



HILL TOP Preparatory School



Pictured (from left): José Velasco, Head, Americas Autism at Work Program, SAP, Joseph Riddle, Director, Neurodiversity in the Workplace & Hill Top Trustee; Sissy Wickes, Board President, Hill Top Preparatory School & Headmaster Thomas W. Needham

Hill Top Leaders Converge at Autism at Work Summit 2019



June 2019



A report from Board President Sissy Wickes

Hill Top Headmaster Tom Needham, fellow HTPS Trustee and Neurodiversity in the Workplace Director Joe Riddle, and I spent two riveting days at Redmond, Washington’s Microsoft campus at the Autism at Work Summit. The meeting was hosted by Microsoft, one of the leading employers of neuro-diverse workers, and attended by business leaders from the U.S., Denmark and Australia promoting neurodiversity and inclusion programs. Large companies such as EY (Ernst and Young), SAP, Dell, IBM, JP Morgan Chase, and Travelers Insurance were represented. Smaller, more grassroots companies such as Spectrum Designs engaged us with their story of establishing a T-shirt company in which 90% of employees are on the autism spectrum.

“There is no about us without us.”

Self-Advocacy skills are critical to success.

I listened in awe to the various industries promoting opportunities toward inclusion and diversity in the workplace. The type of employment varied, the scale of the effort varied, but the commitment was consistent: the value of employing autistic individuals. The numbers are often small and the programs are relatively new, but the effort is firmly and deeply rooted in the operating mission of these companies.

My takeaway is a renewed personal commitment to the world of autism and a strong belief in the current direction of Hill Top toward transition and employability. In our work with young people, it is imperative that we instill an understanding of employment and an opportunity to develop workplace experience. Securing summer jobs, internships, and employment training are all essential elements to future success in our young adults. As Hill Top continues to expand our curriculum to include work outside of the classroom, and as we continue to expand our support past graduation, I hope that all of us will enthusiastically and robustly support the school.



“There is no about us without us.” This phrase was heard throughout the summit in reference to engaging people on the spectrum in discussions of all aspects of the autistic world. We need to become involved on behalf of our children while teaching them to self-advocate and to actively engage in the world around them . By discovering and strengthening their own agency, our children and our students will promote and establish opportunity and inclusion for people on the autism spectrum. The time is now and the movement has begun. Let us support Hill Top and the future for all of our students.