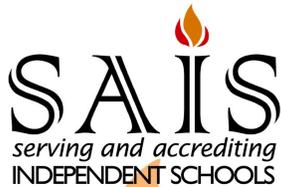


# Hilltop Montessori School

## Wellness Plan for the 2020-2021 School Year



## **Our Wishes and Hopes for the 2020-2021 School Year**

*Protecting the health, safety and well-being of every member of the Hilltop Montessori School community is our highest priority. Hilltop's mission focuses on creating an authentic Montessori experience and addressing the whole child, and this is best accomplished with in-person, on-campus, face-to-face instruction and interaction. While the SARS-CoV-2 virus and COVID-19 disease caused by the virus will impact our on-campus instruction and normal activities throughout the 2020-21 school year, we will not be deterred and refuse to surrender hopelessly to the challenges posed by the virus. Guided by medical experts and others, we will aggressively seek solutions which allow as normal of an on-campus experience for the 2020-21 school year as is safely possible. We intend to be more preventative in nature so that our students can enjoy being back in school again as experts agree that students need to return to school.*

*For those students who wish to start the year with a distance learning plan, we are also happy to provide that until concerned parents feel more comfortable. The structure of the plan will depend on each child's developmental level and arrangements should be discussed on an individual basis.*

*Hilltop Montessori is responding to these uncertain times with an emphasis on flexibility, mindfulness, and understanding while prioritizing an extraordinary academic experience. We want to ensure all students feel safe and engaged in our unparalleled community, while being as healthy as possible. We will get through this with patience, humor, positivity, and flexibility, showing our students the benefits of resilience.*

## Resources for Best Practices for Health and Wellness:

Alabama Roadmap for Reopening Schools:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1q48E8VoKkuFFxvO1sC4i8a91xF7myJgb/view>

CDC Guidelines for Reopening Schools:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/schools.html>

American Academy of Pediatrics:

<https://services.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/clinical-guidance/covid-19-planning-considerations-return-to-in-person-education-in-schools/>

Although Hilltop Montessori School will be following the CDC guidelines and the guidelines from the American Academy of Pediatrics to the best of our ability, there are some procedures that will be unique to our campus or that require additional explanation. These are outlined below and a video overview of some of our changes is on our “News and Events” page.



## On Campus:

- We will be serving boxed lunches in classrooms or outdoors for those that order hot lunch, including 1-8th grade. Second semester will be evaluated closer to time and if health conditions allow, 1-8th grade will return to eating in the gym in smaller groups and socially distanced. Toddler through kindergarten snack will not be self serve and students at the early childhood level will continue to eat in their classes. 8 additional picnic tables have been purchased for this reason. Additional classroom tables have been purchased at the early childhood level to ensure more distance during eating but we will still have the children near enough to each other so they can interact socially.
- To the fullest extent possible, the students are socially distanced in the classroom and hallways with 6 feet as the ideal and 3 feet in some situations. Each child has an assigned work area, workspaces have been rearranged, more tables are being utilized and in most cases, class size is reduced while outside areas are being utilized to the fullest extent with increased ventilation when possible as well.
- We have eliminated the use of soft touch surfaces that cannot be easily disinfected and we will follow CDC approved disinfection for cleaning for all aspects of the indoor and outdoor environments. Examples include: disinfection of learning materials before/after use and in between students to the best of our ability, disinfection of playground and frequently touched surfaces at multiple points throughout the day, encouraging increased ventilation when weather appropriate, instruction and regular practice of hand washing with contactless dispensers, hand sanitizer stations accessible through the building for when soap/water is not available, the purchase and use of 4 electrostatic sprayers and disinfectants. Washable yoga mats have been purchased as a substitute for our soft touch mats for work areas and soft touch furniture has been eliminated. Students in grades 1-8 are encouraged to also provide their own personal hand sanitizer and use it as often as they wish. We will still be regularly washing our hands with soap and water but it is handy for older children to also have their own sanitizer at their individual work area.
- We are eliminating K-8th grade field trips for the first semester and will re-address for the second semester if guidelines change. Large gatherings have been postponed (entire school events and gatherings with more than one class) until advised by medical experts as appropriate. We plan to offer virtual and small group options for parent get togethers following CDC guidelines and the state's recommendations.

- We are eliminating the practice of shared learning materials to the fullest extent possible. Montessori class materials will be sterilized before and after use before returning to shelves. Class supply shelves have been eliminated; each child will have their own materials such as pens, markers, etc in their own box and their own work space. The class community supply shelves are not going to be in use for this year.
- We have implemented one-way walkthrough routes on campus with social distancing arrows and lines. Carpool arrival/dismissal procedures have been changed so guests and parents are not walking through the building, older students will go directly into their classrooms to limit foyer use. Toddlers will be entering through the playground and going directly into the classrooms. All parents are asked to stay in their cars and to please wear a mask when the faculty come up to take temperatures. Staff will sign each child in so we aren't sharing a common surface. All adults and in the children in the car will have a temperature check with a contactless thermometer. If anyone in the car has a temperature over a 100 degrees, everyone will be sent home for evaluation from a physician.
- We are limiting the number of students in restrooms, at lockers and in the hall at one time. There will be regular cleaning/disinfection throughout the day in common areas, as well as classrooms. Touch-less soap dispensers will be used with CDC approved soap and cleaning supplies. Disinfectant is also CDC approved and kept out of reach of children. Instruction and supervision will occur to ensure good hand washing throughout the day and at regular intervals (entering the class, before/after playtime outside, before/after using the restroom, before/after eating, at a minimum of every two hours). We will be teaching additional lessons in covering coughs, sneezes and best ways to stay healthy as outlined in the CDC guidelines.
- Water fountains are closed, except the water bottle filling station. Additional water will be supplied through cups/filters for the little ones and teacher served. Students are also asked to bring their own water bottle, labeled with their name.
- We will also use outdoor spaces as much as possible and open windows and doors at times. **Because teaching is a personal and close contact activity, masks for preschool through eighth grade are mandatory when**

**social distancing is not an option. All faculty will be wearing masks indoors and outdoors if in close contact with others. Students who are exercising outdoors and maintaining social distance can participate without a mask (recess, PE). Teachers will help students learn to wear masks successfully but we encourage practice at home and encouragement. Parents should wash their child's mask nightly or change out new ones each day. The CDC guidance is currently recommending face coverings for children over two years of age. We know this can be challenging for those with sensory issues or asthma but would please like to request that we all try with our little ones as this will help to protect our entire community unless a health condition prevents the child from wearing a mask. We had wonderful success during our "Montessori Reboot" with the students age 3 and above in masks so we have confidence this will work beautifully!**

- Physical education and playground spaces-High touch surfaces will be disinfected frequently and before/after each class use. 1-8th grade will not be using the Mt Laurel playground for the foreseeable future but will have use of the field, gym, native plant trail, beautiful wooded areas and outdoor classrooms. Physical education (K-8) will be outside when possible and all gym equipment will be sterilized before and after use. PE classes will try to do low impact activities and social distance, particularly when indoors. Close contact sports will be eliminated for now.
- Specialty faculty will travel to classrooms where possible to limit the students movement throughout the building and gathering in common areas. Spanish instruction will be in the class for all students. 1-8th grade may travel to art and music when needed but will go in smaller groups of approximately 10. Music recorders or other "mouth" instruments will not be used for the foreseeable future. Hand music instruments, art supplies and other equipment will be sterilized before/after each use and students will wash hands before/after use and with each transition. Teachers entering the classrooms will also be hand washing in and out and sanitizing their materials.
- There will be no third party enrichment programs/vendors on campus to start the year-Only essential faculty will be permitted to start the year. Speech/hearing/reading therapists and private lessons are permitted if the faculty involved follow all safety and wellness protocols. After school vendors such as gymnastics, dance and soccer will be considered for the second semester if conditions allow but are cancelled for the first semester. We are still having early care and after care to accommodate our working parents.

- Unfortunately, there will be no unannounced parents or visitors beyond the front office. Parents are welcome by appointment to observe in the classes but visitors to the classroom must have a temperature check, use hand sanitizer, wear a mask and watch from the doors of the classroom. We are hopeful that by the second semester, parents will be welcome to volunteer in all the classrooms but for now, CDC guidelines feel that limited adult exposure will better protect our students and our faculty. We know parents want to be involved and engaged so we will be finding unique ways to do this electronically or at a distance. Ideas include live video during the morning work cycle, use of the updated See Saw platform for the younger ones and parent orientations though Zoom. We are still having an open house for parents and students on Friday, August 7th but social distancing will be followed and visits will be spaced out throughout the day. Our large back to school parent orientation on Sunday, August 9th will be held on Zoom. Events like job demonstration, open observation and parent conferences will likely be held online or in very small groups but we will make those decisions a month prior as we see what is recommended.
- Please take your child’s temperature and your own before leaving your home.** All students and the parent driver will also have a temperature check upon arrival in the carpool line and assure the staff they are healthy enough for school. Those with a 100 degree temperature or higher will be sent home. Each teacher will also take their temperature at home before coming to work and then again when on campus. All day employees will have a mid day temperature check. Employees and students that do not feel well will be immediately isolated and sent home and will be asked to seek medical advice from a licensed physician before returning to campus.
- Regarding students in particular, we will “err on the side of caution” and immediately isolate any children who seem ill and ask that parents come pick them up within a reasonable time period, as well as any siblings. If a child or staff member tests positive for COVID-19, they need to remain at home, test negative before returning and provide documentation from a physician before they can return to campus. We also ask that asthmatic students remain at home for nebulizer treatments as studies have shown these activities can contribute to the release of COVID into the air. If a child is coughing severely and has asthma or tends to have allergies/runny nose, we may ask for a note from their pediatrician or allergy specialist that they are negative for COVID and any infectious disease to put in our files. If the household member of a student tests positive for COVID-19, we will ask that the child remain at home to watch for symptoms until guidance is received from their pediatrician that they can return to campus but HMS will happily provide a distance learning plan during that time.

- As this is a constantly evolving situation, HMS may make changes or alter specific health guidelines as is necessary but will continue to update parents weekly and also update the COVID-19 page on our website. The CDC guidelines for schools may change and we will be flexible and revise policies as needed.

**Parent and Faculty Commitment:** In order to keep our community as healthy as possible, we ask each family and staff member to commit to the following at home:

In public spaces, including work, all members of each household commit to practicing the following:

- Increased social distancing.
- Minimizing close contact conversations to less than 10-15 minutes for those outside my home.
- Face masks worn when social distancing measures not available.
- Monitoring for symptoms, or self-quarantine if chance of exposure, after international travel or domestic travel to an area experiencing widespread community transmission.
- Hand sanitation after contact with high touch surfaces
- Hand washing during or after public activities.
- Monitoring at home for symptoms of COVID-19 such as: mild, cold-like symptoms, such as fever, runny nose, and cough, vomiting and diarrhea, temperature, loss of taste/smell, shortness of breath and anything unusual.
- Teaching proper hand-washing techniques to the children in my family. Practicing with mask use if my child is capable so they can wear them effectively in school.
- Modeling hand washing habits at home to my children.

- Disinfecting your child's backpacks, shoes, lunch boxes and masks each evening.
- Promoting awareness and help child identify when hand washing might be necessary.
- Reporting to school when there is a confirmed case of COVID-19 in our family so Hilltop can reach out to local health department for guidance.
- Disclosure and self-quarantine when known direct contact with a confirmed case has occurred.

**Amended Distance Learning Plan if Needed:** In the event of a mandated campus closure or a lapse regarding on campus instruction, students will move to distance learning utilizing our *revised distance learning plan*. If at all possible, Hilltop Montessori School will remain open but plans are in place in the event of a widespread outbreak on campus or a shelter in place order. We have also been told that if a child or family on campus contracts COVID-19, that groups of children or teachers that have been in contact with the child may need to remain at home for a period of time. Having our students wear masks can prevent this from happening so we mandate masks for all students ages three and above for this reason, among others. The new plan includes:

\* IXL has been purchased for students in K-8th grade for math and language individual work that can be done from the comfort of home on an individual basis if needed. 13 additional Chrome books have been purchased so students will have technology experiences with the new platform in the classroom. This is not going to be our primary source of work in the classes but we will make sure the students are confident in using the system so they can be more independent at home.

- Updated See Saw Plus has been purchased for toddler through third grade for better organization and engagement. In the event of a campus closure, the toddler class will use See Saw Plus as well for better access to videos and information.
- Google Classroom will be mandated for 1-8th grade for easier organization for parents and older students to work toward more independence.
- We would continue the use of Zoom or FaceTime for face to face interaction, but zoom experiences will be more individualized to better meet the needs of younger students who had trouble engaging online in a larger group. Teachers will offer a once per week individual session with each student to check in, gain feedback and offer a personal touch.
- We will be keeping the format for checking in and out of Montessori learning materials for the early grades. As before, they were sterilized in and out and were available for weekly check out.
- We will be utilizing EPIC and possibly other programs for readers to access reading material with ease at home to assist parents who may not have quick access to reading materials.
- If a mandated closure is longer than a week, teachers will work a week ahead and lessons will be posted by Monday morning so students will have until Thursday to complete the assignments on their own time table. (Unless a different due date is given by the teacher for specific assignments) Friday will be designated as time for teachers to collaboratively plan and give feedback to students. We hope this will allow more flexibility to working parents.

- HMS will be purchasing a new office copier to assist with at home learning packets. More time will be given for “picking up” of learning packets if needed; the office would be open from 8 to 12, unless we experience another stay at home order in Alabama and then, packets will be sent electronically.
- In the event we have to move to distance learning, there will be some sharing of lessons and work by subject matters within the same academic level as some of our teachers have small children at home. With such a sudden and unexpected move to distance learning last March, we felt it best for students to see their teachers faces but in a planned distance learning move, it might be likely to see certain teachers tackling subjects while others tackle others to assist those that have small children at home alone, allowing us to improve the quality of instruction to the fullest extent possible and freeing up time for faculty to engage online in smaller groups.
- Although Hilltop will meet all applicable safety requirements to the best of our ability, as long as COVID-19 continues to spread by community transmission and until there is an effective vaccine, there will be a risk that students could become infected with COVID-19 despite the School’s efforts. That risk extends to the families of students as well as others with whom the student may have contact. To this end, all parents who plan to send their child back to campus for school will be asked to sign a liability waiver acknowledging that they are aware of the risks associated with on campus instruction. The waiver is currently available at: <https://hilltopmontessori.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/COVID-19-waiver.pdf>

## **Questions and Answers for Parents:**

### **What will happen if someone in the Hilltop community tests positive for COVID-19?**

As a community, we have an obligation to notify our local health authorities and the school community of a COVID-19 diagnosis. We will use the contact tracing guidelines provided by the CDC and the Alabama Department of Public Health to notify any families of students who may have been in contact with the infected individual as soon as possible. We are fortunate that we have a small, intimate community and know where our students and teachers spend their time each day on campus. The notification process should be very quick. Community members who may be affected will follow the health department and CDC protocols and this will guide the individual's return to campus plan. To reiterate, any student or teacher with a COVID-19 diagnosis may not return to campus until they test negative and have been permitted to return to work/school from their physician (this is typically 10-14 days). Siblings of the same family are included in this plan. HMS will offer a distance learning plan during that time period for the children.

### **Are there special considerations for items students will or will not be allowed to bring to school?**

Young children that nap are still permitted to bring their own comfort item/blanket for reassurance but beyond that, we are currently asking all students to leave toys, stuffed animals, and other items that are likely to be touched by classmates (playing cards, trading cards, etc) at home. Again, we are asking that parents disinfect items that come home each day such as backpacks, shoes and lunch boxes. We recommend removing "extras" from backpacks and lunch boxes such as charms, stuffed animal keychains, etc. The more items your child has to deal with, the more that has to be disinfected. The students will continue to change into their "indoor" shoes when they arrive and lunchboxes/backpacks will remain in the hall.

**If Shelby County and Hoover School systems move to a mandated closure, will Hilltop do the same?**

One of the best aspects of HMS is that we are not bound by what other schools are doing. As an independent school, we are responsible to our Board of Trustees and seek to make decisions about what is best for our school uniquely. We are more able to adapt to situations as they arise because of our smaller class sizes and expansive campus. We are committed to being part of a network of other independent schools that regularly share and exchange best practices but decisions are and will continue to be made based on what is best for our immediate community. Obviously, if there is a mandated shutdown of all private schools, then HMS would move to distance learning immediately as we still must follow the law but beyond that, we are fortunate to have more flexibility.

**My child has been at home for several months with just our family. I am a little concerned about his/her transitioning back to a full school day in August. What support will my child have at school emotionally?**

Your child's social and emotional well being is important to us and we understand that children of all ages may have struggled during this time. We are fully aware that many students have had little contact with people other than their immediate families and may have issues with separation and anxiety when school begins. We will be sharing videos regularly (such as the one with our new mascot, Bumble) to help ease the transition for your child and yourself. Classroom lessons will focus on age appropriate topics such as working with friends and sharing feelings related to this situation. Our faculty will be compassionate and kind, especially regarding new challenges such as wearing a face mask, the importance and need for social distancing and other changes.

**If a vaccine becomes available but I don't want my child to have it, what are my options?**

Our school policy remains the same for all immunizations, including COVID-19. No one can be forced to receive a vaccine for religious or medical reasons; however everyone is highly encouraged to get all recommended vaccines from your pediatrician on whatever plan/time schedule is deemed appropriate. Currently the state guidance in Alabama mandates that each child must have either an immunization form on file or a religious exemption. We understand there are many strong feelings about vaccines and always direct you to your pediatrician for the best information regarding your child's health.

**If my child gets an antibody test and is determined that she/he has had the virus, can we opt out of the temperature checks?**

No, you must still do the temperature checks until the CDC does more research on the antibody test. The accuracy of these tests is still being determined. COVID-19 is such a new virus that there is still much we do not know so a positive antibody test may not be reliable and if so, only determines past infection, but no strategies should be based on antibody tests at this time.

**If a child at school is diagnosed with COVID, will my family be able to know who the child is so I will know if my child is at risk (such as a close friend or classmate) or do privacy laws prevent that?**

HIPPA law does not permit disclosure of this information. Having said that, contact tracing will be conducted and you will be notified if your child has been exposed. Contact tracing is not a job of HMS-it is the job of the health department who would guide us through this process. Depending on the type of exposure, your child may be required to quarantine at home, along with other guidance provided. In all instances, we will maintain privacy of the COVID-19 positive individual.

**If HMS is forced to close in-person, on campus learning and shift only to distance learning for a period of time, will you refund any tuition to reflect on the loss of expected service as we move back to distance learning?**

Please understand that our school is a non profit and targets a break even budget each year, providing the most value at the best possible price point. Most of the annual budget is fixed annually because of our commitment to teachers and staff. To date, the COVID-19 crisis additional costs have been absorbed by our current budget. These include the added costs of technology, technology platforms, enhanced disinfection, cleaning and retrofitting learning spaces. We have also amended our distance learning plan and feel we are more prepared. If a child is too young to participate in distance learning and the school closes for several months again, we will offer a credit.

**I really care about my child's teachers and it seems like all this cleaning is a lot. How will they teach?**

Hilltop has slightly lower enrollment than expected this year, which is fortunate so that our faculty are not overwhelmed. From schools that have opened around the world, anecdotal evidence is that after a week or two, everyone adjusts well and the staff quickly settle back into their teaching routines. As with any beginning of the school year, we will spend time going over procedures and ways to keep our community safe but HMS has plenty of faculty and support staff to make everything happen. We also feel that the students will do very well with all the initiatives and as Montessori observed, they love learning when the environments are well prepared with beautiful learning materials. Although the wellness guidelines seem to be lengthy, they will quickly fade into the background as the students resume their studies. Your children are bright, engaged little people that love learning and we feel confident they will adjust quickly back into the learning cycle. Our experiences with the children during our 3 week "Montessori Reboot" confirmed this.

\* As always, if you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to reach out. We look forward to an engaging, safe year on campus and even with this highly unusual situation, we feel confident that this will be a wonderful academic experience for all. Again, everything is subject to change based on recommendations as outlined by the local health department but we will definitely continue with our weekly updates so everyone will be informed.