

Being an Ally During Pride Month and Beyond - July 23, 2021

A rainbow flag flies in the wind at Hilltop, while the person who proudly holds it parades through the audience that came to celebrate the 2021 graduation of the Middle Schoolers. Student graduation speeches have traditionally focused on the individual's academic growth and community experiences during their time at Hilltop Montessori School - this year, the speeches brought many profound lessons, questions, and reflections of a broader nature. Three speeches in particular called out student experiences with personal challenges around race, size, and gender identity inclusivity.

Here are words from one of our graduates, Finnegan Pucciarello, as they addressed the socially-distanced crowd gathered on the evening of June 11th:

"While I was learning about racism in the classroom, I was learning about another type of bigotry in more social parts of school. Among this class there rests a great deal of transphobia and homophobia. People have negatively called certain actions and each other "gay" as an insult and later claimed it was a joke. People have falsely claimed that there are only two genders. Another transphobic trend is claiming one's identity as "super straight". This essentially means that one is exclusively attracted to cisgender people of the opposite gender. Many transphobic comments have been justified by religion. I have tried many times to address this issue, but my hope is that by calling it out, right here and right now, I can gain awareness for this issue. Many do not understand what all the fuss is over a few comments, but I can tell you that to my gender-fluid ears, these "innocent comments" sound just like hate, and I want so desperately to fix this."

While people celebrated June's Pride Month in the streets and through social media around the country, we at Hilltop Montessori School were reminded that conversations and lessons about LGBTQIA+ history at our school are so important. They matter because, just like racism, xenophobia, ableism, and islamophobia, LGBTQIA+ people belong to a list of historically marginalized groups that struggle against systemic oppression. Hilltop would like to express our solidarity with, and commitment to, the LGBTQIA+ community, while we continue to create a learning environment in which the multiple forms of gender identities and sexual orientations can be seen, heard, included, and celebrated.

We agree that a month dedicated to acknowledging and celebrating historically marginalized groups in this country is not enough. We also believe that going forward, Pride Month is an excellent opportunity for our school to focus on conversations about LGBTQIA+ history and people in the classroom, so that students could have the opportunity to learn about the history and struggles for achieving equity, justice, and inclusion in all aspects of people's lives.

We are always learning and re-learning to listen, and just as Maria Montessori encouraged us “to follow the child,” we are guided by the true leaders of our community: the students. By listening to the words of our students as they graduate, we take the time to know children in all their intersections and differences, intellectually and culturally. Gender identity and sexual orientation are some of the many facets of individuality that our students are asking us to know and understand about them. We commend our graduates for speaking their truths to our community.

Yupaichani / Gracias / Thank you

Marco Yunga Tacuri

