



Hilltop Children's Center
Building on the wonders of childhood

4 Nickerson St, Ste 100
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(206) 283-3100
hilltopcc.org

January 29, 2015

Childcare Exchange
17725 NE 65th Street, B-275
Redmond, WA 98052

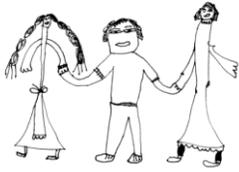
Dear Selection Committee:

I am writing this letter to give my highest possible nomination for Liddy Wendell as an emerging leader in the field of Early Childhood Education. I know Ms. Wendell through her work as Executive Director at Hilltop Children's Center, where I am the Program Supervisor/HR Manager. Throughout the duration of Ms. Wendell's tenure at Hilltop and as the Executive Director, I have had the opportunity to discern her strengths as a strong community leader, reflective and analytical thinker, coach and mentor, active problem solver, and advocate.

Ms. Wendell embodies the notion of values driven decision making in every layer of her work. She clearly communicates her vision for the organization and how it intersects with Hilltop's core values, consistently referring back to the values to reflect on organizational change and growth. Ms. Wendell led the administrative team in an exercise to create our own values to guide our work, landing on transparency, efficiency/effectiveness, stewardship, and sustainability. This has been invaluable in the work of the leadership team, resulting in a perspective shift that has redefined our roles and resulted in a healthier and stronger organization. Ms. Wendell also created a culture shift in the organizational systems and structure of the office, allowing the leadership team to move from being reactive to proactive, increasing retention and responsiveness to the needs of faculty, families, and children.

Ms. Wendell serves as a prominent advocate at Hilltop and in the education field in general. Her strong commitment to advocating for her staff is evident in her consistent knowledge of the pulse of the organization, and recognizing if there are feelings of burn out. She has put sustainable support systems in place to mitigate these challenges, and regularly recognizes and values the work of individuals and teams both formally and informally. She is responsive to needs, slowing down on a project if she gets the sense that there is not enough capacity, or motivating her staff by offering diverse growth opportunities. People at Hilltop feel like they have a voice largely because of the culture that Ms. Wendell creates. She balances her hat of advocate for children, families, and faculty, even when those hats are contradictive of one another. In those moments, she refers back to Hilltop's core values. Ms. Wendell also serves as an advocate for the Early Childhood Education field, attending and participating in discussions, forums, and Town Hall meetings with the Seattle City Council about early education, and being interviewed multiple times during the research of the Universal Pre-K initiative development.

Ms. Wendell is an ambitious and innovative leader. She spearheaded Hilltop's Step Up Leaders Program, which offers a structure and compensation for faculty who have an inventive idea and who want to take leadership in bringing that idea to fruition. This program has allowed educators to further develop skills outside of the classroom, and has increased ownership, creativity, and



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accountability. Last year, 70% of educators participated in a Step Up project, shifting the culture of the school from one of complaint to one of trust and empowerment. Ms. Wendell has initiated and launched the construction of a new website, identifying outside-the-box strategies to accomplish this on a small budget. She spearheaded an entire technology overhaul for the organization, providing tools for educators to achieve new standards in their own documentation goals and objectives. Ms. Wendell has also begun a strategic planning process and board development to further nourish, foster and develop Hilltop's trajectory of growth.

Ms. Wendell models the notion of living in community for everyone at Hilltop. While her roles and responsibilities are vast and complex, I have found her in the kitchen washing dishes on a particularly chaotic afternoon so that there are enough bowls for morning breakfast the next day. And despite her many meetings, she also finds the time to be in the classroom and welcome families at drop off, knowing the names of children and caregivers alike. She is warm and welcoming, and recognizes the importance of building relationships. Ms. Wendell displays a balance of backbone and heart, empathizing and nourishing when necessary, while pushing faculty to thrive and be held accountable – attributes necessary for successful implementation of values.

I have been particularly impressed and inspired by with Ms. Wendell's value add as a community member, leader, and contributor. Her strong communication skills are evident as she does not shy away from conflict and is able to respectfully and confidently share her opinions with faculty, families and children, broadening perspectives. Her spirit and sense of humor bring a genuine and authentic energy that sets the tone and is valued by the community.

Ms. Wendell is incredibly intelligent, hardworking, reflective, ambitious and self-aware. She is a rare find and I feel incredibly grateful to work for and with this emerging leader. It is with great honor that I nominate Ms. Wendell.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sarah Nordhausen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Sarah Nordhausen
Program Supervisor/HR Manager
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