

Community Handbook

(Revised July, 2023)

Mission Statement: *Hilltop Montessori School's mission is to light the flame of learning to achieve a lifetime of success.*

Diversity Statement: *Hilltop Montessori School celebrates diversity and inclusion in all aspects of academic and campus life. Reflective of best practices of an authentic Montessori education, we celebrate and value the uniqueness of every individual.*

Philosophy Statement: *Hilltop Montessori School is a highly engaged, academic community of students, parents and educators that embrace Montessori philosophy. Global citizenship, environmental stewardship, critical thinking and best practices in education contribute to each student's individual learning experience.*

This handbook remains the property of Hilltop Montessori School (HMS or "School"). This handbook may not be duplicated in whole or in part by anyone other than the Administration of Hilltop Montessori School. This handbook is not to be distributed to anyone other than the family for which it is intended.

This handbook is intended to provide an overview of the policies and procedures of Hilltop Montessori School and does not necessarily represent a complete recitation of the School's policies and procedures. This handbook does not create an expressed or implied contract or covenant of any type between the School and any person affiliated with the School.

The School reserves the right to supplement, amend, rescind, or modify any of its policies and practices at any time, with or without prior notice.

Hilltop Montessori School is a non-profit 501(c)(3) corporation, offering quality private education based on the principles of the Montessori philosophy. The carefully planned, self-motivating environment helps each child develop naturally at the child's own pace. The environment promotes a child's discovery, learning, teaching, and growth. Hilltop Montessori School is dedicated to the development of the whole child: academically, emotionally, and socially. Students, teachers, and parents play an active role in the educational process. The educational environment celebrates cultural, ethnic and economic diversity such that children from various backgrounds are taught to live to their greatest potential.

In our commitment to embrace diversity, Hilltop's enrollment is open to all children and their families without regard to race, color, religion, creed, gender, disability or national origin. Hilltop is also non-denominational and works toward the goal of having each child celebrated for their own unique traditions, culture and religion.

Hilltop Montessori School offers an academic year program, beginning in August for Toddler, Preschool/ Kindergarten, Elementary, and Middle School students. Hilltop is accredited with SACS/CASI (AdvancED) and SAIS (The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools and The Southern Association of Independent Schools). The entire school is also an associate member of The American Montessori Society (AMS) and the toddler through kindergarten program is accredited with AMS.

Hilltop Montessori School accepts children between the ages of eighteen months and eighth grade. Hilltop Montessori accepts children without regard to race, color, religion, creed, gender, disability, or national origin. The school recruits a culturally diverse student population where children learn respect and understanding for others, cultural heritage, and individual differences. Admissions information is available on our website at: <http://www.hilltopmontessori.com/admissions-procedures/>.

All parents are required to sign an enrollment contract with Hilltop Montessori School and are subject to all rules, regulations, and policies established by the Board of Directors and the Head of Hilltop Montessori School. The enrollment contracts are binding, obligating families to pay for the entire year. Please see the enrollment contract for further information.

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ADMISSIONS POLICIES

Children are considered for admission after parents complete an Admission Application. Children are typically admitted to Hilltop Montessori School in the Toddler Program (18 months and walking through 36 months before September 30) and Primary/Preschool (three years before August 1 through kindergarten) levels. Montessori classrooms incorporate multi-age groupings and whenever possible, children stay with the same teaching team and classmates for a three-year cycle. To take advantage of this unique learning opportunity, parents are encouraged to plan for a multi-year commitment to the school and enroll their child as early as possible. Although children may be accepted at any age, for maximum benefit of the program, we encourage enrollment no later than three to four years of age.

BULLYING

Hilltop Montessori School strives to provide a safe, secure, and respectful learning environment for all students in school buildings, on school grounds, on buses and field trip transportation, and at school-sponsored activities. Bullying has a harmful social, physical, psychological, and academic impact on bullies, victims, and bystanders. The school consistently and vigorously addresses bullying so that it is extinguished immediately and thereby prevents disruption to the learning environment and learning process. Teachers participate in continuing education to support best practices in addressing bullying.

Definition:

“Bullying” is defined as deliberate verbal or nonverbal behavior which is intended to cause physical or emotional harm to another person, and which has a significant negative impact on the educational environment or other person’s physical, emotional, or psychological well-being.

Bullying is intentional, often involves an imbalance of power, and is typically behavior that is repeated over time. Bullying may be motivated by an actual or perceived characteristic, such as, but not limited to, age, national origin, race, ethnicity, religion, sex, sexual orientation, physical attributes, physical, mental, emotional or learning disability, or social or economic status.

Bullying behavior can be:

1. Physical (e.g. hitting, kicking, throwing objects at, or otherwise subjecting another person to unwanted physical contact);
2. Verbal (e.g. threatening or intimidating language, name-calling, or racist remarks); or
3. Indirect (e.g. spreading cruel rumors, social exclusion, or sending threatening or intimidating messages or pictures by mobile phone or using the Internet – also known as cyber bullying)
- 4.

It is important to understand that bullying is a recurring and deliberate abuse of power. Accidental contact, arguments, differences of opinion, and isolated incidents likely do not rise to the level of bullying. Not all conflicts between students or groups of students may be categorized as bullying.

Prohibition

Bullying is prohibited on school property and/or school-sponsored events and activities. In addition, cyberbullying is prohibited regardless of whether it is done on school property or at a school-sponsored event or activity.

Complaint Procedures

School employees are required to report incidents of bullying that they witness. Third party witnesses (e.g., other students) are strongly encouraged to report such incidents.

If a student or a student’s parent/guardian believes the student is being bullied, the student and/or parent/ guardian should report the incident(s) to the classroom teacher for informal investigation and resolution. Reports of bullying/intimidation may be made verbally or in writing. Reports will be investigated promptly and will be kept confidential to the extent possible. Anonymous complaints will be investigated, to the extent possible, with the understanding that investigations of anonymous complaints may be hampered by the lack of information regarding the source of the complaint. If the issue is not resolved by the teacher the parent/guardian may request a formal investigation by submitting a written complaint to the Head of School. The written complaint must describe the alleged bullying behavior (with dates) and explain why the complainant is not satisfied with the response of the teacher.

Upon receiving a written complaint, the Head of School or designee will promptly investigate the complaint. While the scope of the investigation will depend on the nature of the particular complaint, the investigation will typically include, but is not limited to, the following steps:

- Interviewing the alleged victim;
- Interviewing the alleged student(s) who may have engaged in bullying behaviors listed above; • Interviewing potential third party witnesses(e.g., other students in the class);
- Interviewing the teacher who received the initial report, as well as other staff members with knowledge of the facts surrounding the complaint.

If the investigation determines the reported behavior constitutes bullying as defined by this Policy, the offender will be subject to discipline. Cyberbullying, regardless of where it originated, will be subject to the same discipline if the investigation determines that it had a significant negative impact on the educational environment or endangered the health or safety of another at school or under school supervision.

Within 30 school days of receiving the written complaint, the Head of School or designee will send a written response to the complainant. The written response will include a description of the findings and conclusions of the investigation, and, if appropriate and permitted by law, any action taken.

Retaliation

Retaliation against any individual who reports bullying or participates in a bullying investigation is prohibited. Any student who engages in such retaliation will be subject to discipline.

Additionally, the school has chosen a representative from the faculty that is the designated representative to handle bullying issues that can be brought for resolution without fear of penalty in order to remedy the situation. This employee is Stephanie Kirkpatrick. In this way, students can have an alternative adult to speak with and may be more comfortable voicing concerns to someone that is not in a position of authority to terminate a child's enrollment.

CURRICULUM AND ADVANCEMENT

Hilltop Montessori School offers a full Montessori curriculum based on the philosophy of Dr. Maria Montessori, which is available in outline format at our website, <http://www.hilltopmontessori.com/curriculum>.

Hilltop Montessori School strives to meet each child's needs academically. "Skipping" grades is not permitted. On some occasions, Upper Elementary students excelling in mathematics may participate in the middle school math program, in keeping with the Montessori philosophy of meeting each child's academic needs. Parental request is not a basis for placement in the middle school

mathematics program and requires approval from classroom teachers, The Director of the Elementary & Middle School Program, and the Head of School. In order for a student to be considered, his or her mathematics standardized test scores must be at the top 10 percent and above. Maturity and internal motivation are also evaluated as part of the decision making process.

CHALLENGED MATERIAL OR METHODS

The school annually reviews its curriculum and instruction as part of the overall educational experience. HMS values the diversity among its families and therefore realizes that viewpoints may vary on appropriate materials, methodologies, trips, or other components of the school's curriculum and activities. If a student or parent objects to a component of a class or student life, the parent should contact the instructor for clarification. If satisfaction is not acquired, then the parent should contact the appropriate educational Director for further inquiries. The school will handle each concern on an individual basis to allow for sensitivity in each situation. However, students are responsible for all grades regarding materials even in the case of an objection by the student or family. The school does not promote any certain political, religious, or philosophical approach but desires to expose its students to appropriate experiences to be successful after graduation.

CHANGE OF CLOTHES AND INDOOR SHOES/FOOTWEAR

We would like to ask all parents of Primary and Toddler children to have at least one full change of clothes (seasonally appropriate) onsite, in a Ziploc bag labeled with your child's name. Extremely soiled underwear might be thrown away as there is not any laundry or sanitation equipment on site. Children may get muddy or wet.

Additionally, "indoor" footwear is encouraged for all preschool and toddler children; options will be discussed at Parent Orientation. (Typically soft soled shoes, crocs, or slippers) Children in K-8th grade will need sneakers for PE that are non-marking for the gym floor.

PARENT COMPORTMENT POLICY

HMS believes that a positive and constructive working relationship between the School and a student's parents or guardians is essential to the fulfillment of the School's mission. Thus, HMS reserves the right to not continue the enrollment, or not re-enroll, a student if the School reasonably concludes that the actions of a parent or guardian make such a positive and constructive relationship impossible or otherwise seriously interfere with Hilltop Montessori School's accomplishment of its educational purposes. To avoid the spread of misinformation within the School community, parents are expected to address any concerns with School policies or practices directly to School administrators.

We encourage parents and guardians to engage in discussions that contribute positively to the educational environment while also respecting the privacy and dignity of all individuals. Gossip or sharing unverified information about fellow parents, students, or school staff is not aligned with our

values and can create an unhealthy atmosphere. Let us work together to build a supportive community based on empathy, understanding, and productive dialogue.

COMPLAINT POLICY

Initial concerns regarding any issue occurring in the classroom (whether it is in the primary or a specialty classroom) context such as academic issues or a child's or staff's behavior in the classroom should be addressed with your child's primary lead teacher. Simply discussing your concern with the primary lead teacher and getting information clarified can easily remedy this matter, in most cases. All concerns regarding students, parents, volunteers, or employees of the school regarding a classroom/academic issue should be handled by scheduling a conference with the primary teacher. Problems should not be discussed during school hours when there are other students, parents, volunteers or employees present.

*If a parent has a concern regarding a classroom or one that involves students, we respectfully ask them to clarify with the teacher in charge. Parents are not permitted to speak to students other than their own children regarding disciplinary issues on campus or other concerns that they might have.

Please note: texts or emails are not an ideal correspondence for lengthy explanations and questions. Although email can be an easy alternative to communication regarding short questions or small concerns by calling after school hours to arrange a time for conferencing. Please do not all approach our staff for lengthy conferences while they are directly caring for children as this becomes a safety issue.

If satisfaction is not met regarding a concern after your conference with your child's teacher, then a formal written complaint should be filed with The Director of the Early Childhood Program or the Director of the Elementary and Middle School for the matter to be moved forward.

Any serious concerns regarding a school action, or the behavior of students, parents, volunteers, or employees of the school would be considered a complaint. A formal written procedure should ensue so that the initial issue and follow-up responses can be documented. If the issue remains unresolved to a party's satisfaction, the Early Childhood or Elementary and Middle School Director should be informed in writing. If satisfaction is still not met, then a meeting with the Head of School is warranted. If concerns are brought to the office regarding a teacher, the individual will be involved in the discussion to clarify the situation. If satisfaction is still not met, then the written complaint should be given to the President of the Board of Directors. The complaint will be addressed by the board as soon as possible. **All** formal complaints must be in writing.

Issues regarding tuition payments, donations and other financial matters should be addressed with the Director of Finance and Operations.

Any parent that fails to comply with the complaint policy or becomes abusive to the staff will be asked to leave the school permanently and the enrollment contract will be immediately terminated by the School. Because of the increased concerns about security in schools, HMS has a no tolerance policy for verbal, physical threats, abuse, screaming, yelling at faculty, particularly when students are present. Parents or visitors that act abusively will be asked to leave the premises and the authorities will be contacted. The school reserves the right to terminate the enrollment contract for the children of the parent. If the school determines that it is best for the family to finish the school year or semester, all further correspondence with the school will have to be submitted in writing. Hilltop's employees must maintain a level of professional courtesy for each parent and the same is expected from our parent body. This includes making arrangements for conferences with the faculty, not approaching HMS employees at public venues to discuss concerns and being respectful of our employees' time so that full attention can be given to your concerns.

If the school makes the decision to allow the family to remain at HMS after such incidents and such abuse continues so that a level of professional courtesy is not maintained, the school reserves the right to take whatever steps they deem necessary to remedy the situation. This could include immediate termination of a child's enrollment, providing parameters for the parent to complete the school year or to recommend or mandate family counseling.

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Hilltop maintains a list in the front office for resources regarding family counseling, physicians and educational testing. Parents are free to use this referral list. All referrals are confidential.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Each child's work progress and behavior will remain confidential. Parent volunteers, teachers, and aides are not permitted to discuss a child's progress or behavior with anyone not directly involved in the child's education. In order to help maintain confidentiality, we ask that parent volunteers not use the office computer or the classroom computers and refrain from discussing children other than their own. We utilize parents as volunteers in the classroom and ask that they refrain from discussing other children's progress. If a parent volunteer has a concern regarding a child's progress or an event observed in the classroom, they should discuss the matter privately with the lead teacher for the classroom. The teacher will do his/her best to explain the matter without providing personal details on student progress.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If there is ever a change to the contact information forms you previously submitted, please let the office know immediately.

CRISIS MANAGEMENT PLAN

Fire, tornado and intruder drills will be conducted at the beginning of the school year and thereafter to ensure all children and staff understand the disaster procedure. The library and piano room serves as a tornado shelter in the primary building and the large bathrooms serve as shelter in Phase 3. In the event that tornadoes are imminent in our area, mass emails and phone calls will be put in place so that all available parents can pick up their children before a tornado watch goes into effect. If parents are not comfortable with their child in school due to inclement weather, they should feel free to pick them up from school. The school has emergency/crisis management plans for all crisis situations. Please note that once inclement weather is in the area, the school may hold students until we are advised it is safe to dismiss them.

CUSTODY AGREEMENTS / SEPARATE HOUSEHOLDS

HMS will take necessary steps to communicate with both parents/legal guardians regarding a student's progress. The school will assume the natural parent has custody, unless presented with a court order to the contrary. In order to keep the best interest of the child in mind, non-custodial parents can participate in the education process, receive information and be listed on the child's emergency information, unless the school has court documents stating otherwise. In the event of a potential disagreement regarding the child's education, we rely on the custodial parent and legal documentation stating so to secure consensus in the decision making process.

DAILY ARRIVAL PROCEDURES

Primary-Middle School parents are to form a line in the carpool lane and remain inside their vehicles. A Hilltop staff member will greet and escort your Preschool child to the school building between the times of 8:05 and 8:30 AM. All Elementary and Middle School students should also be dropped off in the express carpool line between 8:00 and 8:30

AM and will walk themselves to class, with supervision. All **toddlers** must be walked into their classroom by their parents and parents of toddlers are asked to park along the Abbott Square extension (not in the teacher parking lot). If parking along Abbott Square, please make sure to utilize the sidewalk and not walk through the faculty parking lot. Children walking through the parking lot may not be seen by incoming traffic. Please utilize the sidewalk that connects the Abbott Square extension to the front path for this reason.

The school assumes responsibility for a child only when the child is delivered to school personnel and has been signed in. ALL students at the preschool through Kindergarten must be signed in at the carpool line by the person dropping them off and must include the time of drop off.

* To encourage the independence that is so vital in Montessori, we encourage all parents of students to drop their child off in the carpool arrival/dismissal line unless they are in the toddler class. If you need to come into the office to speak to someone in the administrative offices or to volunteer, please sign your children in and leave them in the early care room if it is before 8:00 AM or hand them to school personnel in the carpool line between 8:05 AM and 8:30 AM for toddler and primary students and between 8:00 AM and 8:30 AM for elementary and middle school students. Similarly, if you have to walk in a toddler child but also have older students attending Hilltop, you should sign your non-toddler children in and leave them in the early care room if it is before 8:00 AM or hand them to school personnel in the carpool line between 8:00 AM and 8:30 AM.

Teachers are not available to meet with parents before the school day starts or after school begins unless a prior appointment has been made. Please do not hold up the carpool line or visit the class unexpectedly in the morning to have lengthy conversations with teachers. Teachers are happy to discuss your concerns at the appropriate time but must make the most use of their available instructional time with the students. They wish to give full attention to your concerns, so setting up time for a phone conference or an in person conference is ideal.

DO NOT leave any vehicle unattended in the carpool line or park in the faculty parking lot. If you block the carpool line with an unattended vehicle, you are not only inconveniencing other parents and visitors, but you are also blocking a fire lane, and thereby endangering the lives of those in the building. If you must park for official business, or for bringing your child into the school, or for volunteering, parking is available in the spaces at the front of the school or along the Abbott Square extension.

Also, please remember that the carpool driveway is a one-way driveway and is the only driveway for cars to the school. You will be fined \$25 each time you: leave a vehicle unattended in the carpool driveway (even if you have left the engine running), park in the teacher's parking lot or violate the one-way driveway rule. The school also reserves the right to have your car towed if you are parking in these undesignated parking areas.

Hilltop Montessori is a school and expects its students to be at school on time. Tardiness is disruptive to your child, the teachers and the other students in the class, so please observe the school start times to ensure an optimal learning experience for all of our students. In the Kindergarten, Elementary and Middle School Programs, consistent tardiness is considered a violation of the discipline policies and will be treated accordingly. Excessive tardies and absences can lead to retention in your child's grade as per the state's policies and procedures. Please also know that in the elementary and middle school, we encourage independence and ask parents to refrain from walking their child in, and supervising them in the class. Learning to function independently at school is an important life skill and so for that, we ask 1st – 8th grade parents to follow all arrival and dismissal rules, unless they have business in the school.

Early Care is available from 7:00 AM. If you drop off your children between 7:00 AM and 8:00 AM, you will be assessed an early care fee. If you know you need Early Care on an on-going basis, there is a

discounted monthly rate. You will be billed by Hilltop at the end of each month for Early Care charges. In the event you have a past due balance for early or aftercare, you will be unable to use this service until your account has been paid. This policy will be strictly enforced.

DAILY DISMISSAL PROCEDURES

All Toddlers are dismissed directly from their classroom at 11:30 AM or 3:00 PM and must be walked from their classroom to their car by their parents. If you have not picked up your child by 11:35 AM, you will be assessed a \$1 per minute fine for each minute you are late. All toddler parents picking up early are asked to go through the office-personnel will come and get your child from the class.

Half-Day Preschool and Lunch Bunch parents are to form a line in the carpool lane and remain inside their vehicles. A Hilltop staff member will have Half-Day Preschool children at the carpool line at noon and will have Lunch Bunch preschool children at the carpool line at 1:00 PM. If you have not picked up your child by 12:05 PM or 1:05 PM, as appropriate, you will be assessed a \$1 per minute fine for each minute you are late. The teachers that work the mid-morning carpools are required to return to class and cannot remain outside, waiting on late parents.

Full-Day Preschool parents are to form a line in the carpool lane and remain inside their vehicles. These students will be dismissed from the carpool line from 3:00 to 3:30 PM Monday through Thursday and from 2:00 to 2:30 PM on Fridays.

Express Carpool Line: 1st through 8th grade students will be picked up from the express carpool line beginning at 3:00 Monday through Thursday and 2:00 on Fridays.

If you have signed your children out and remain in the building or outside on the playground, carpool line, parking lot, etc., you have now assumed responsibility for the care of your children and must supervise them accordingly. Similarly, you are responsible for watching any other of your children whom you might have brought to school while you wait for your Hilltop child (such as Hilltop or non-Hilltop siblings who are running around the building and playground while waiting for someone to get done with an after school activity).

Note regarding changes in pick-up: Unless we receive confirmation releasing your child to another adult from you via telephone, fax or email, only parents are permitted to pick up their child. If someone on your emergency contact list is picking up your child, you must still inform the school. If we receive email or faxes from listed accounts on file, we are assuming that this information is from a designated parent. Please do not text the faculty updates for dismissal during the day as the staff is teaching & not able to check their phones. Contact the office at 205-437-9343 for immediate assistance.

Students are not permitted to drive golf carts or any other motorized vehicles on campus for any reasons.

CHECK IN AND OUT PROCEDURES

Please ensure that you've submitted an updated list of authorized caregivers who may check your child in and out of school. You will come to the front office to check your child in or out. You may be required to show the front office a picture id when checking out a student. Parents are not permitted to walk to classrooms to retrieve their children or to walk them to their classrooms when checking in. This is part of maintaining a safe campus for all students. Someone from the office will retrieve your child from their classroom. Please refrain from checking students in or out during or just before carpool times at the beginning and end of the school day.

EARLY CARE AND AFTER CARE

Early Care for all ages is offered from 7:00-8:00 AM, and After Care for K-8th grade is available from 3:15-5:30 PM at additional costs. There is late pick-up available until 3:45 PM at an additional charge.

ENTERING AND EXITING THE BUILDING

The only door that may be used for entering or exiting the building is the single glass door into the Main Office. The back classroom glass doors and the side faculty exit doors are not to be used for routine entering or exiting the building and these remain locked. There are times when these doors may be used in case of emergency or under the guidance of the teachers when they are tending to their gardens or other outdoor academic pursuits. However, neither students nor their parents are to use these exits as a means to enter and exit the building without the staff. In order to carefully monitor who enters the building, it is important that all visiting parents follow procedures for entering the office through the reception area. The building is continuously in "lock down" mode and all parents are required to check in at the office and get a visitor's badge outside of regular drop-off/pick up times. All parents and guardians must have their licenses scanned via our Raptor system. Once your license is scanned, you will be able to enter the building via the front office entrance for volunteer opportunities and class visits. We will issue a volunteer tag at this time that must be worn while you are in the building.

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Private piano, guitar, voice, violin, and ukulele lessons are available for Kindergarten, Elementary, and Middle School students during the regular school day as availability allows.

*Those interested in private lessons are given a sheet of interest when school begins. Parents can contact private instructors directly.

*After school activities are offered on site based on interest. These activities are not associated with the school's curriculum or programming. All correspondence and issues for these activities should be directed to the appropriate person in charge. The school offers their facility for these additional opportunities and participation is completely optional. A complete listing of extracurricular activities is listed on our website.

Certain age requirements for each activity are provided on the forms.

FIELD TRIPS

A few outings are scheduled throughout the year for school age children only. A Field Trip Authorization and Information Form must be completed for each trip. We encourage the students to wear their Hilltop Montessori School shirts on days they attend field trips to show school pride and so it is easier for the teachers and parent drivers to keep track of who is in the group. All children are required to wear seat belts during transport and are to follow school safety guidelines. Please leave a booster seat for your child on the day of the field trip; all children less than 40 pounds are required to be in a children's car seat and all children weighing between 40 and 80 pounds are required to be in car booster seats. **YOUR CHILD WILL NOT BE ALLOWED TO GO ON THE FIELD TRIP IF THERE IS NOT A COMPLETED AUTHORIZATION FORM OR A BOOSTER SEAT LEFT FOR YOUR CHILD ON THE DAY OF A FIELD TRIP.** These rules, including the booster seat rule, will be strictly enforced and your child will have to remain at school with the other children if the rules are not followed. If a parent feels that their child does not need a booster seat, they should furnish this in writing.

We would like to ask that each family drive children to field trips at least twice during the year. The school requests that all field trip drivers provide a copy of their driver's license and car insurance certificate to have on file in the office. Please note that the car insurance carried must have certain limits regarding coverage as outlined in the separate paperwork (in order for you to drive children other than your own). Additionally, the school requests that parents transporting children other than their own, not drive "open" vehicles such as jeeps or convertibles and follow all state laws regarding driving safety, including not texting while driving. We would also like to ask parents to refrain from cell phone use while driving children other than their own and be mindful of appropriate radio stations or videos being shown while in transit.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Financial assistance money is awarded on an annual basis and must be requested each year. Tuition and financial aid information is available on our website at <http://www.hilltopmontessori.com/tuition-and-financial-aid/>. Any family afforded financial assistance is strongly encouraged to provide volunteer assistance back to the school.

LATE ARRIVALS AND TARDIES

In order to reduce traffic, we will be placing orange cones to close the drop-off lane each morning at 8:30am. Families arriving after 8:30 am will need to park their cars along the Abbott Square extension road or one of the parking places on the backside of the drive around circle to the Main Building. Parents will need to walk your child(ren) into the Main Office, sign them in at the front desk, and take them to their classroom.

This is to help reduce the traffic that tends to back up in the drop-off line after carpool has ended and in the front office when students arrive after 8:30 am. Parents may not drop children off in the driveway and let HMS students walk to the building alone. Also, children are not to be dropped off prior to the designated early care time of 7 a.m.

If you live in The Town of Mt Laurel and plan to have your older children walk back and forth from school, your children must sign themselves in and out, and the parents must have a standing permission signed in the office allowing them to do so.

No child under the age of 16 is allowed to drive a golf cart or any other motorized vehicle on the property for any reason.

LUNCH

HMS provides a hot lunch daily for all students at an additional charge or students may bring their own lunch. Orders are sent electronically. There are a variety of choices for each child to make. Milk is also available on a daily basis for an additional fee. In the event a family chooses not to purchase lunch, they must sign a waiver indicating they waive the right to hot lunch for those students under school age per DHR policy.

In the event a parent chooses not to purchase lunch, a nutritional and complete lunch must be sent from home that contains foods off the approved list. Students should pack whatever utensils, napkins, and/or plates they will need for that day's lunch. In keeping with the school's wellness policy, we would also like to request that fast food lunches not be brought into the building in their containers.

MEDICAL EMERGENCY PROCEDURE

HMS staff is not allowed to administer medical treatment beyond wound washing, offering an ice pack, and a bandaid. A parent or designated alternate, and perhaps the child's physician, will be contacted in the case of an emergency. If there is a medical emergency that cannot wait until the arrival of the child's parent or designated alternate, Hilltop will call 911. The majority of our staff are certified in basic cardiopulmonary resuscitation. Hilltop staff will initiate CPR, if needed, in the event of a life or death emergency and continue providing CPR until the EMT's can arrive. A staff member will stay with the child until the parent or alternate assumes responsibility.

*Emergency medication will be given only by or on the direct order of a physician, and must be on the approved consent forms on file in the office unless the school must contact the physician's office via telephone in the event of an emergency.

*Emergencies can occur at any time. HMS encourages at least one parent to always be available by a cell or work number during the school day. In the event that a HMS employee is unable to reach any of the child's parents or emergency contact numbers, HMS will make the judgment as to treatment at the time.

MEDICATION

Medication must be authorized in a written statement by the parents. There are special forms in the office that must be completed weekly for each medication. This applies to both prescription medicines as well as over-the-counter medicines such as topical creams and lotions, Tylenol, Benadryl, etc.

All medication must be in the original container, clearly labeled with the child's name, type of medication, date of prescription, dosage amount, and dosage times. No medication will be dispensed without parental and a medical provider's written consent. This includes, but is not limited to over-the-counter medication. Medication must be carried into the school by the parent and given directly to someone in administration. **DO NOT SEND MEDICATION IN WITH YOUR CHILD.** This will be strictly enforced for all the children regardless of age.

Any medication that must be taken daily or any medication that is to be used in the event of an emergency (for example, an epinephrine pen or asthma inhaler) must have explicit written instructions provided by your child's medical doctor as to when and how to administer it. There are special forms in the office that must be completed by your physician for each prescription. Also if there is any daily or emergency medication that is at the school, it is your responsibility to know when the medicine is set to expire and to bring a replacement to the office when necessary; please mark on your calendar when a medicine is set to expire before you ever leave it at the school.

According to DHR regulations, the school staff may NOT apply sunscreen, insect repellent, diaper cream, first aid ointment or any other topical medication on your child without written parental and medical provider consent. A parent request/permission form for an oral or a topical medication is valid only for a week and then must be resubmitted if the treatment is to last beyond a week.

Please do not send vitamins (for example, in a lunch box) for your child or allow your older children to bring things like Tylenol or Advil or even asthma inhalers in the book bags. Thus, any unauthorized medication in the school (i.e., medication or vitamins that do not have weekly permission written statements by the parents) will be confiscated and a note will be sent home.

NAP TIME

All full-day three AND four-year-olds will have a scheduled time for nap/rest each day, following lunch. If your child is awake at the end of the 45 minutes, your child will be allowed to quietly re-enter and/or continue school activities. If your child is sleeping, we will let your child continue to nap for no more than 2 ½ hours. If your child is a full-day preschool child of age four or younger, please send a top and bottom sheet and a light blanket for your child's nap cot. You may also send a pillow or comfort item like a stuffed animal if you wish. Your sheets will be sent home every Friday or the last day before a vacation period; also, sheets, blankets and comforters will be sent home when soiled. If these have been sent home, please make sure that you have brought these items back for the next school day. Kindergarteners who are five years old and above will not take part in naps unless they appear to need rest.

Half-day preschoolers can nap on an occasional day-to-day basis for an additional cost per day. This includes the Lunch Bunch fee, but you must send a lunch with your child on these days or have purchased a lunch for them through the hot lunch program. Pick-up time will be at 3:00 PM Monday through Thursday and at 2:00 PM on Fridays. You will be billed at the end of the month for any day-to-day charges.

OFFICE HOURS

Hilltop Montessori School office hours are 7: AM until 3:45 PM Monday through Friday. Parents may call and leave a message for a teacher, who will then return your call during their break time or after school. In fairness to the teachers and students, teachers will not be interrupted during class time. Likewise, please do not hold-up the carpool line by having lengthy discussions with teachers. You are welcome to make an appointment to meet your teacher before or after school or during one of their breaks, if there is a matter that you must discuss with him/her. Please refrain from calling your child's teachers at home or texting them during class. You are also welcome to email your teachers and if they do not provide you with their personal email, you can use hms@hilltopmontessori.com. The email message will be read by the Head of School and a hard copy will be placed in the teacher's mailbox.

Please be aware that text & email should be a form of communication for quick and simple replies and responses. If you have lengthy concerns or questions, email is not the best form of communication. We encourage this type of communication through phone calls or in person conferences. Teachers are asked to respond within 24 hours, unless it is during a vacation, holiday or weekend and then they will respond the next business day. Please be respectful of the staff's time and try to limit correspondence during weekends, late evenings and holidays.

PARENT VISITATION AND PUBLICITY

Hilltop Montessori School maintains an open visitation policy and encourages parents to visit and volunteer, which enhances the understanding of their child's development. When observing a class, please remain quiet and do not interrupt a lesson in progress. Parents are also free to observe at other levels within the school and might find these visits helpful when planning the future of your child's education. Please also note that when attending and photographing school events, some students are not to be photographed or have their images displayed on social media. Additionally, all visitors are required to present their driver's license to be scanned before going to the classes. You must wear a visitor's badge at all times.

PARTIES AND BIRTHDAYS

Your child's birthday is celebrated in the classroom in Montessori tradition. Please contact the teacher at least one week before your child's birthday to make appropriate arrangements. For parties and birthdays, we insist on treats being as healthy as possible. At the preschool and toddler level, good party snacks are muffins, fruit and vanilla yogurt. At the elementary level, muffins, cookies, 100% fruit juice bars, cupcakes without icing and other snacks are appropriate. Since the school does not allow chocolate and candy for lunch, it then becomes inappropriate to offer this to our students on special occasions. If you are having a celebration within the school (either for your child's birthday or assisting with a school party), please discuss treats that will be served in advance with your child's teacher as a precaution. Many of our students have dietary needs or restrictions and we want to take this into consideration as much as possible during these events. Children with allergies or dietary needs may keep acceptable treats to have at school during these times.

PERSONAL CELL PHONES/SMART WATCHES/ELECTRONIC DEVICES

HMS students are prohibited from using phones, smart watches, and/or any other electronic devices while on campus. These items may be kept in a student's backpack during the day if they are not being used. This new policy would include break times, lunch, early care, late day, specials, After School Activities, and any other time while on school campus. Students are also prohibited from using these devices during dismissal time while waiting to be picked up. Teachers will collect phones, smart watches, and other electronic devices from students who have them out or use them while on campus, secure them in a safe location, and return them at the end of the school day to the adult picking them up from school.

If a parent/guardian needs to be in contact with their child during the school day, we ask that you please contact the main office and we can relay the message for you. We want to give you some time before the start of the school year to speak with your child and adapt to our new policy. We want to thank you for your help in this matter.

Note: We ask any parents that receive texts from students during the day to remind their child they are violating school policies.

PERSONAL ITEMS

All school supplies are provided, but a tote or backpack should be brought to school each day in order to protect the schoolwork that is carried to and from home.

Children should not have bare feet while in the classroom. Toddler and Preschool/Kindergarten students should have indoor shoes provided by you and left at the school so that the children may remove their outdoor shoes upon entering each morning, and then put on their indoor shoes. Indoor shoes can be hard soled slippers, Crocs or other soft shoes. This significantly reduces noise, prevents dirt from being tracked into the school, protects your children's feet from objects on the floor, and prevents sliding with stocking feet. It will also protect your child's feet in the event they have to leave the building suddenly (fire drills, etc.) Elementary and Middle School students are encouraged to have indoor shoes for at school, or may choose to be in their socks in the hallways and classrooms; however, they will not be allowed to be barefoot. Appropriate, outdoor shoes are required for all children participating in formal PE instruction.

SCHOOL PROPERTY/COMMUNICATION

Parents will be held financially liable for loss, breakage, or destruction of school property or other student's or staff's personal property. This includes all books, materials, fixtures, etc.

SICK POLICIES

Hilltop Montessori School does not have an on site nurse and thus cannot offer medical care beyond basic first aid. Any contagious health condition is cause for exclusion from the program. Children present in school will be assumed to be fit and able to participate in all regular school activities, including outside play.

Parents must keep children home for the following reasons:

- Has or has had a fever (100.4 degrees or greater) within the past 24 hours
- A rash of unknown origin
- A consistent/persistent productive cough
- Vomiting
- Earache
- Diarrhea
- Bacterial Conjunctivitis (colored discharge from eye)
- Shows signs of any bodily fluid that is not clear
- Visible head lice or nits (if a child has been sent home for lice/nits, we don't require that he/she be out of school for the next day. As long as a treatment has been done, students are allowed to check-in with the office and return to class if they are found to be nit/lice free post treatment.)

- Any student diagnosed with head lice must be treated and “nit-free” in order to return to class. Students are asked to come to the Front Office for a final head check before returning to activities with other children.
- [For Covid-19 related symptoms, see this list before sending your child to school.](#)
- Please also note the following:
 - If antibiotics are prescribed, Children must have had 24-hours of antibiotics and be symptom free before returning to class.
 - oral fever of 100° or fever within the last 24 hours, without the help of a fever-reducing medication
 - vomiting within the last 24 hours
 - diarrhea within the last 24 hours
 - excessive discharge from nose or eyes
 - not well enough to play outside
 - any type of contagious condition such as streptococcal infection (strep throat), conjunctivitis (pink eye), head lice or nits, chicken pox, measles, mumps, rubella, impetigo, etc.

While HMS reserves the right to send a student home for any type of suspected medical condition, a student will be sent home for the following reasons:

- oral fever of 100°
- vomiting
- diarrhea
- excessive discharge from nose or eyes
- not well enough to play outside
- any type of contagious condition such as streptococcal infection (strep throat), conjunctivitis (pink eye), head lice or nits, chicken pox, measles, mumps, rubella, impetigo, etc.
- Students leaving school because of a contagious condition such as head lice or nits may return to school 24 hours after successful treatment and after administration has deemed them nit and lice free.
- Students leaving school because of streptococcal infection or impetigo may return only after 24 hours of antibiotic treatment.
- Students leaving school because of conjunctivitis may return 24 hours after successful treatment and if they are no longer contagious.

If your child is having severe asthma problems that require medication, please keep the child at home so he/she can be monitored more effectively. Also, if your child has had a recent flare-up of his/her asthma but is well enough to go to school, please make sure that a note has been sent that day so that the teachers know to keep an eye on him/her. If you have a specific request (such as keeping an asthmatic child indoors on an extremely cold day), please send that request in writing by the start of school that day.

If your child becomes sick while at school, a parent or your designated alternate, as indicated on your child's enrollment form, will immediately be notified to pick up the child. A child with a fever or vomiting will be separated from other children and supervised by an adult.

SNACKS

The school will provide a nutritious snack for each toddler/preschool/kindergarten child, everyday. If your child has special dietary needs, please indicate that on the children's pre-admission forms and speak with your child's teacher as to your particular needs. Students in grades 1-8 are able to bring their own snack as long as it is acceptable to our food policy.

Please keep in mind that you will be responsible for providing your own child's snack if the dietary restrictions cannot be accommodated by the rotational snack provided by the staff. You may wish to leave a few acceptable snacks with the teacher to have on hand for those occasions when the snack may not be appropriate for your child or on those days when there might be a special event for the class (birthday party, holiday party, etc.) with treats that your child may not be able to eat.

TODDLER AND PRIMARY SNACKS

Preschool and toddler classes are provided with a snack according to the guidelines established by The Department of Human Resources. Elementary and middle school classes ask each student to bring their own snack and adhere to the list provided below.

ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL SNACKS

It is recommended that each child bring a daily nutritious midmorning snack. Students should bring their own snack from home and follow these ground rules:

1. Please send 100% juice or milk that does not need to be refrigerated.
2. Chocolate, soda and candy are not allowed. Baked chips are okay.
3. You may only send items on the approved snack list below
4. Any food item that is not healthy will be confiscated and thrown away.
- 5. Gum is not permitted on campus.**

APPROVED SNACKS INCLUDE:

- Fresh fruit
- Canned fruit
- Applesauce
- Raisins or other dried fruit
- Fresh vegetables
- Cooked vegetables
- Bagels
- Muffins

- English muffins
- Bread baked with fruits or vegetables (like banana, zucchini, carrot, apple, pumpkin, raisin bread)
- Bread sticks
- Crepes
- Tortillas
- Rice Cakes
- Crackers
- Graham Crackers
- Baked pretzels or chips
- Popcorn (pre-popped; the children will only have access to a microwave during lunch time and will not have access to one at snack time)
- Dry cereal
- Granola bars
- Cereal bars
- Trail mix made with cereal, dried fruits, nuts, peanuts or seeds
- Finger sandwiches or bread toppings with peanut butter and jelly, cream cheese, cheese slices, Lean meats
- Beef jerky
- Hard-boiled egg
- Tofu
- Cheese (cubes, slices, sticks, string cheese or cream cheese)
- Yogurt
- Dips for vegetables include ranch dressing, other salad dressings, hummus, yogurt, and salsa

Parents will have the option as part of the ordering process to “order” their preference for their own child, to make their own choice about what they want their child to consume.

SUSPENSION/EXPULSION

All children are accepted on a conditional basis. Should the Head of School, under the advisement of The Directors of the Early Childhood, Elementary or Middle School programs, determine a child does not benefit from this Montessori environment, or a child’s behavior is disruptive to the educational process, the School reserves the right and option to terminate any child’s enrollment in the school. Additionally, if the parent fails to cooperate with the school and the school determines that they are unable to work cooperatively with the family to assist in the child’s education, the school reserves the right to terminate the enrollment of the student. If you as a parent or guardian have concerns about something that occurs at school or about a student at the school, please respectfully address it with the school rather than via social media contacts or texts with other parents. We want to create a nurturing environment for all students and families and to nurture a positive community culture.

HMS reserves the right to deny, cancel, sever, and/or suspend a student's enrollment if deemed in the best interest of the student or the school. Withdrawal from school does not release a family from the obligation to pay the full year's tuition. Any family which maligns school credibility or fails to comply with school policies and rules outlined in this handbook, the Enrollment Contract, and/or stated by the Head of School/Administration/the Board of Directors may cause the termination of their child's enrollment at HMS. Any parent who fails to follow the published complaint policy listed in this handbook may also cause the termination of their child's enrollment. The school reserves the right to immediately terminate enrollment for a family that is verbally abusive to the staff.

The staff at Hilltop Montessori School discourages any violation, but recognizes that childhood is a learning process. For that reason, violations will be treated based on the Teachers/Administration's assessment of the child at that particular time. Often a simple reminder of the rules will let the child know that the behavior is inappropriate. Any or all of the following steps may be taken at the teacher/Head of School's discretion. Immediate dismissal may result in any violation.

1. Exclusion of a child from the class to discuss the problem with a teacher or administrator.
2. Parent notification of the problem, which may initially be a verbal notification. Any more serious problem will be documented in the child's record and will require the elementary student to also provide a written account of the incident. A parent must respond/sign off of each written complaint.
3. Formal parent conference clearly outlining the problem, specifying subsequent consequences, and identifying possible solutions. These meetings will be documented as part of the student's permanent record.
4. A six-week trial period may be initiated any time a child's behavior is significantly disruptive to the classroom or is affecting the child's ability to learn. During this time, teachers and administration observe the child, intervene when problems occur, and document the incidents. Parents are contacted and a plan is developed to address the child's behavior. If the child does not make progress, the student will be withdrawn from Hilltop Montessori School.
5. Reviewing the child's behavior/situation with the Head of School and pertinent staff to determine additional courses of action.
6. Either a "soft" suspension where the child is sent home for the day(s) for reflection or a true suspension, which is documented in the child's permanent record.
7. Recommendation for outside counseling or help if needed.

8. Immediate dismissal. (expulsion)

Determination for suspension and/or expulsion are at the full discretion of the Head of School and/or the Board of Directors.

OFFENSES THAT MAY RESULT IN DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS UP TO SUSPENSION OR EXPULSION

- Students or family members making direct or indirect verbal, written, and/or physical threats of harm to others, oneself, and/or school property.
- Physical, emotional, written and/or verbal violence/harassment/intimidation to anyone.
- Fighting. Striking and/or touching another person against his or her will.
- Vandalism/damage/destruction to school and/or someone's personal property
- Having possession of a weapon and/or using any item as a weapon with the intention to cause or threaten harm to another individual, group, oneself, and/or school property. These items may include, but are not limited to: knife, gun, cap guns, BB guns, and any other weapon and/or item perceived to be a weapon by another individual. Possession of weapons or firearms on campus is prohibited for all students, parents or guardians, and visitors.
- Using racial slurs, discriminative words, profane language or gestures, hate speech, bullying, cyber-bullying, extreme taunting/teasing, and any language that is considered inappropriate as determined by the Head of School. (see bullying section)
- Student, parent, family member, and family care providers who refuse to follow instructions, policies and procedures written in this document, the enrollment contract, Classroom Guidelines, and/or given by the Head of School, Board of Directors, and/or the Administration. Including but not limited to:
 - Repeated failure to comply with rules of school,
 - Inability to develop appropriate strategies to solve conflicts
 - Continued disrespect for the learning/well being of others, oneself and/or the school
 - Defiance of any school employee's authority. This includes all employees and parent volunteers.
- Possession, use, and/or being under the influence of alcohol, tobacco items, vaping devices, illegal drugs, any medications (prescription or over-the-counter medications, including vitamins and Tylenol) not submitted to the main office, any other item(s)

which may cause impairment (Such as, but not limited to: Inhalants, Edibles, Delta-8, Delta-10, THC-O, etc.) Possession includes being in a student's book bag or other belongings and/or on their person.

- Failure for a family to make proper payments as stated in the Enrollment Contract
- Excessive tardiness or absences. Students are to arrive between 8:05 and 8:30. Arrival past 8:30 am constitutes tardiness. Five (5) unexcused tardies constitute 1 absence. State guidelines mandate 12 unexcused absences are grounds for retaining a student in the same grade the following year. At the elementary and middle school level, pre-planned absences must be approved in advance in writing using the appropriate form.
- Failure to come to class prepared. All specified assignments due (eg. homework, reports, research) should be completed in time allotted. Students will be ready to participate in the full day's activity.
- Possession of inappropriate/suggestive/pornographic material. This includes viewing inappropriate material over the internet on a school or personal computer and/or any other device. This includes obtaining information on a personal/school computer account.
- Violation of the dress code.

DRESS CODE

- a. At HMS everyone is expected to dress simply and appropriately for school in clothes that are neat, clean, and in good condition.
- b. All students are treated equally, regardless of their clothing choices, hair color, or other personal characteristics. A key component of the Montessori environment is that environmental distractors are minimized so dress and self expression should not distract from learning.
- c. Chewing gum is not permitted at any time.
- d. All students are expected to dress in a manner that will maximize their ability to enjoy all aspects of school and to make sure they are safe.
- e. No one in our community may wear clothing with slogans that promote illegal or inappropriate behavior (i.e., alcohol, drugs, sex, or racism).
- f. Modesty and Respect: Emphasize clothing choices that adhere to common standards of modesty and respect for oneself and others. Parents are responsible for ensuring that their children are dressed in an appropriate manner for school.

- g. Toddler Programs: Toddlers get messy when they have the freedom to explore and experiment. We use aprons or smocks for art activities; however, we do ask that you send your child to school in clothing that affords artistic accidents, and which are loose enough to allow for full freedom of movement. Extra clothing should be clearly marked with your child's name. If your child uses one set of extra clothing, then please replenish another immediately, so he or she always has an extra set of clothing available.
 - h. Students in Primary through Middle School wear regular school clothing and sneakers for physical education. If a student wears a dress or skirt, please make sure that the student wears bike shorts underneath.
- Cheating. This includes giving or receiving information that should be completed by an individual student.
 - All other reasons deemed necessary by the Head of School/Board of Directors

STANDARDS FOR DAY CARE CENTERS

You may contact the Department of Human Resources for a copy of Alabama's Minimum Standards for Day Care/Nighttime Centers at 50 Ripley Street; P0 BOX 304000; Montgomery, 36130-4000 or call (334) 242-1310. Hilltop Montessori School maintains a license for its toddler and preschool program with The Department of Human Resources. Please note that kindergarten students after 12:30 do not fall under DHR guidelines as they are considered school aged and are being taught separately at that time.

STUDENT RECORDS

The school shall maintain a permanent cumulative record of each child's personal data and academic progress throughout the year. A copy of the record can be released to another academic institution or shared at the request of a parent.

TARDINESS /ABSENCES

Students are to arrive between 8:05 and 8:30. Arrival past 8:30 am constitutes tardiness. Five (5) unexcused tardies constitute 1 absence. Starting in Elementary, Alabama State guidelines mandate 12 unexcused absences are grounds for retaining a student in the same grade the following year. At the elementary and middle school level, pre-planned absences must be approved in advance in writing using the appropriate form.

VOLUNTEERING

We will have opportunities to volunteer throughout the year for both the classroom teachers & the school. We encourage everyone to be involved as much as possible. There are community meetings to

learn about volunteering as well as many online sign up opportunities. We appreciate and welcome our volunteers.

WITHDRAWAL

HMS reserves the right to deny, cancel, sever, and/or suspend a student's enrollment if deemed in the best interest of the student or the school. Withdrawal from school does not release a family from the obligation to pay the full year's tuition. The school requires at least a thirty day written notice prior to the date of intended withdrawal. As stated in the enrollment contract, you are responsible for the full year tuition if you withdraw for reasons other than those outlined in the contract. Parents are responsible for the full year's tuition regardless of the circumstances, as outlined on the contract.