Tuesday, May 6, 2014 - Parent & Child OPEN HOUSE / 9-10 am

Come visit and learn about the unique qualities of a Montessori classroom for the young child. Mixed aged groupings work in a prepared environment which supports many different levels of learning and interest. Young children learn from the activities of older students, with a wide range of choices and time to engage in the work without interruption. Individual lessons and guidance are offered by a Montessori trained teacher to help young children become independent, competent and confident in mind, body and spirit. Come see for yourself and imagine how this school can support your young child's natural desire to learn. Toddlers 18 - 36 months and Children's House, ages 3 - 5 years.

Friday, March 28th - Hilltop Family Dinner and Contra Dance

at the Dummerston Grange with very special musical hosts and Middle School parents, Keith Murphy and Becky Tracy. Join us to celebrate going solar with song and dance. We're looking for a few strong volunteer helpers. <u>Email Rebecca</u> if you can help either on Thursday, March 27th with decorating and/or cooking, or on Friday with ticket sales and/or clean up. Tickets on sale NOW!!! Adults \$10, Students \$5 Available at the front desk.

Curriculum Night - Educating for Peace / March 11, 5:30 - 7:30 pm

☐ Teaching peace in the classroom, the home and in the heart.

We hope you will be able to join us on Tuesday March 11 for our Curriculum Night. This year we will focus on our Peace curriculum. While the Peace curriculum is woven into every part of what we do, from our academic studies to how we organize the day, on Curriculum Night we are going to focus on the 'social skills' part of the curriculum. Through direct instruction and a variety of activities, we help children grow more aware of their own feelings, recognize the feelings of others, and solve problems peaceably. During curriculum night we will share some of these activities with you.

"Parent Education Program: Navigating Social Media and Electronics Use"

Monday, February 10th 8:30-9:30 am and 7-8 pm Morning and Evening offering!

Karen Blumberg, Lower El parent to Ben Berg and experienced Social Skills Counselor, will present and lead a discussion about how we as families can support our children in the new arena of social networking and accessible technologies. For many of us, our children are living in an electronic world less-familiar to us. How can we give them the tools to manage their behavior and reactions productively?

Please join us and share your questions and experiences as we work together to navigate this world.

Karen has 18 years of experience working in the Brattleboro community as an outpatient therapist, a school-based clinician, and a counselor at a small private practice where she helps children, adolescents, adults, couples, and families. Karen also facilitates life skills groups at the Brattleboro Area Middle School and at The Grammar School and runs workshops for Teachers and Para professionals for The Windham Supervisory Union and Parent Evening Programs for The Hinsdale High School and other schools. We are thrilled to have her offering her expertise and experience to our parent group.

Please RSVP to Ann or sign at the front desk.

We are generating electricity from the sun!

10:30 am on December 31st, the "switch was flipped" and we officially went solar! Thanks to

all the parent committee members led by Seth Harter who worked hard to see this project to its fruition. We will be generating about 60,000 kWhs per year. That's enough to power the entire school!

The solar array was installed at no cost to Hilltop by Integrated Solar Applications of Brattleboro. They helped us connect with investors from Wisdom and Power LLC of Norwich, VT. Hilltop will pay 90 percent of the monthly electric costs to Wisdom and Power. After seven years, we may choose to purchase the panels at fair market value or continue to pay our investor.

Project Feed the Thousands

Hilltop is joining forces with other area schools and WTSA and KVT radio stations in Project Feed the Thousands. During All School Gathering yesterday, Tim Johnson, from WTSA, Lucie Fortier, the Director of the Drop-In Center, and Jerry Goldberg, Brattleboro Chamber of Commerce Director came to talk to students about how they could pitch in to help people in our own community who are going hungry. An astonishing 1 out of every 5 children in Windham County go hungry every day.

The food drive will culminate in a "Stuff the Bus" event at Hannaford Supermarket on December 20th. We will have our own cardboard bus in the lobby to stuff with goods to donate.

<u>Download a flyer from the Drop-In Center.</u> Items high on the list of need are personal hygiene products like soap, toothpaste and diapers. Non-perishable food stuffs are also needed. Tuna fish and peanut butter are good protein choices.

Help us fill our bus for Project Feed the Thousands.

Do you hear the calling?

The board is looking for new members. We need people with an interest in Hilltop Montessori School, some expertise, and a little time to further their involvement in the forward momentum of the school. There will be a "Candidate Information Session" for prospective Board members in the next few weeks, and an outside expert coming to do Board training on December 6th and 7th. We'd love to have you get involved now!

The Hilltop Board of Trustees Annual Call for Nominations

The role of the Hilltop Board of Trustees is to determine and oversee policies that support the mission of the school and to ensure the school's fiscal stability. This includes the hiring and evaluating the Head of School, appointing standing and ad hoc committees, overseeing the lease and facility use, fundraising, and strategic planning. HMS board members also serve as ambassadors for the school to the community at large.

Specific Professional Experience or Areas of Expertise sought by the HMS board

Serving on the HMS board or on one of its various committees is a great way to offer your professional expertise, experience, and time to Hilltop. The board has an ongoing need to attract potential trustees from within and outside the Hilltop community who have experience or expertise in the following areas:

Law, Finance, Development/Fundraising, Contracting/Architecture, Agriculture/Landscaping, Education, Administration/Organization, and Community Connection
Time Commitment/Expectations

Board members attend a monthly meeting, typically from 6-9 p.m. on the third Wednesday of the month (though this could change to include Mondays). There is some report reading and meeting preparation required in the days before the meeting. There is a varying amount of time throughout the month, depending on what committees of projects each member is involved in. There are also occasional longer meetings as part of an annual retreat or board training.

Interested?? - Next Steps . . .

More detailed information about serving on the Hilltop board is available at the front desk. If you decide you're interested in becoming a board candidate, please complete the HMS Board Candidate Information Form and return it to Ann, who will forward it to the Committee on Trustees. (Electronic copies of the Board Member Description and Info Form are available from the e-mail address below).

If you have any questions, please contact the Board Chair of the Committee on Trustees, Patrick Keppel via email or telephone 802-254-5028.

Hilltop Community! We are ROCKIN' this Annual Fund!

THIS JUST IN! Inspired by the response to our progress so far, we have a former Head of School who will pledge an additional \$2000.00 to our Annual Fund if we meet our \$18,000 goal by end of day Friday! And we are SO close. As of this morning, we have a total in gifts and pledges of \$14,286 -- only \$3714 to go!

Here's a recap of our challenges:

By tomorrow end of day: cookies for 20 new donors - We currently have 19 new donors - c'mon folks, we need 1 more new donor and you will ALL get the coveted Jellema-Harter cookies!

Here's a new challenge for Thursday: a family will double their last year's pledge if we reach 75% participation by the end of the day. Remember it's about participation, not the size of the gift. No gift is too small.

Friday's challenge: an additional \$2000 from a former head of school if we reach our \$18k goal a day early.

And Monday, the last day of our2013 Annual Fund Week for current parents, staff and board: additional \$1000 from a family and board member if we reach 100% by the end of the Annual Fun Drive.

We can DO this!

2013 Annual Fund: Celebrating our Teachers

by Jenny Smith and Robyn Ostrander 2013 Annual Fund co-chairs

Come celebrate the kick-off to Annual Fund with us. If you pledge to the Annual Fund that evening, your name will be entered into a raffle to win 2 one day passes to Mount Snow! Most activities will be free, but we will be selling pizza and \$1 tickets to be used for some of the games and activities. Prizes galore! (we're collecting pre-owned stuffed animals to be used as said prizes - so clean out your closets and bring in your stash. There will be a box in front lobby).

With anticipation we reach out today to you, our fellow Hilltop parents. Take a minute from your busy day, take a breath, and think about Hilltop. What does it mean to your child? What amazing futures are unfolding right here?

Hilltop is beautiful, with indoor and outdoor learning environments balanced to provide a practically ideal setting for learning, independent thinking, peer collaboration and social

responsibility. But our teachers make it all happen. Their deep knowledge of Montessori methods and materials and their incredible dedication to your child create the growth you see each year, perhaps each day! Look at their commitment: Cheryl, Sarah, Melissa, Ellie, and Mariam: 68 years at Hilltop. Kerstin, Patrick, Connie, Tom, Dan, and Jen: 58 years. Paul, Finn, Nora and Ilene: 34 years. Ben and Jay: 26 years! To our teachers and to their 186 (!) years with Hilltop, we dedicate the 2013 Annual Fund.

2013 Annual Fund: Celebrating our Teachers

The Annual Fund keeps Hilltop more diverse and representative of our community. A Hilltop Montessori education is possible for many of us because the school keeps tuition as low as possible, and an increasing percentage of families rely on financial aid to keep Hilltop within reach. On average, there is a \$1,000 gap per child between tuition revenue and actual cost of educating each student. This practice is standard among independent schools: we fundraise to make up the difference. This way, instead of asking you to pay more tuition, you can choose the level of tax-deductible contribution in keeping with your financial situation.

Annual Giving is ultimately a measure of a school's excellence. Donations of all sizes from every family do more than support education costs. Your gift demonstrates our community's delight and satisfaction in Hilltop, its mission and values. It also sends this message of inspiration to the philanthropic organizations offering major grants: our school is so beloved and supported by its community that Hilltop simply shines. 100% generous participation makes this possible.

This year, Annual Fund Week starts with a bang! Celebrate with us at the kick-off carnival this Friday. Then, each day next week a Hilltop family will offer a challenge gift to keep us moving toward our \$18,000 goal for board, staff and families. By the end of October, we can celebrate having completed this vital and significant annual achievement. Please join us in honoring Hilltop's teachers by participating in this year's Annual Fund.

THIS WEEK'S BARN UPDATE:

by Leland Smith,

Barn Project Chair, September 27, 2013

Math Trivia Answer: How big is a tank that holds 25,000 gallons of water?? The water tank for the sprinkler system is 40' X 10'!

This week is about digging. Digging out old soils, rocks, old pieces of concrete, and some miscellaneous old garbage. The soils are less than ideal, it turns out, for pouring new footings. This means more digging. We will be bringing in new material for the new footings and prepping for the pouring of the new slab.

Digging continues in the form of test pits along the parking lot, emergency access road, and behind the garage. These pits will help us determine where the best place is for the pump house and tank for the sprinkler system.

Keep an eye on the giant hole! Who knows what you will see!

by Leland Smith, Barn Project Chair, September 22, 2013

The progress continues! The demolition is almost complete. Now we are designing the sprinkler system and its complex array of pumps, valves, and one huge water tank. Test pits will be dug around campus next week to determine where to place our 25,000 gallon water tank for the sprinkler system. Foundation work will begin soon and project materials will be arriving on campus. Work is continuing on the standing part of the barn to prep it for the project. Sub contractors are being finalized. Watch for the activity level to increase in the weeks to come. It's very exciting!

Math Trivia: How big is a 25,000 gallon water tank??? (Answer in next week's newsletter!)

by Leland Smith, Barn Project Chair, September 13, 2013

Curious children and adults have been asking, "Why hasn't the whole barn been torn down?"

Here's the scoop:

We're using that part of the barn in the new design, the core frame is sound This frame will serve as the structure for the SIPS panels (Foard Panels) which will cover the framed building. If you're not familiar, SIPS stands for structured integrated panels the materials in that section of the barn are being re-used and therefore saved from going to a landfill

It's more economical to keep that portion of the building

FYI, now that they've seen the trucks going by and heard the loud noises, we've invited our neighborhood up to our campus to see barn plans and tour the campus. 5-7pm. Parents and friends are more than welcome to join us. RSVP with Ann.

Watch this space for more updates...

by Leland Smith, Barn Project Chair, August 30, 2013

Now you see it, but next week you won't! The barn, as we know it, is to be demolished over the weekend. On Monday, the site will be unsightly, and there may be restricted traffic access. This stage is unavoidable, but hopefully, will be brief. We're sorry, in advance, for any inconvenience. Keep the vision of the finished product in mind!

After the building comes down, preparations will be made for the demolition of the concrete slab which is slated for Sat. & Sun. 9/14-15.

Stay tuned for more updates...

by Leland Smith, Barn Project Chair, August 30, 2013

Dear Hilltop Families and Staff,

I am thrilled as chair of the Barn Re-Build team to tell you that the long awaited start of the Barn Project is underway!

It has been a frustrating and bureaucratic summer of trying to negotiate the different fire safety codes. It was our understanding that we didn't need to install a sprinkler system according to our use of the building. However, the Fire Safety Inspector from Montpelier thought differently. On Monday, August 26 the building committee comprised of Bob Stevens, Stevens & Associates, Frank Balla, Stevens & Associates architect, Moss Kahler, our Owner's Representative and alumni parent, Dave Snyder and Jenny Smith, current parents, Tonia Wheeler, former Head, and I, current parent, met to review the final sticking point that was holding up the project: was sprinkling the building really a requirement?

After reviewing the options, it was decided that it was in the school's best interest to install the sprinkler system.

As you may have guessed, the cost of the sprinkler system is not cheap - a whopping \$150,000, to be exact, which brings the project cost to approximately 1.85M. Yes, this means we have some hard work ahead of us! We know now that we will need to pay for the sprinkler system in addition to the desired theater equipment. The dream can come true if all of us make the effort!

The demolition of the building will hopefully begin by the end of next week. It will be well contained and not pose a hazard to our community. Ingram Construction has kindly agreed to do the loud demolition work of removing the slab after school hours and on weekends. The project site is fenced in and the gates will be open for drop off and pick up each day. While the barn and its fence is indeed an eye sore, the light at the end of the tunnel is a theater, gym, and classroom building beyond our wildest dreams!

I am always available for any questions or concerns you may have about the project. Please feel free to email me at Halifax.leland@gmail.com. We have made a conscious decision to allow our new Head of School to focus on leading our school, not building a gym. Thus Tamara is informed, but not the person to field questions or concerns about the project. I am deeply grateful to our Design/Build Team, Stevens & Associates (architects), and Ingram Construction for their hard work, perseverance, and patience.

I look forward to the project getting underway!! Until my next update, Leland Smith

The Barn Re-Build Team:
Leland Smith (parent and Chair)
Tonia Wheeler (former Head of School)
Dave Snyder (parent)
Jenny Smith (parent)
Moss Kahler (Our Owners Representative)
Stevens & Associates (architects)
Ingram Construction (builders)

Click here to see a floor plan of the new building Click here to see elevation renderings

Moments - Spring Newsletter \square

<u>Click here</u> for a pdf version of our newsletter, filled with photos, updates and Q&A with incoming staff.

First-hand research

Hilltop Montessori School receives grant for recent Middle School odyssey to Alabama

BRATTLEBORO—Hilltop Montessori School recently received a \$2,000 grant from the Vermont Community Foundation's Small and Inspiring grants program for its recent middle school trip to Alabama, which offered students the opportunity to live and breathe the Civil Rights movement after an intense period of study on the topic. Read the full article.

From Vermont with Love - Middle School Students Create Quilt for Alabama Odyssey Trip

The Vermont Commons wrote a wonderful piece about our students' quilt creation, and immersive trip to Alabama, as part of their study of the Civil Rights Movement. Read the article here (page B1)

Welcome Tamara Mount - Incoming Head of School

Hilltop Montessori School is delighted to formally announce the appointment of Tamara Mount as its next Head of School, effective July 1, 2013. Tamara is a life-long Montessorian, and is passionate and knowledgeable about the philosophy, values and practice at the core of our school. Her extensive Montessori experience, combined with her ten years in the management consulting field, give the Hilltop Montessori School Board of Trustees every confidence that she will be an effective and successful leader for our school.

The Search Committee, working with consultant Jim Bonney of Educators' Collaborative, began the process last June and sought significant feedback from our community through parent forums, a survey, and meetings with staff, board and faculty. Our entire school used this process to reflect on Hilltop's unique gifts, challenges and aspirations, and the kind of Head of School who would best serve our current, and future, needs.

Tamara has education and Montessori in her blood. The daughter of a Montessori Head of School herself, she attended Montessori school and has her Montessori Elementary Certification from Princeton Center Teacher Education. Tamara has been an educator in a variety of realms for the past fifteen years. She is currently working at Cherry Blossom Montessori School in Hillsborough, NJ, where she has been both a toddler teacher and Lead teacher in a Lower Elementary classroom over the past seven years.

Tamara and her husband, Brad Holcombe, along with their two sons, are excited to move to the Brattleboro area. After accepting our offer Tamara wrote,

"In our two days at Hilltop, during the selection process, my husband and I felt welcomed and at home. I am impressed with how far the school has come and I am excited to lead the school through its next stages. From the first moments of this process, everything has pointed to this being the perfect fit for Hilltop, for me, and for my family. We feel like we are coming home!"

We look forward to introducing Tamara to the greater Brattleboro community in the coming months.

Brain Diversity and Learning - by Dan Filler (Director, Upper Elementary)

In late November I attended a Learning and the Brain Conference, co-sponsored by Harvard, MIT, Yale, Johns Hopkins, and other leading universities. This conference was largely focused on brain diversity and its impact on reading and mathematics. The Learning and the Brain Foundation sponsors conferences that bring together leading neuroscientists and educators to examine the latest brain research and the possible implications for teaching and learning. The conference was thrilling; I spent three days listening to brilliant people talk about cutting edge research on the brain and learning.

A few important topics were touched on repeatedly over the course of the conference. Many speakers began their presentations by discussing the evolution of the human brain as a way to emphasize just how novel, in evolutionary terms, the acts of reading and writing are. A consistent theme among presenters was just how complex a process learning to read really is, and how much individual brain differences can impact the process for each child. To learn to read, different areas of the brain must form connections and work together. New techniques in brain imaging are allowing neuroscientists to better understand exactly what areas of the brain are involved in reading and how neural connections between these areas develop over time and through experience. Researchers are gaining a greater understanding of how the use of these areas, and connections between them, change as children grow as readers and their brains continue to develop.

Several presenters highlighted new research into the differences in brain function between children who learn to read more easily as compared to children with dyslexia. Children with dyslexia use different parts of their brain to read than children without dyslexia. Researchers hope that new findings about how different parts of the 'dyslexic brain' are activated and work

together while reading will lead to more effective teaching practices for children with dyslexia.

The importance of phonological awareness in reading success was repeated again and again throughout the weekend as well. Phonological awareness is a child's ability to discriminate and manipulate different sounds at the word, syllable, and phoneme (smile, thick) level. Reading, most simply put, is connecting sounds to letter symbols. Without strong phonological awareness, attributing sounds to letters within a word is even more challenging. Direct instruction in phonological awareness positively impacts a child's development of this skill. What can you as a parent do to support your young child's phonological awareness? According to some of the country's leading neuroscientists, talk, talk, and talk some more to your children. All this talk supports phonological awareness and develops your child's vocabulary, another key part of reading success.

Another topic discussed in several presentations is the importance of working memory in reading, mathematical processing, and executive function. Working memory refers to the act of simultaneously storing and processing information for a short period of time. For example, when you are out shopping and doing the mental math required to determine the cost of a new shirt after the additional fifteen percent off, you are using your working memory. You are holding numbers in your head while also mentally doing calculations – you are temporarily storing and manipulating information. A child with weak working memory will often have learning difficulties. Currently, research is being done to determine if and how deficits in working memory can be mitigated rather than simply accommodated. The idea that working memory can be strengthened is still controversial, but one with potentially great impact on teaching and learning. (If you are still reading this article and can connect this paragraph to the ideas presented in the previous paragraph, you have been putting your working memory to use!)

I attended this conference because as a teacher it is vitally important to stay informed of current brain research and its implications for learning. Maria Montessori was trained as a medical doctor. She developed her pedagogical method through close observation of children at work in the classroom environment, making adjustments to that environment, and then observing how children responded to those changes. She was doing brain research. Dr. Montessori's observations about learning and the brain have been confirmed by current brain research conducted with modern research methods and technology. After the break, I will write more about how so much of what I learned about best practices at the conference reflects what happens in our classrooms here at Hilltop.