

Hilltop Becomes AMS Accredited - September 27, 2019 We are proud to announce that Hilltop Montessori School is now fully accredited by the American Montessori Society (AMS). We are the first Montessori school in VT to become Montessori accredited. Only 15% of the Montessori schools in the country are accredited by AMS. Being accredited is an official certification and confirmation that we have the qualified teachers, child-centered facilities, and solid management that enable us to implement the Montessori pedagogy authentically!

This has been a journey of growth and development since the school opened as a one room pre-school in 1972. As many of you know, this accreditation was a goal of the Strategic Plan set in 2017, and we are pleased to have accomplished the self study and site visit portion in the past two years. The self-study was labor intensive for the teachers and other community members who supported this endeavor. A special thank you to people who got this off the ground with donations that paid for the initial application and for the site visit costs. We are very grateful for support from Tonia Wheeler, Mel Kahn, Ciri Gillespie, Liz Richards, Stephanie Betit-Hancock, and their families. We also appreciate the involvement of the past and present board members and staff who did the thinking, meeting, writing, and editing that made this possible.

The process started with a thorough analysis of our mission statement. The work, led by Vanessa Long, resulted in a slight revision and update to the statement. It was important to the staff to keep the critical piece of “responsible independence” and to add the role of “practice” and “community” which is constant here at this school and in life. We are pleased with how thoroughly we know and implement our mission, something that the AMS accreditation team noted!

The self study resulted in a 200 page report that documented all aspects of our school including: teacher qualifications, facilities, implementation of Montessori philosophy, board governance, policies and record keeping, financial management, and more. A big thank you to the teachers who devoted meeting time to discuss and document what they do in the classrooms, to Becky Eisenhandler who took responsibility for the final compilation of materials, and to Stephanie Betit-Hancock and Marti Anderson who did a final read through of the report. We are proud of this document!

After submitting the self-study a year ago, it was approved by AMS and they sent a team of three experienced Montessorians to do a site visit last March. Their visit kicked off on a Sunday afternoon with a full tour of the school and a gathering with all staff. This was followed by a board dinner hosted by former board member, Mel Kahn, currently in her final (and 14th year) as a Hilltop parent. The warmth, hospitality, and sense of community that the visiting team felt, set the stage for their days with students, parents, and staff at the school.

The visitors confirmed that we do what we said we did in our report and specifically commended:
our “teachers’ passions for teaching”
the “very strong sense of social responsibility” exhibited by our students
the “solid fiscal practice through many years of operation”
the extent to which we honor diversity
and much more. (The site visit report is available in the front lobby.)

After the site-visit team recommended us for accreditation, we waited several months for the accreditation board, and then the full AMS board, to meet to approve us. Then, late in the summer, we got the official word!

We are proud of this accomplishment and this confirmation of our authentic implementation of Montessori. And, as this is an accomplishment from our 2017 Strategic Plan, we are now also beginning the process of developing our 2022 Strategic Plan. If anyone would like to be a part of that process, please contact a board member!