisfaction.

As our children get older, these activities lead naturally to volunteer experiences and the beginnings of community work. For our oldest adolescents, many of these practical life experiences are the foundation of their sense of belonging and personal vision.

The Uninterrupted Work Cycle

Establishing a routine that works for your family is an essential first step to creating a successful learning environment at home. Children are very familiar with this framework from school. In a Montessori classroom, children are given large blocks of time in order to explore their work deeply. This contributes directly to the development of concentration and provides opportunities to collaborate and problem-solve, and promotes child-centred as opposed to teacher-directed learning. To the extent that you are able, we highly recommend NOT interrupting a student at work. If they are focussed and concentrating on something productive, we want to foster and encourage this, not interrupt it to impose an adult prioritized schedule.

Ownership of Tasks and Sharing of Learning

Montessori learning environments are often referred to as “optimal learning environments” because of the inherent skills and outcomes that result from being in a rich and interesting classroom, coupled with the dynamic of interactions amongst peers and teachers.

In order to create a deep sense of ownership in a student’s own learning, we focus on two things: the developmental needs and the characteristics of the individual child and their interests. Here are a few key points that aid in cultivating a child’s self-direction and attention to their work:

- Choice
- Participation in planning and organizing tasks
- Conversation
- Finding good resources
- Sharing of knowledge

Google Classrooms will continue to be the primary way that teachers communicate with students and parents about schoolwork, and visa versa. We encourage families to follow the teachers’ suggestions and guidance when completing work at home, with the level of student independence that is appropriate for each child. The more children are involved in developing and detailing their activities, the more they can achieve.

One note regarding sharing or presenting work: It is a regular occurrence in an Elementary and Middle School Montessori classroom for children to present their work or projects to one another. Children’s House students also share work with their friends informally, or at a class circle, or even at All School Gathering! This is something you can replicate at home. Planning a presentation or sharing time at the end of a project is very exciting for young children and gives our older students an opportunity to use their

voice. It is an essential part of the learning process as it requires synthesis of learning to describe, explain and express yourself clearly. It feels celebratory as well!

Feeling of Responsibility and Contribution to the Community/Family

Being in a Montessori school is often described by students as being part of a big family. All of the aspects detailed above result in a feeling of belonging to a community and with that, we learn that there is a responsibility to ourselves, others, and the environment. Through our ongoing commitment to each child, we will support students in reaching their full potential in a community of valued learners.

Toddler Program

Students may be expected to:

- Enjoy family life with developmentally appropriate contributions

Parents are invited to:

- Remain mindful and respectful about the growing self-esteem and sense of independence that your child is developing
- Offer help to your child with the hardest part of a task (not the whole task)
- Initiate verbal communication frequently, ask questions, share concerns and observations
- Be consistent; follow routines and clear, consistent sequences for each activity
- Limit screen time
- Include your child in household chores
- Provide opportunities for outdoor activities and experiences
- Let go of perfection. What you are experiencing now is not the final goal. It is foundational
- Most of all, enjoy and appreciate time with your child!

Toddler Teachers will:

- Provide individual communications and check-ins based on student needs
- Schedule conversations over the phone, or via Facetime, ZOOM or Skype
- Be prompt in replying to your emails if you need additional guidance and support
- Give guidance in setting up a daily routine
- Update Google Classrooms weekly for recommendations of activities, work, and online resources
- Provide detailed updates and consultation (as required) regarding toilet learning/ sleeping habits/activities
- Share guidelines and suggestions for screen time

- Share general/ individual suggestions for activities for fine/gross motor skills, providing pictures/videos/materials for parent viewing
- Provide suggestions for books and songs to support language acquisition
- Provide videos of teachers singing and performing hand actions to well-loved class songs
- Share suggestions for practical life activities at home e.g. recipes, food prep, house chores, clothing tips, etc.
- Be responsive to parent questions and available to offer guidance and tips for activities or any other element of support for your child's development
- Encouragement. At the very least, we hope to extend our encouragement and well wishes!

A few examples to get you started:

- **Gross motor skills** Going for a walk (taking time, walking slowly); jumping, climbing stairs and ladders, throwing a ball, pushing and pulling wagons or wheelbarrows, walking on a balance beam, riding balance bikes or scooters
- **Fine motor skills** Cutting, sewing, pasting, bead stringing, opening and closing small containers or latches, using a lock and key, using tongs to transfer small items (pom poms, tea leaves, acorns) from one bowl to another, pouring from one vessel to another
- **Food preparation** Spreading butter, slicing fruits, pouring milk, making pizza, making tea (with adult's help to pour hot water), peeling eggs, combining ingredients to make salsa or fruit salad
- **Literacy** Reading to your child (sometimes the same book over and over), listening to your child, singing with your child

Example TP Morning Schedule:

7:30 - 8:00	Breakfast
8:00 - 8:30	Story time, or listening to music and playing
8:30 - 10:00	Work time
10:00 - 11:00	Structured activity (baking, cooking, "chores", special art activity, etc.)
11:00 - 12:00	Outside playtime

Children's House

Students may be expected to:

- Enjoy family life with developmentally appropriate contributions

Parents are invited to

- Remain mindful about your child's stress or worries during this time of change
- Monitor communication about your child from your teachers
- Initiate communication with teachers about questions, ideas, concerns, feedback
- Support your child's independence in daily life activities
- Be mindful of and allow children to continue periods of concentration
- Establish daily routines and expectations
- Limit screen time
- Provide opportunities for daily physical activity

Children's House Teachers will:

- Provide individual communications and check-ins based on student needs
- Scheduled conversations over the phone, or via Facetime, ZOOM or Skype
- Be prompt in replying to your emails if you need additional guidance and support
- Give guidance in setting up a daily routine
- Update Google Classrooms weekly for recommendations of activities, work, and online resources
- Encouragement. At the very least, we hope to extend our encouragement and well wishes!

Program-Specific Needs and Characteristics

- Children aged 3 - 6 thrive in environments that promote repetition, routine, and

the mastery of purposeful movement

- Allow your child to choose activities and give the opportunity for periods of time without distractions
- The key to a successful learning environment is order, access to tactile resources, space to explore and meaningful activity. For the early childhood child, 'work' and 'play' should be interchangeable - a natural, fun and exciting part of life
- Develop a Peace Area, or a calming corner. If you do not already have one, make a nice quiet place for your child to go to have a quiet moment, or to work towards resolving a problem
- Structure-in a "quiet book time"
- Structure-in reading, or story-time
- Strongly encourage cleaning-up one activity before moving on (the "quiet" area, or Peace Area, is a great place to wait until something is cleaned-up and another activity is chosen)

Example CH Morning Schedule:

7:30 - 8:30	Breakfast
8:00 - 8:30	Story time, or listening to music and playing
8:30 - 10:00	Work time
10:00 - 11:00	Structured activity (baking, cooking, "chores", special art activity, etc.)
11:00 - 12:00	Outside playtime

Lower Elementary

Students are expected to:

- Plan and organize work with guidance from parents
- Follow teachers' guidelines and academic expectations
- Work with integrity on assigned tasks - do your best!

Parents are invited to:

- Guide your child to set up a prepared environment at home
- Establish a consistent routine and work schedule together
- Follow along with the teachers' suggested activities to maintain skills and concepts
- Provide opportunities for your child to share/present work to you

Lower Elementary Teachers will:

- Prepare a variety of appropriate tasks and activities for children to complete at home in order to maintain and move their learning forward
- Communicate in a consistent fashion with parents, replying to emails promptly
- Come together for weekly morning meetings and sharing circles (student participation encouraged, but optional) on Zoom
- Offer feedback to students
- Coordinate with the Learning Specialist Team to ensure that additional learning support lessons continue
- Collaborate with Enrichment staff to provide activities and suggestions for Art, Music, and PE

Program-Specific Needs and Characteristics

- Respect the stage of development - many Lower Elementary students are at a "concrete level" and require the Montessori materials to complete certain tasks

Teachers will guide you regarding what work makes sense for your child and might be available during this learning at home period

- Develop ideas that allow the opportunity for Lower Elementary students to build from their interests. Examples may include projects (building a treehouse!), journals, creative writing, geometry constructions, Practical Life at home, etc.
- Encourage socialization. Lower Elementary students are extremely social; they will need to feel connected to their friends

Lower Elementary ZOOM Schedule:

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
	<i>Weekly Assignments on Google Classroom Weekly 1:1 Check-Ins with LE Teachers</i>				
8:30-9:00	Morning Meeting		Virtual Sharing Session		Sing with Jay
9:00-10:00	Office Hours	Office Hours	Office Hours	Office Hours	Office Hours
1:00-1:30		Art with Jade		PE with Mace	

Lower Elementary Daily Work Diet:

Math	<p>This work should regularly incorporate the following elements of math practice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic fact practice • Operations practice (based on your child's level this will include some or all of +, -, x, ÷) • Application (a wonderful way to incorporate long-term projects and practical life work into your math time) 	
Language	<p>Phonemic Awareness: 2 or 3 activities distributed throughout work time</p>	
	<p>Handwriting: ~1 page in workbook per day</p>	
	<p>High Frequency Word (HFW) Work: Practice reading and spelling each day. New ideas posted each week.</p>	
	<p>Phonics Work: Lesson videos and activities posted each week</p>	<p>Reading Group Work: Assignments given by the week</p>
	<p>Grammar & Word Study: Work posted periodically</p>	<p>Writers' Workshop Projects: Weekly journal and long-term projects</p>
Cultural	<p>Long-term project and research ideas posted periodically</p>	
Art	<p>Graphic Art, Dance, Music Exploration: Ideas and tutorials posted periodically by Jade and Jay</p>	
Movement	<p>P.E. Activities, Outdoor Time: Ideas and tutorials posted periodically by Mace</p>	

Upper Elementary

Students are expected to:

- Plan and organize work as independently as possible
- Follow teachers' guidelines and expectations
- Be own advocate when assistance or further clarification is required
- Communicate directly with teachers
- Refer to Google Classroom each morning for daily announcements, weekly ZOOM lesson schedule, and assignments
- Include the following areas in the weekly 'diet' of home learning activities: math/geometry; language arts; culture/science; art and music; mind and body; stewardship and community service

Parents are invited to:

- Guide your child to set up a prepared environment at home
- Establish a routine and work schedule
- Follow along with the teachers' suggested activities to maintain skills and concepts
- Meet and review your child's assignments; provide opportunities at home for work presentations

Upper Elementary Teachers will:

- Prepare a variety of appropriate tasks and activities for children to complete at home in order to maintain and move their learning forward
- Communicate in a consistent fashion with parents, replying to emails promptly
- Communicate with students and parents about expectations during the 'Learning from Home' period
- Share daily class announcements with students via the Google Classroom Stream
- Offer daily live lessons in core areas of the curriculum

- Offer feedback to students
- Coordinate with the Learning Specialist Team to ensure that additional learning support lessons continue
- Collaborate with Enrichment staff to provide activities and suggestions for Art, Music, and PE

Program-Specific Needs and Characteristics

- Respect the stage of development - some students may still be at a “concrete level” and require the Montessori materials to complete certain tasks. Avoid “teaching” shortcuts especially for Mathematics
- Develop ideas that allow the opportunity for Upper Elementary students to build from their interests. Examples may include projects, journals, creative writing, geometry constructions, Practical Life at home, etc.
- Support the need for Upper Elementary students’ group work - working with a friend (over FaceTime/ZOOM, if possible) may be very well received
- Encourage socialization. Upper Elementary students are extremely social; they will need to feel connected to their friends

“Working” Upper Elementary Schedule:

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
9:00-9:30	4ths Math A		5ths Journey North		Optional 4ths Math A recap
10:00-10:30	5ths Math 6ths Math A	Lit Group B	Spelling	Lit Group B 6ths Math A	5ths Math A
10:30-11:00	6ths Math B 4ths Math B	Seminar Lit Group A	6ths Math B	Lit Group A 4ths Math B	Seminar
11:20-12:00	Community Meeting	Community Meeting	Community Meeting	Community Meeting	Community Meeting
12:00-12:30	Office Hours	Office Hours	Office Hours	Office Hours	Office Hours
1:00-1:30	P.E.		P.E.	Art	

Note: Weekly updates to this schedule will be posted each Monday in Google Classroom.

Middle School

Students are expected to:

- Schedule their own time
- Come to class on ZOOM as scheduled on the Middle School 2019-20 Google Calendar (or make other arrangements with teachers)
- Schedule individual meetings with teachers as needed
- Review both individual and group lesson expectations
- Work solidly for roughly 5 hours a day, approximately 3 hours online and 2 hours of project and homework time
- Submit or review assigned work according to guidelines on Google Classroom

Parents are invited to:

- Check in with your child each morning to plan school work time and work space
- Maintain daily conversations about work progress
- Invite your child to prepare a meal for the family once per week
- Invite your child to contribute more than usual to household chores
- View and discuss suggested movies/web inquiries with your child when possible
- Share news items

Middle School Teachers will:

- Set up and lead classes on ZOOM from 9:00am - 11:30pm every week day
- Select days may start earlier and go later
- Meet individually with students on Zoom as needed
- Maintain an active Google Classroom where all assignments are posted and where students can turn in their work
- Answer student or parent emails within 24 hours

Program-Specific Needs and Characteristics

- In general, we expect Middle School students to take responsibility for completing their work within the timelines provided
- There is an opportunity for parents and students to discuss topics of inquiry from their studies. Watching or reading the news together, and otherwise having adult-style conversations is very important
- While we don't expect parents to review assignments, please do support work completion
- Adolescents crave and require social interaction. We are continuing to incorporate socializing into our remote learning activities

Middle School Schedule:

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Morning Meeting 9:00-9:45	Morning Meeting 9:00-9:45	Morning Meeting 9:00-9:45	Morning Meeting 9:00-9:45	Morning Meeting 9:00-9:45
Humanities 9:45-11:30	8ths Health 9:55-10:55 7ths Language Arts 9:55-10:40	7ths Science 9:55-10:40 8ths Seminar 9:55-10:40	Pre-Algebra/ Geometry 9:55-10:40	Humanities 9:45-11:30
	7ths Health 10:45-11:45 8ths Language Arts 10:45-11:30	8ths Science 10:45-11:30 7ths Seminar 10:45-11:30	Algebra A/ Algebra B 10:45-11:30	

Office Hours and Contact Information for Teachers

Toddler Program	Ellie	Email	epennell@hilltopmontessori.org
	Sarah	9:00 -12:00pm	spalacios@hilltopmontessori.org
	Françoise	Email	fzucchetticlay@hilltopmontessori.org
Birch Room	Cheryl	9:00 - 12:00pm	cmatthews@hilltopmontessori.org
	Mariam	9:00 - 12:00pm	mdiallo@hilltopmontessori.org Cell: 802 275 6069
Willow Room	Jonathan	9:30 - 11:00am	jsellers@hilltopmontessori.org
	Rebecca	8:30 - 9:30am	rbaiser@hilltopmontessori.org
Lower Elementary	Kerstin	9:00 - 10:00am	kkjellberg@hilltopmontessori.org
	Patrick	9:00 - 10:00am	pburke@hilltopmontessori.org
	Amelia	9:00 - 10:00am	afontein@hilltopmontessori.org
Upper Elementary	Tom	12:00 - 1:00pm	tgriffith@hilltopmontessori.org
	Jen	12:00 - 1:00pm	jhed@hilltopmontessori.org
Learning Specialist	Wendy	2:00 - 3:00pm	wlynde@hilltopmontessori.org
Art Teacher	Jade	Email	jharmon@hilltopmontessori.org
Music Teacher	Jay	Email	jcook@hilltopmontessori.org
PE Teacher	Mace	8:00 - 8:45am	msebby@hilltopmontessori.org
Middle School	Paul	Thurs, 9:30-11:00am	pdedell@hilltopmontessori.org Cell: 802 348-7735
	Finn	Thurs, 9:30-11:00am	fcampman@hilltopmontessori.org
	Nora	Tues, 1:00-3:00pm	ngordon@hilltopmontessori.org Cell: 802-380-6961
	Becky	Tues, 1:00-3:00pm	beisenhandler@hilltopmontessori.org Cell: 203-824-3272

Working Hours and Contact Information for Admin

Head of School	Tamara	8:30am - 5:00pm	tmount@hilltopmontessori.org Cell: 802-246-7983
Admissions and Enrollment Office	Lauren	8:30am - 5:00pm	lcampbell@hilltopmontessori.org Cell: 802-380-3890
Business Office	Deb	8:00am - 4:00pm	busadmin@hilltopmontessori.org
Development Office	Roselle	9:00am - 4:00pm	rgarro@hilltopmontessori.org
Administrative Coordinator and Front Desk	Zoe	9:00am - 12:00pm 1:00 - 4:00pm	frontdesk@hilltopmontessori.org
Facilities Manager	Kegan	9:00am - 5:00pm	krefalo@hilltopmontessori.org Cell: 248-974-6475

FAQs

Q: When and how can I reach my child's teacher?

A: Email remains the best way to contact a teacher. If you wish to speak to a teacher, please use email to set up a time for a phone call, facetime, or ZOOM call. **Hilltop teachers are generally available during 'school hours', from 8am - 4pm weekdays.** Each teacher has also designated "Office Hours" during which they are consistently committed to be readily available.

Q: When can I expect a response from teachers?

A: You can expect a response to emails within 24 hours, within working hours. (We encourage students, parents, and staff to take the evenings and weekends off. With no physical boundary between school/work and home, we need to provide time to reflect and refresh.)

Q: How much communication can I expect from the school?

A: You can continue to expect weekly Friday Newsletters, which are a great source of information for school- and community-wide updates and information, in addition to summaries and sharings from each program. Administrative staff is available and will respond to emails within their working hours.

Q: My family has technology limitations (computer access, internet limitations, printer access, etc.) and can't participate fully. How can HMS help?

A: HMS has made computers available to families who have needed additional hardware. We have also facilitated getting printed materials to families and troubleshooting for Internet access. If anyone needs assistance please communicate

this to your teacher who will get you in touch with someone who can help with these resources.

Q: How will HMS help families financially?

A: Hilltop's Finance Committee is offering an option for families who find it necessary to delay the start of next year's tuition payments from May 1st to as late as July 1st. If you would like to request a deferral of your initial tuition payment for the 2020-21 school year from May 1 to July 1, please contact [Deb Lagoy](#), Business Manager, or [Tamara Mount](#), Head of School. Any families who are able and willing to maintain the May 1st tuition payment date are strongly encouraged to do so. Keeping our cash flow steady enables us to continue to pay teachers and maintain our facility, which is critical to the long term viability of our school. Your understanding and help with this is greatly appreciated.

Q: Will there be any end of year ceremonies, such as The Bead Ceremony, Middle School Graduation, etc.?

A: Currently we are not able to plan such activities due to the uncertainty of the health crisis. If we are allowed to gather in groups, we would certainly want to hold these traditional beautiful events of celebration and closure. We have hopes, but can't make any plans or promises at this time. But, as Paul Dedell, Middle School Director wrote, "no one knows how things will pan out or when the physical distancing will be relaxed, but we are committed to having a graduation to celebrate the eighth grade class and the entire Middle School community. It may or may not happen on June 12th as currently scheduled but we envision a tent by the pond, graduation speeches, music, food, and everything we hold dear. It will be a joyful day."