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Notes from editor (not for publication):

HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

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1 Hilltop Montessori School announces \$600,000 gift to
2 support major STEM expansion

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4 TEXT BODY:

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5 Hilltop Montessori School recently announced a major
6 \$600,000 gift from Parker and Alexandra Conrad.

7 The school said this donation launches a new capital
8 campaign designed to expand elementary classroom space and
9 equip students with state-of-the-art materials for integrated
10 Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) learning
11 schoolwide.

The \$750,000 campaign will allow Hilltop’s Montessori-trained teachers to fully implement the robust STEM curriculum outlined in their Montessori “albums.” The planned expansion includes:

- Enlarged Lower Elementary (LE) and Upper Elementary (UE) classrooms to provide dedicated space for STEM lessons and materials.

- An expanded art room redesigned to incorporate STEM resources for both LE and UE.

- A greenhouse, additional sinks, and lab tables to support hands-on, experiential science.

- A dedicated makerspace to facilitate advanced work in robotics, coding, engineering, and design, with capacity for after-school programming open to Hilltop students — and potentially the broader Brattleboro community.

- New STEM materials and equipment to support a more hands-on, inquiry-based science curriculum.

By increasing classroom size and improving facilities, the school said the expansion will also enable the school to welcome a larger number of students at lower Index Tuition tiers, ensuring greater accessibility for families.

“This announcement comes at a moment of renewed community commitment to thoughtful technology use,” the school wrote in a news release. “A group of Hilltop parents recently united to reintroduce and strengthen a shared agreement to delay providing smartphones until at least eighth grade, aligning with the national ‘Wait ‘Til 8th’” movement. The initiative aims to support students in forming connections away from screens and social media, ensuring no child feels isolated or singled out for not having a smartphone.

Hilltop has already received an additional anonymous gift of \$50,000, along with other contributions, bringing the current total raised to \$656,000. With this momentum, the school says it is now able to move forward with plans for construction in the summer of 2026.

47 Current teachers say they are excited to see this dream
48 become a reality for lessons as soon as the 2026–27 school year.

49 Akari Stimler, Lower Elementary teacher, is looking
50 forward to having space to do deeper observations and
51 experiments in botany and explore biogeographical phenomena
52 through lessons in geographical science.

53 Tom Griffith, who retired two years ago after working in
54 the Upper Elementary classroom for 30 years, still comes back
55 every Wednesday and works with students, sharing all his favorite
56 science lessons. He is looking forward to having designated
57 space designed for science and engineering lessons like
58 dissection, thermal conductivity, and simple machines.

59 To complete the project, Hilltop aims to raise the final
60 \$94,000. Community members interested in supporting the STEM
61 expansion are encouraged to contact Head of School Tamara
62 Mount (tmount@hilltopmontessori.org) or board member and
63 Development Committee Chair Laura Ridlehoover.
64 (lridlehoover@gmail.com).

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BIO/COATTAIL:

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