

LOCAL LITERACY PLAN

Cornerstone Montessori Elementary School

I. SCHOOL OVERVIEW

The vision of Cornerstone Montessori Elementary School (CMES) is to create a world-class, cross-cultural learning community that employs rigorous Montessori methodology to prepare children to achieve at their highest levels academically. Cornerstone will accomplish this by providing a quality education for all children regardless of their socioeconomic or cultural background and through partnering with a diverse community of parents, non-profits and social service agencies to cultivate healthy lifestyles and nurture empathy, character, and community engagement. The mission of CMES is to support children from culturally and economically diverse backgrounds living in or near St. Paul's East Side through a rigorous and high impact Montessori program that empowers them to make positive decisions, develop self-discipline, and create a true sense of responsibility for themselves and others in their community.

Cornerstone Montessori Elementary School opened in fall of 2011 serving 60 children in grades K-2 and authorized by Volunteers of America. Children in our Kindergarten program are in Children's Houses, which operate in partnership with Cornerstone Montessori School. A private preschool, Cornerstone Montessori School, has a shared mission to provide quality Montessori education to a diverse community while preparing children for success in life. After Kindergarten, children move to one of two lower elementary environments, which include children in grades 1-3. Each year, the school added a grade until ultimately serving 140 children in grades K-6. This includes Kindergarten children in two Children's Houses, two lower elementary environments (grades 1-3), and two upper elementary environments (grades 4-6). All Cornerstone Elementary teachers or guides have a diploma for the appropriate age-level from the Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) and appropriately licensed by the state of Minnesota. Cornerstone Montessori Elementary School has been authorized by the University of St. Thomas since 2019.

Montessori pedagogy is driven by principles that are based on an understanding of human development established through observation of children and teaching practice in Montessori learning environments around the world for more than 100 years.

II. STATEMENT OF GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Cornerstone Montessori Elementary School is committed to providing differentiated reading and writing activities (which are a part of the Montessori curriculum) that allow children to independently develop their reading and writing in a way that meets their individual interests and learning styles. Our goal is to develop fluent readers that can both read what is written on a page and also understand and interpret the meaning of the author.

As a part of the Montessori curriculum, children will receive instruction in fluency, phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, and comprehension within the classroom environment. For groups of students not making adequate growth to meet grade level objectives, children will receive additional reading support both inside and outside of the classroom.

Since reading is the key to accessing the Montessori classroom and allowing children to explore and pursue their interests in all content areas, Cornerstone is also committed to ongoing assessment and evaluation of our students' reading skills.

III. STATEMENT OF PROCESS TO ASSESS STUDENTS

Cornerstone will provide screening, diagnostic, and ongoing progress monitoring in order to assess students' levels of reading proficiency.

Literacy Areas Assessed

- Oral reading fluency, accurate and fluent reading of connected text (1-6)
- Advanced phonics and word attack skills (1-6)
- Reading comprehension (1-6)
- Phonemic awareness (K-1)
- Alphabetic principle and basic phonics (K-2)

Assessment Instruments Used

FastBridge reading assessments will be used to assess children in grades K-6. It is a combined measure of fluency, comprehension, phonemic awareness, alphabetic principle and phonics. CBMreading will be used to help identify students in grades 2-6 who may be at risk for reading difficulties, including dyslexia; earlyReading will be the dyslexia/reading difficulty screener for children in grades K-1. These tools will also help teachers identify areas to target instructional support.

FastBridge will also be used to monitor the progress of students that have been identified to receive reading intervention services. Teachers will use this data to examine the effectiveness of instructional support.

Frequency of Assessments

The FastBridge assessments will be administered in the fall, winter and spring for all children grades K-6. For children in need of extra reading support (in tiers 2 and 3), the progress monitoring assessments will be used bi-weekly to monitor the effectiveness of the instructional support.

Administration of Assessments

A team of teachers and specialists that have received FastBridge training will assess each student's reading progress using the tools mentioned above and compile the data. Additionally, all teachers will assess their children on an ongoing basis through observation and information gained from daily classroom work.

Data will be used at the classroom level to differentiate phonics, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension and spelling instruction. It will also be used to determine interventions for children who need extra support in reading and monitor the effectiveness of the interventions.

The literacy specialist will train and coach teachers to develop strong reading instruction across all subject areas in all classrooms.

Use of Data

The use of data collected about student reading achievement will be used for the following purposes:

- By the administration to assess the overall efficacy of the school's reading program;
- By the administration, literacy specialist, and teachers to identify students who may

- need special interventions or services in order to be successful readers; and
- By classroom teachers in order to inform instruction on a regular basis, appropriately group students, differentiate language and reading instruction, help students access appropriately leveled books, and to provide individualized reading help as needed.
- Data collected about student reading achievement as well as classroom observations, other Montessori formative assessments, and comments and experiences shared by children will aid faculty and administration in the process of identifying children with possible Dyslexia and/or Convergence Disorder. This information will be shared as a regular part of Child Find meetings and scheduled or impromptu parent conferences. It will be followed up on in the same manner of all concerns raised in Child Find and Child Study meetings, ensuring the parents are supported with necessary resources resulting in all children having access to appropriate academic accommodations or supports.

Determination of Proficiency

Cornerstone students are deemed proficient readers when their composite score on the FastBridge assessment is at or above the benchmark goal.

Benchmark Assessments

FastBridge assessments will be completed in September, January and May to closely track progress of our students.

IV. PARENT NOTIFICATION AND INVOLVEMENT

Parent Communication

CMES will notify parents in a timely manner regarding their child's progress in reading at biannual parent-teacher conferences (early November and March) and through end of the year written progress reports (in June). Children receiving literacy intervention services (Tiers 2 or 3) will receive written progress notes from the appropriate specialist twice per year.

Parent Involvement/Resources for Parents

Classroom teachers in grades K-3 will regularly provide information regarding strategies for parents to use at home to help their children become better readers and to foster a love of reading. The literacy specialist will provide parent partnership education evenings to help guide parents in supporting constructive periods of reading at home each evening.

The school's website will identify reading resources that parents can use at home with their children.

V. INTERVENTIONS AND INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORTS

Core Instruction

Language is involved in every aspect of the Montessori curriculum. Children are provided with a diverse group of activities that allow them to develop their capacity for reading and writing in a way that meets their interest and learning style. The language materials in the Montessori environment at each level build upon the skills supported at the previous level. This supports the children in becoming fluent readers, described in Montessori as *total reading*. Our goal of total reading is defined as the ability to not only read what is written on a page, but also the ability to understand and interpret the meaning

of the author.

The effectiveness of the Montessori approach to reading and literacy is revealed in a study, “Evaluating Montessori Education”, by Paula Polk Lillard, published in the *Science Magazine*. The report details a study conducted in the Milwaukee Public Schools, which include both public Montessori and conventional public schools. A double-blind study revealed that Montessori students have superior performance at age 5 on measurements of reading.

Cornerstone has worked in partnership with other Montessori communities to align the MN State Standards to the Montessori curriculum. Cornerstone has also served as a member of a coalition of Montessori schools that has worked to align Montessori materials to Common Core Standards. The entire work was reviewed by the Association Montessori Internationale trainers.

In addition to the Montessori materials and curriculum, Cornerstone utilizes Reading A to Z. Children in grades K-3 work with Reading A to Z books and teachers may use running records with benchmark books to help assess adequate progress or an area of need.

Cornerstone uses the American Reading Company leveled books to support strong literacy skills in all children across all subject areas.

Intervention, Supports, and Use of Data

Cornerstone will provide a multi-tiered system of support that includes interventions within the classroom, interventions for English language learners, interventions for students who are behind grade level, and interventions for students who are identified with special education needs.

The reading and language materials provide scaffolding and can be manipulated to meet diverse learning styles and needs.

Remedial lessons will be offered to children who are assessed in the fall as being behind grade-level expectations on FastBridge assessments. The lessons can be given by the classroom teacher to individuals or small groups and can be worked into the regular work cycle of the Montessori environment.

Additionally, children who need more intensive remediation will be offered services outside of the classroom with the literacy specialist. The frequency and duration of these sessions will be determined by the assessment results, classroom observations, and the specific needs of the children, collaboratively, by the literacy specialist, the EL Learner teacher and the classroom teachers.

When a student tests below grade-level and the system of intervention set up by the classroom team and literacy specialist is not effective, the child may be referred to Child Study with the special education team.

The following interventions may be available for students who are not reading at or above grade level:

- Appropriate placement in a guided reading group during reading time;
- Individualized reading assignments as determined by the literacy specialist or the classroom teacher;
- Individual and small group push-in or pullout reading instruction with the literacy specialist;
- Small group ELL push-in;
- Small group ELL pullout;
- Special education services.

Intervention Providers, Frequency and Purpose

- Licensed teachers or the licensed literacy specialist will oversee all interventions and provide the interventions.
- The duration and frequency of the intervention will depend on the needs of individual students. Services may be provided within the classroom or outside of the classroom depending on what best meets the needs of the student.
- Interventions will be provided during the normal school day.

VI. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ON SCIENTIFICALLY-BASED READING INSTRUCTION (SBRI)

Alignment and Collaboration

- Teachers at Cornerstone have as a valuable resource, the combined efforts of Montessorians Nationwide: the linking of Common Core Standards in Language to the Montessori Curriculum. This tool not only supports the teachers in preparing children to demonstrate proficiency with respect to the Common Core Standards when they are called to do so and, in addition, it raises our accountability as a school to those educators familiar with a more conventional approach to education, as well as to our parents who are learning the Montessori philosophy.
- The Cornerstone teaching staff is diverse in training, skills, and approaches. Each classroom teacher or Montessori Guide is highly qualified, having both an AMI Montessori Certificate and a Minnesota State Teaching License. In addition we have licensed, non-trained support staff, an EL Learner Teacher, a Literacy Specialist and a varied and highly qualified Special Education Staff. As well, Cornerstone values and embraces working in a network of Charter schools with other areas of expertise, also working to serve the population we serve. We embrace numerous opportunities for valuable collaboration around challenges, approaches, best practices, and successes of our students and teaching staff.
- Most importantly, strong alignment with state performance expectations and rich collaboration opportunities both in our own school and with other schools, support our teachers in fostering strong literacy skills so students move quickly from 'learning to read' to 'reading to learn' across all subject areas, ultimately fostering their confidence in themselves as capable learners in any situation, devouring text both for information and pleasure as they become life-long lovers of reading and learning.
- All teaching staff have been or will be trained through Lexia's LETRS program by the end of the 2025-26 school year, as required by the Minnesota READ Act.

Use of Performance Data to Inform Professional Development Plan

- Cornerstone values reflective practice and uses performance data to inform our professional development plan as well as to inform instruction. The systematic development of our literacy program from first including adaptations in the classroom such as Orton-Gillingham, Heggerty, and Words Their Way to the addition of reading tutors the following year, to the addition of a part time literacy specialist the following year, to the addition of direct teacher training and coaching and the adoption of a school-wide reading period each day are direct results of analyzing performance data, reflecting on best practices as teachers, and aggressively seeking to meet any needs the data suggests.

VII. CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION SYSTEM

Horizontal and Vertical Alignment

- The Common Core Standards have been linked to the AMI Montessori Albums of Presentations (our curriculum) by an exceptional team made up of Montessorians across the nation. The document clearly demonstrates which presentations support proficiency in all of the Common Core Language Standards.

Curriculum Resources

- Additional Curriculum Resources are as follows:
 - American Reading Company Leveled Readers, Skills Cards, take-home reading program, and training and coaching for administration, staff, parents, and children to use these resources effectively
 - Reading A to Z
 - Orton-Gillingham (for Tier 3)
 - Words Their Way
 - Heggerty
 - UFLI

VIII. STUDENT SUPPORT SYSTEM FOR EL LEARNERS

Training and Support Provided to Ensure K-3 Staff Can Meet Student's Diverse Needs

Language support is already integrated into the current Montessori curriculum. The lessons are clearly presented using planned vocabulary and supported by concrete objects. Opportunities to practice with the lesson objects and manipulatives are built into the lessons. The lesson is not complete until participants are able to articulate through words that they understand the concept.

Small, multi-age groups and the interactive nature of lessons in the Montessori classroom give opportunities for listening and speaking. All of these Montessori methods give strong support to a developing language learner.

Cornerstone seeks opportunities to provide training to deepen the understanding of the EL Learner so that instruction across all subject areas in the classrooms strongly supports those learners as well.

IX. COMMUNICATION SYSTEM FOR ANNUAL REPORTING

- With regards to the Literacy Program, Cornerstone submits these reports annually:
 - Annual Report
 - World's Best Work Force
 - Local Literacy Plan
- In addition, the Annual Report, the World's Best Work Force, and the Literacy Plan are posted on our web site.