

# ACADEMIC & SOCIAL EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

2025-26

Hilltop's  
Multi-Tiered  
System of  
Support



HILLTOP  
MONTESSORI  
SCHOOL

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## INTRODUCTION

At Hilltop Montessori School (HMS), we endeavor to provide for the whole child, and the whole student, acknowledging the innate multifaceted uniqueness of each person. More than a century ago, Dr. Maria Montessori, in the development of her philosophy of an education for peace, understood the importance of considering a child's academic, social-emotional, and spiritual aspects of their growth: what we call the whole child approach. Time and again, we observe that much of a student's academic progress is intricately linked to their social and emotional development.

HMS's integrated Learning Specialist Team and Social Emotional Learning programs are two arms of support for students, staff, and families, designed to give each student as much support as we can.

## ACADEMIC LEARNING SUPPORT AT HMS

A core tenant of Montessori pedagogy is known as "following the child". In its essence, this practice allows teachers the better understand the many different and individual ways children acquire knowledge through observation, and then use those observations to help guide students in reaching their fullest potential. Maria Montessori suggested that to help a child fulfill their physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual capacities, educators should understand the child as a whole.

As we work to follow the child, and therefore recognize each student's uniqueness, we are able to implement integrated, systematic academic scaffolding for those with lagging academic skills, as taught directly by the Learning Specialist Team (LST). The LST also plays an integral role in helping to take the first steps in identifying students with a learning disability in coordination with the local school district.

Our hope is that, in serving a broader range of learning styles, every student can benefit from Montessori education.

## **Benchmark Assessments**

A critical task of the Learning Specialist Team is to conduct benchmark assessments for all students kindergarten through 8th grade, three times per year. The HMS LST uses a nationally-normed program to administer assessments in literacy and math that mirrors the skills-based measures that the local school district (WSESU) uses in their assessments.

The data from these assessments, along with to the classroom teacher's observations, helps to provide a more complete academic picture of each student. The assessments enable us to better understand and meet each student's specific learning profile, organize literacy and math groups, and help to track academic progress throughout the year.

## **Educational Support Plans**

When we identify a child as needing additional literacy support beyond what is "typical", or beyond what the classroom teachers are able to sustainably provide, the LST communicates with the student's parents/guardians about the need, content, goals, and measures for the support needed. This information is compiled in an Educational Support Plan (ESP), which is our version of a 504/IEP, that is supplemental to a student's in-classroom instruction. Additionally, in-person meetings are often encouraged to develop understanding and partnership between school and home. ESP Reports are sent to families biannual as an additional piece with the progress reports.

## **Direct Instruction**

Students on an ESP will work directly with the LST in small groups to augment their reading abilities and confidence. At times, a small group might include only one student, if there is not another peer at their level. In Lower Elementary, lessons with the LST are in addition to phonics lessons that are happening in the regular classroom work cycle, and contain systematic, targeted instruction based on the science of reading, specifically designed and tailored to each student's individual lagging skills. This regular, additional instruction is built into our program, and implemented for any student on an ESP.

## 2025-2026 Learning Specialist Team Members

- **Wendy Lynde**, Learning Specialist Director
  - **Rebecca Baldini**, Learning Specialist Montessori Teacher
  - **Ali Crivelli**, Learning Specialist Teacher
  - **Catherine Flannery**, Learning Specialist Teacher
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## SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING SUPPORT AT HMS

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) is a core principle of Montessori pedagogy. Each day, all teachers and staff at Hilltop implement social-emotional learning through lessons, interactions, and modeling. Contemporary research shows that social and emotional well-being are not only predictors of academic success, but also have long-term effects well into adulthood<sup>1</sup>. Social and emotional well-being seems to also be predictors of a healthy lifestyle and a positive outlook on life.

“If we are among the men of good will who yearn for peace,  
we must lay the foundation for peace ourselves,  
by working for the social world of the child.”

—Dr. Maria Montessori, International Montessori Congress, 1937

Grace and Courtesy lessons and practicing conflict resolution are integral elements of a Montessori environment. These SEL lessons that Maria Montessori developed in the early 20th century, the Peace Curriculum, foster self-regulation and social cohesion. Further, one of the underlying themes in Montessori pedagogy is that we all have the same needs, we just meet them in diverse ways. It is the interconnectedness of the universe that allows for such diversity to thrive, and for each and every being to have their own unique way of being supported and supporting others. What these lessons look like differs in age-appropriate ways throughout our programs:

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<sup>1</sup> <https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/what-does-the-research-say/>

- In the **Toddler Program**, these exchanges are heavily teacher facilitated, as our youngest students are learning how to use words instead of their bodies to express their feelings, how to be a member of a community, and so much more.
- As the children become more articulate and independent in the **Children's House**, teachers support a student-led practice of the reflective listening process with a tangible speaking object (the Peace Rose) at a designated "Peace Table". Once students become accustomed to the reflective listening process, they are often able to independently identify when a conflict needs to be discussed, and can move through the process with a teacher standing by to help only if needed. Alicia Jewell's The Peace Rose is a lovely depiction of this process.
- Once children reach **Lower Elementary**, every table is a Peace Table! A critical work for this age is learning how to manage conflict and working through issues of fairness. They use a similar reflective listening process from the Children's House. At this level, class responsibilities and agreements also come into play, as the group collectively works to identify and achieve what they want their community to look like.
- At the **Upper Elementary** level, the Classroom Meeting takes center stage. This is the process through which students bring up issues - classroom, personal, or interpersonal - and the class works together to help find solutions. At this stage, students develop their self-advocacy skills by raising concerns in a safe environment, learn to take responsibility for their actions, and come up with solutions that are helpful, reasonable, related, and respectful.
- Finally, at the **Middle School** level, the Peace Curriculum of the elementary years is built upon by direct curricular engagement with real-world issues of social justice and personal responsibility, and a design of community life that engages students in ongoing self-reflection. This includes academic study, as well as regular, more formal community meetings, small group discussions, and supported and creative problem solving that emerge from the adolescents themselves and, when necessary, facilitated by staff. As Dr. Montessori notes, the adolescent is in a sensitive period for personal dignity and j

justice<sup>2</sup>, and therefore is driven by a developmental need to participate directly in conflict resolution and community problem solving. When appropriate, more formalized restorative practices are included in this approach.

For students who might need more support than is provided through regular classroom lessons, we have a Social Emotional Learning Coordinator and Child Study Team to provide support to the teachers, classrooms, and students.

## **Social Emotional Learning Coordinator and Child Study Team**

### **The Child Study Team's Mission Is:**

- To support each classroom, and the school as a whole, in creating a learning environment that is safe, supportive, and gives each child a sense of belonging and success.
- To support students and staff to learn responsible independence through developing skills that will enhance their ability to engage in learning and to be a part of a thriving community.
- To coordinate and facilitate communication between all parties supporting a student.

### **What the Child Study Team Does**

The Child Study Team (CST) consists of a group of teachers and administrators who meet weekly to collaborate on the school's implementation of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) instruction and support in the classroom, as well as provide extra assistance to classrooms and families for children who have Child Study Action Plans, and help guide classrooms and families through the CST process.

When a child enters the CST process, the teachers will fill in a Child Summary Form and meet with the CST to begin creating a Child Study Action Plan. The plan focuses on one or two specific goals that will help

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<sup>2</sup> Maria Montessori, *From Childhood to Adolescence*

the student access academic content and improve their engagement in the classroom. Together, we brainstorm a number of strategies that could be used as supports, after which teachers meet with parents to finalize the plan.

The CST ensures that progress is monitored and documented, so that the supports can become more targeted and effective over time. No later than six weeks from the initial parent-teacher meeting, parents are invited for an Outcomes Meeting to discuss how the implementation of the strategies went, and how the child is currently doing. At that time, children can continue instruction with strategies altered to incorporate new findings, or add in additional accommodations and supports (often small group or one-on-one targeted instruction) in addition to the instruction they are already receiving.

Regardless of where a child is in the CST process, parents/guardians and/or HMS may begin the process of seeking outside evaluations.

### **Progress Monitoring and Data Collection**

It is a goal of the CST to develop a systematic process with tools to document, address, and communicate around students with lagging Social Emotional Learning skills. We are always continuing to refine how we address and communicate about serving students with diverse needs. Bringing concerns about a student to the CST is taking advantage of a wonderful resource that we have here at Hilltop, adding multiple viewpoints, ideas, experiences, and a greater support team from which we can all learn.

HMS uses a variety of forms to track implementation of interventions and to monitor progress. These forms are to ensure fidelity and effectiveness of the interventions. Observations are also tracked in Transparent Classroom, our in-house Montessori record keeping system.

### **Safety Assessment**

In rare instances, a student's lagging SEL skills might be a safety concern for the community. Should a student break school guidelines as laid out in the handbook and/or disregard explicit directions laid out by the staff that result in serious concerns about the student's safety, the safety of others at our school, or school property, HMS may request a Safety (or "Threat")



Assessment. A Safety Assessment is provided by a trained and licensed professional outside of the school, and will help us to determine:

- A. If the student poses a risk to themselves or others.
- B. If HMS is equipped to support a student's individual needs, or if the environment/supports already available could be adapted to do so.
- C. The best course of action for the creation and implementation of a behavior/safety plan for the student.

The National Association of School Psychologists explains a Safety/Threat Assessment as follows:

- 1. Threat assessment is intended to prevent violence and involves both assessment and intervention. Threat assessment involves determining whether a student poses a threat of violence (they have intent and means to carry out the threat).
- 2. A threat is an expression of intent to physically or sexually harm someone. This expression may be spoken, written, or gestured. Threats can be expressed directly or indirectly to the victim or to others, and threats may be explicit or implied. Threats sometimes, but rarely, actually involve guns or explosive devices. An expression of intent to harm may happen during the school day, or outside of school hours and still be considered a threat.
- 3. A threat to harm others can be transient (i.e., expression of anger or frustration that can be quickly or easily resolved) or substantive (i.e., serious intent to harm others that involves a detailed plan and means).

If a Safety Assessment is determined to be necessary, a student and family's privacy will be respected, but the members of staff involved in the discussion of the findings will include: the Child Study Team, Classroom Teachers, and/or other involved teachers/staff, the student's family, as well as contracted licensed child psychologists. This larger team will work together to review the findings of the Safety Assessment to determine best next steps.

To learn more about Safety/Risk Assessments, you may visit the National Association of School Psychologists at: <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-mand-podcasts/school-safety-and-crisis/systems-levelprevention/threat-assessment-at-school>

## 2025-2026 Child Study Team Members

- **Laura Gypson**, Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Coordinator & Early Education Program Partnership Director
  - **Tamara Mount**, Head of School
  - **Jade Harmon**, Elementary Art Teacher & UE Health Teacher
  - **Wendy Lynde**, Learning Specialist Director
  - **Classroom Teachers**, for the student being supported
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## MULTI-TIERED SYSTEM OF SUPPORT

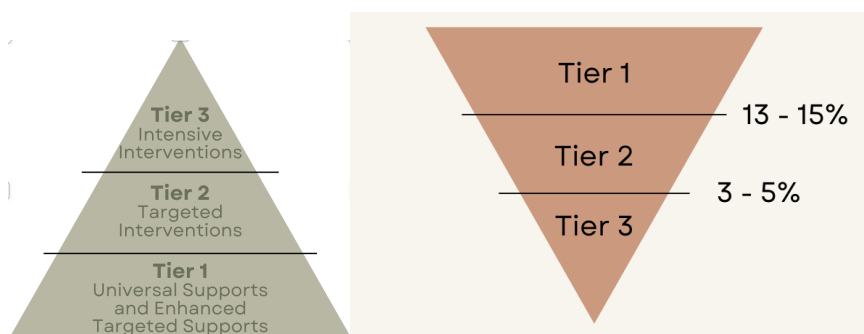
Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) is a framework that is widely used by many educational institutions to support the whole child. MTSS is an easily recognizable and transferable framework and makes it easier to communicate with a student's home school district, external professionals and other systems of support. At Hilltop, MTSS is used to better explain and demonstrate how the Montessori curriculum, as well as additional tools and supports, are used to support all aspects of a child's education.

The goal of MTSS in all institutions is to match support for the goals of each child. Matching support means that for different goals or outcomes, a child may receive different levels of instruction. These levels of instruction may be happening simultaneously. For example, a student may be receiving additional literacy instruction, as well as small, group-focused instruction of social-emotional skills.

If the data shows that the child is making progress towards their goals, or if a child is not making progress towards their goal, the intensity, frequency, and duration of interventions being delivered may shift. Among the supports outside of the classroom are the Learning Specialist Team and the Child Study Team.

Each student is served by our Tier One instruction, which is the Montessori Method for both academic and SEL instruction. The Montessori lessons are also constantly enhanced through professional development that augments a teachers' tools for instruction.

Even with such a strong foundation, we can expect that about 15% of our students will need further support developing lagging academic or social and emotional skills, and/or have unmet needs that require more direct, explicit instruction. This is when our Tier Two approach is enacted, and we offer more targeted and individualized support. We can still expect another 3-5% of children to require even greater, more targeted instruction, as well as receiving outside evaluations and support, known as Tier Three.



## **TIER ONE: UNIVERSAL SUPPORT**

### **Overview**

Tier One Universal Support is the academic and SEL lessons that are a part of our Montessori curriculum and a teacher's best-practices. This level of support and instruction is designed so that each child who attends Hilltop is able to access and learn new concepts.

## **TIER TWO: TARGETED SUPPORT**

### **Overview**

Tier Two support begins with involving the Learning Support Team or the Child Study Team. Teachers meet with the LST/CST to determine what additional support the students need and to draft an Educational Support Plan for academic goals or an Action Plan for SEL goals. These Plans are then then finalized and communicated to parents/guardians.

Tier Two Targeted Support is given to students who have demonstrated a low acquisition of academic skills expected for their grade level or

exhibited patterns of unexpected behaviors due to lagging social and emotional skills, and/or have unmet needs that have not been served by the universal supports. These interventions are typically given in a small-group setting, 3-5 times a week. The interventions can be led by the child's teachers, the LST, or other teachers in the school that have more experience in a specific area, and are meant to provide additional explicit instruction and opportunities to practice new skills.

## **Family Communication and Partnership**

We work to communicate and have a partnership with the family when a student is receiving Tier Two instruction for academic areas or SEL. We communicate the plans, in writing or in a meeting caregivers. The family meeting will include discussing family reflections and input and family's next steps. Partnership between school and home is integral to the success of each student. We are all on the same team, with the student's best interest at heart, and with the same goal: to set the child up for success! The process of family meetings, family partnership, and outcome meetings continue throughout Tier Two and Three.

## **Outside Expert Consultation**

HMS contracts and works with several tutors, learning specialists, licensed social workers, school counselors, and therapists to consult on specific situations/students, or to collaborate on systemic/policy initiatives or professional development and training. While a child is in Tier Two, with the family's permission, we will consult with outside professionals, in order to gain greater insight into possible underlying causes, improve our monitoring process (if necessary), and enhance our current interventions. This can also be a stage where the CST works with the family to request an educational evaluation from the local school district.

## **TIER THREE: INTENSIVE SUPPORT**

### **Overview**

As mentioned on page 10, 3-5% of our student population will require intensive support for developing their academic skills and/or emotional and social skills. This is true for all schools across the USA<sup>3</sup>. We will know a

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<sup>3</sup> Kent McIntosh and Steve Goodman, *Integrated Multi-Tiered Systems of Support: Blending RTI and PBIS*

student is in need of Tier Three Intensive Support because we will have tried various interventions in small groups or 1:1 multiple times a week, with the student having shown very little, or no, progress. The evaluation process may lead to a student qualifying for a One Plan or an IEP/504 Plan. Although evaluations are performed by a student's district, HMS remains a partner to families and teachers and staff attend meetings, and are part of communications throughout the process.

### **Intensive Supports - 1:1 Aide**

Tier Three Intensive Supports are teacher/adult-led interventions that include meeting 1:1 with a student, 5 times per week, for a minimum of 30 minutes. These interventions are similar to those used in Tier Two, but with increased frequency.

When it has been determined that a student needs more consistent support from a designated adult for part or all of the school day in order to access the learning environment and/or stay safe, a 1:1 Aide will be necessary. HMS will work to find and hire a 1:1 Aide. See the Family Responsibility section below for more information. A 1:1 Aide needs to adhere to Montessori philosophy, actively supporting students to reach goals agreed upon by HMS. HMS will not create or run a long-term parallel program outside of the classroom for students. Classroom success and integration is the goal for all students.

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## **FAMILY RESPONSIBILITY**

Regular tuition does not cover many of the Tier Three services or special education services beyond what the LST or teachers and specialists are able to offer within small group instruction. If your child requires additional services, such as a 1:1 Aide, evaluations by outside specialists/constants, and/or a formal Safety Assessment, as identified by Hilltop Montessori School or as specified in an IEP, ESP, or Child Action Plan the parent/guardian will be responsible for additional costs, unless the Local Education Authority (LEA) has a written agreement with HMS to support the student's needs. If your child requires accommodations under a 504 plan that would result in a substantial increase in costs, HMS may bill the parent/guardian for those exceptional costs, unless there is a written agreement with the LEA to support those accommodations.

Additionally, if it is determined by HMS that the student would benefit from accessibility services, their parent/guardian would also be responsible for any additional supports provided under the student's Action Plan/IEP/ESP.

If HMS determines that evaluations/assessments are in the best interest of an individual student and necessary for the school to determine what level of services the individual student would need, and the parents/guardians are unwilling to partner with HMS to have the student evaluated, HMS reserves the right to dismiss that family, including the enrolled student, from the school.

When partnership between the school and family takes place, we are able to meet the expanding spectrum of each student's needs. We welcome partnering with families to support students! And, as always, the first point of contact for a parent/guardian is the classroom teaching team. If you have a question or information to share about your child's social emotional learning, please contact their teachers.

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## IDEA

At any point, parents/guardians can request an evaluation for suspected disability and/or eligibility under the IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) from the school district of their residence. Those requests would go directly to the Director of Student Services in the Supervisory Union, which covers the individual student's residence, or to the Director of Student Services in the Supervisory Union which contains HMS (WSESU). The decision to evaluate a student under this process is solely the decision of the Director of Student Services of the Supervisory Union and not HMS.

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Thank you for taking the time to learn about Hilltop's  
academic and social-emotional supports!