

Cornerstone Monthly Newsletter

October 2024

Dear Families,

Every week I get two emails from Sadie's teacher: a lesson plan on Monday and pictures on Friday. While I mostly just click through the pictures to find ones of Sadie, it's also fun to know in advance that the babies are playing with bubbles or looking at leaves. Over the past 6+ years, figuring out how to provide this level of communication with families is something I've struggled with in our Montessori environment. A lesson plan for Ellie, in Children's House 1, might look something like this:

Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs
Pr Life Sweeping - *POC* to on x	Pr Life Zipper frame Waffle work (request) → is she ready? have to pre-measure ingredients	Pr Life wiping the counter after dishes	Pr Life Sweeping RP - x too small, try □
Sensonal PT x 2 CB2 @ distance	Sensonal bells - POC - striking gently	Sensonal CB2 language - "white" "green" "red"	Sensonal sound boxes pairing brown star
Language Sound game - shelf	Language SP letters - e, m, t	Language touch tabs Question Game if group	Language classified cards things in kitchen SP letters - r, a, s
Math # rods !! 1-3	Math oral language (can you bring 3 rocks?)	Math SP #s - 3, 7, 9	Math # rods 4-6
Culture map of the world	Culture parts of mammal	Culture painting - POC - wiping water off floor	Culture sm group - story of giraffes
G+C saying "thank you"	G+C pushing in chair	G+C Inviting a friend to eat snack	G+C observing a lesson → correct to map + CB lag

This is a good time for me to say that I made this lesson plan up, based on what I know about 3 year olds and about Ellie's interests. The only concrete things I can tell you about Ellie's recent weeks are that she and Gabe had a meeting on the black carpet and that Melanie took away her cup because she wasn't listening. I believe wholeheartedly that these things happened, but I also believe she did something productive with her time, at least on some of the days!

During the week, my imaginary lesson plan for Ellie would be marked up, with presentations added and removed. My notes might look something like this:

Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs
<p>Pr Life Sweeping - *POC → to on x 10:35 really into making the x!</p> <p>Seasonal PTex 2 CB2 @ distance</p> <p>Language Sound game - shelf</p> <p>Math # rods !! 1-3 too hard body parts next time should be able to go quickly</p> <p>Culture map of the world ✓</p> <p>G+C saying "thank you" Angela did w/ "gracias"</p>	<p>Pr Life Zipper frame Waffle work (request) → is she ready? have to pre-measure ingredients</p> <p>Seasonal bells - POC - striking gently watched for WW</p> <p>Language SP letters - e, m, t ✓</p> <p>Math oral language (can you bring 3 rocks?) do at recess</p> <p>Culture parts of mammal Used a cow as example</p> <p>G+C pushing in chair</p>	<p>Pr Life wiping the counter after dishes - added as a POC after WW</p> <p>Seasonal CB2 language - "white" "green" "red" blue</p> <p>Language touch tabs ✓ Question Game if group</p> <p>Math SP #s - 3, 7, 9 no group talked at day during waffles</p> <p>Culture painting - POC - wiping paint off after paint off easel</p> <p>G+C Inviting a friend to eat snack - made 2 waffles, invited RB to join</p>	<p>Pr Life only willing to do x waffles sweeping POC to snatching</p> <p>Seasonal sound boxes pairing brown stair Cyl blocks x 3 Δ</p> <p>Language classified cards things in kitchen SP letters - r, a, s</p> <p>Math # rods 4-6 straw w/ 5 to 6</p> <p>Culture sm group - story of giraffes waded to talk to animals that eat</p> <p>G+C observing a lesson</p>

And then what Ellie actually did might look like this:

Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs
<p>breakfast Sweeping (rp, dc, c) Cyl block (ic) PT (ic) book corner group - Angela - "gracias" + I spy + Simon dice button frame (sc) pizza works (ic) outside (ic) Sweeping (ic) lunch set up - cups (dc) lunch recess nap (11:05 - 2:20) book corner map of the world (ic, dc) rolling mats (ic) snack recess → after care</p>	<p>breakfast Sweeping (ic) Classified cards (mammals) (ic) observing waffles (cc) Wandering → # rods (ic, dc) group - parts of a cow (ic) + 5 little frogs SP letters (rp, dc) CB2 (ic) painting (ic) Windows (ic) → Melanie lunch set up - cups (ic) lunch recess nap (11:15 - 1:45) book corner snack recess → after care</p>	<p>breakfast painting (ic) - (FP) # rods (ic) CB2 (ic) → language (ic) book corner waffles! (ic, c) group - songs lunch recess nap (12:50 - 2:00) touch tabs (ic, dc) map of the world (sc) Sweeping (dc) Snack recess → after care</p>	<p>waffles (ic) Sweeping (dc) # rods (ic) - 4-6 outside (ic) windows (ic) scrubbing (ic) glass polishing (ic) group - Melanie - animals eating leaves cyl blocks x 3 (ic, dc, c) lunch set up - forks (ic) lunch recess nap (laid down, no nap) cyl blocks (ic) PT (ic) book corner bells (cc) button frame (ic) CB2 (ic) touch tabs (ic) map of world (sc) book corner snack recess → after care</p>

Imagine this on a five day week! And imagine one of these for all 30 children in the class! Sharing a weekly update is a lot easier when all of the children are learning about the color purple at the same time on the same day, or everyone is doing single digit multiplication at 11:00 on Tuesday.

My imaginary observation grid for Ellie tells me so much about what she's interested in right now. She needs gross motor activity (look at all that big practical life work!), she tends to stay within an area and move through it systematically, she likes to repeat what she's been recently shown, and when she's tired she flits from thing to thing. Later in the year, when things are more settled, I would do a timed observation, where I can learn not only what she's choosing and how (those "ic" and "sc" notes mean that she chose her work independently or by suggestion), but how long she's spending on each material/activity and how deeply she's concentrating. These data are critical to helping me lesson plan further.

I'm sharing these samples with you not as an excuse – communication about your child's academic and social progress is hugely important – but to explain why a weekly classroom update doesn't work well in a Montessori environment. It also explains why your child very likely says "I don't know" or "nothing" when you ask what they did that day. Look at all the things Ellie did on Thursday! And she didn't nap. She couldn't possibly tell me all of her activity and it would be overwhelming to even try. Combine this with the absorbent mind that our children under 6 have, where they are also observing everyone else's choices, and there's just too much to even try to repeat back. The things that stuck out as unusual to Ellie (having her cup taken away) or that parallel experiences she hears me talking about (having a meeting) are the ones that she can identify to share.

We would love to hear if you have ideas for how we can share more regularly about your child's school life, and we hope you will join us to observe this fall and come to meet with us during conferences next week. While they don't happen weekly, these opportunities to get a glimpse into your child's work are far more meaningful than the lesson plan I get each Monday saying that the babies are playing with drums on Thursday (as cute as that may be). And, if you'd like to learn more about Ellie's imaginary observation grid, I would be happy to share my shorthand with you!

Alyssa

Toddler Community

The Toddler Community is enjoying the autumn weather. We've experienced some warmer days recently; but it seems we are into the long pants season again. The toddler room has in floor heat and fan forced heat. The children stay warm in our room working in short sleeves. Layered clothing works best, putting a long sleeve layer over a short sleeve t-shirt. We can help your child hang up their long sleeve shirt with their jacket upon arrival. Long sleeves in the classroom tend to get wet and need to be removed with all of the water work. **ALL** of your child's garments need to be labeled: socks, shoes, undergarments, shirts, pants, coats, hats, mittens, boots. We have quite a few items in our Toddler Community Lost and Found that need to be claimed. Please check it for any unlabeled items. Thank you! 🍁





Children's House 1

Happy fall! This month, we've been focusing on strengthening our sense of community. The children have enjoyed working together to rake leaves and create big leaf piles, which has been a fun way to bond and collaborate. We've also been playing group games using our language cards, helping everyone practice their language skills while fostering teamwork.



We can't wait to see you all at conferences next week! It's been a wonderful season of growth and connection!

Children's House 2

It's fall and with that comes the big work of raking up the leaves from our beautiful trees and than tossing them up and letting them fall.



As we get into colder weather and weather that changes from day to day and hour by hour I have some suggestions to help your child dress in layers. It's really hard for us to keep track of everyone's clothes so please remember to label the tag of everything your child brings in or wears in if it's important to get it back.

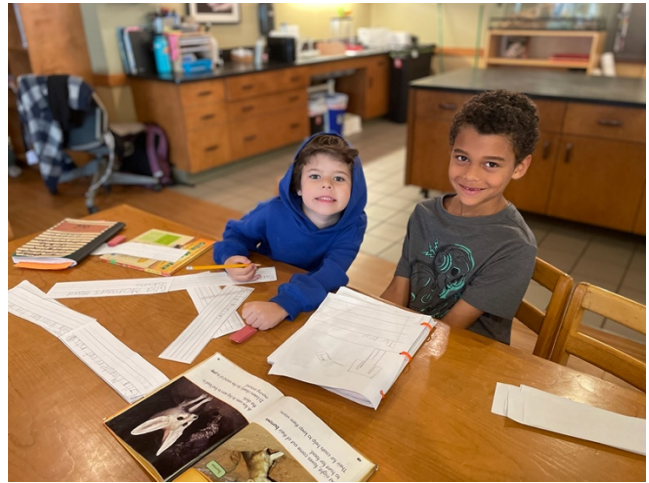
- In their locker: Indoor shoes, sweatshirt, and maybe a sun hat
- In their bathroom drawer: A couple of sets of seasonal clothing
- On their bodies: shoes and layers that are appropriate for the weather (it's really been too warm lately for warm hats, mittens, and winter jackets, but that will change). A thick sweatshirt or light jacket is perfect for our current weather and shoes they can play in.

Lower Elementary Garden

October quickly came and went in Garden! Children have been busy with all sorts of lessons and work throughout the environment. There have been discoveries about the function and parts of a leaf, explorations into addition and subtraction with different math materials, publications of original stories and comics, illustrations and labels of different nouns found in the classroom, and an explosion of research on topics ranging from animals to berries and dinosaurs.



As a class, we have been talking a lot about freedom and responsibility both in the classroom and on the recess field. Children are encouraged to reflect on their choices and are given support to find work that is balanced, interesting, and challenging in order to grow their brains. This is big work for the lower elementary child.



This month, we read a book in the Jasmine Toguchi series called *Drummer Girl* by Debbi Michiko Florence. Jasmine is a young determined Japanese-American girl who learns how to play the Taiko drum for her school's talent show. We are now reading *James and the Giant Peach* by Roald Dahl. Children are laughing out loud to Dahl's clever writing about a young boy's adventure with some peculiar arthropodic friends! Ask your child what their favorite character is or what kinds of antics the crew has gotten into so far.



Lower Elementary Pond

One of the classroom traditions we've been building in Pond is taking time for gratitude at the end of the week. At the beginning of the year these compliments and thank yous tend to center around how great the adults are, which certainly feels nice at the end of the week! Over the past couple weeks the students have continued to offer gratitude for the classroom adults, but something that gladdens my heart even more has also started to take hold: the children are turning these compliments and thank yous towards each other. These moments where children take



time to recognize and lift up each other help to weave together the classroom community, and are part of what makes *me* so grateful to be working with your children every day.



Upper Elementary Marsh



October in Marsh has included lots of language work. Children are exploring sounds (phonemes), letters (graphemes), and meanings (morphemes). Syllables, root words, prefixes and suffixes - all these are included in our spelling and vocabulary work this month. In addition to language, children also have continued to explore many other subjects, including the three branches of our government, triangles, robots and coding, and cross-stitch. Some children presented at Cornerstone Cafe, others completed baking projects, and many learned how to wax seal letters to send home beautiful end of the month reflections to their families. We are almost finished with *Out of My Mind* by Sharon Draper and looking forward to book clubs starting next month. Social dynamics are active and have led us to lessons about keeping problems small (as opposed to growing them) and the difference between joking and teasing. We are excited to share all our work at conferences soon!



Upper Elementary Forest

Our days continue to be filled with *lots* of learning and growth! Forest children are developing their self-awareness of time, others, and themselves as a part of a larger community. This social and emotional development can't be neatly plotted on a graph. It is often a 'messy' trajectory of steps forward, followed by regressions, and then *big leaps* ahead! The same process happens with academic learning.



The Montessori Elementary Curriculum is known as “Cosmic Education” because your children are presented with all of the ‘keys’ (foundational concepts) to unlock and build their understanding in all areas of learning.

This is also why Montessori education during the Elementary years is such an act of ‘faith’ on the part of parents. ‘Authentic’ learning is a rather chaotic process. Your child is developing their internal organization and understanding of numbers, words, the Earth, the Universe, human behavior and social organization, history, and everything else that makes up the complexities of existence.

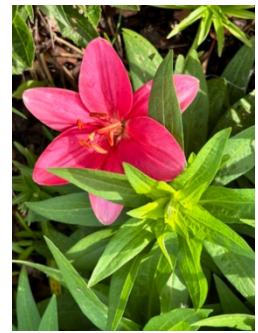


1611 Ames Ave Spotlight



This month we are recognizing the behind the scenes work of Chris Bewell, Director of Business Operations for CMES. I once met some former coworkers of Chris' and they remarked, "you're Chris' boss!" It took me a minute to realize they were talking about Chris Bewell. If there's anyone who I consider an equal partner in the administration of Cornerstone, it's Chris. She has been here since 2011, the very beginning of CMES, working as the Startup Coordinator. Chris does all the persnickety things that benefit from her tremendous eye for detail: she coordinates transportation, orders meals and milk, manages Department of Education relationships, orders materials, and most of all, believes that children are the future.

Chris is an East Sider through and through. She attended Hamline University and then taught at Monroe and Humboldt Junior/Senior High Schools, before working in the fashion and printing businesses. She came back to education in 2001, supporting the startup and administration of public charter schools. Chris knows and loves the families at Cornerstone deeply, even if these days she mostly works from home. She talks about being a Montessorian by proxy: "I see Montessori philosophy at work in everyone's lives – staff and children – as we all grow in understanding freedoms and responsibilities, grace and courtesy, becoming active seekers of knowledge." Despite no formal Montessori training, Chris lives out what we do in her very being.



Outside of school, Chris grows a beautiful garden, is a master knitter, and enjoys music and theater. It is a true pleasure to work with her and I hope you all can say thank you the next time you see her; Chris literally keeps the school running!

From the CMES Board of Directors

Participating in the Cornerstone Montessori Elementary School Board of Directors is a great way to support your child's teachers, classroom, and community at CMES! The CMES Board draws on the experience and expertise of its members, which include parents/guardians, community (anyone who is not a parent/guardian or employed at 1611 Ames Ave), and licensed teachers employed at CMES to add to the discussion of supporting CMES as a whole school entity. Currently, we have an opening for a Parent Member and a Community Member. As a Board member, your main work would include:

- Attending monthly Board meetings on the third Tuesday of each month, wherein we review CMES financials and operations (approximately 1.5-2 hours a month).
- Serving on one of the Board Committees, which include: Governance, Finance, Advancement, & Equity. Or serving on a Task Force, which currently is studying marketing. These committees and task forces help with specific aspects of long-term school planning (time commitment varies, but typically 2-5 hours a month).
- Supporting our Head of School and staff with specific policies and procedures, attending events, and/or advocating for needs.
- Having a voice in discussing and formulating long term plans for CMES. Each year, the Board sets aside a 3-4 hour retreat time to discuss our goals for the year, which is generally guided by our Strategic Plan.

As a bonus, being on the Board helps the entire community by having more people aware, knowledgeable, and participating in the inner workings of a small, public charter school like Cornerstone. If you or someone you know is interested in serving on the CMES Board or a Board Committee (no need to be a Board member in order to serve on a committee!), please contact Alyssa or CMES Board Chair, Julaine Roffers-Agarwal, at julaineroffersagarwal@cornerstone-elementary.org.

From the Montessori Center of Minnesota

Check out these upcoming learning opportunities at MCM!

AMI First Plane (0-6) Orientation Course

MCM's next AMI First Plane (0-6) Orientation Course kicks off on November 11. This Course is perfect for parents and caregivers whose children are enrolled in early childhood Montessori programs. You will gain an understanding of key Montessori principles of early childhood development. Learn how you can integrate Montessori principles at home and support your child's natural curiosity and love for learning.

MCM offers need-based tuition assistance. Learn more about the course and available financial resources at montessoricentermn.org/orientation

Freedom and the Construction of Self-Discipline: From Theory to Practice for 0-3 Practitioners

On January 25, MCM will host Freedom and the Construction of Self-Discipline: From Theory to Practice for 0-3 Practitioners. Facilitated by Sharlyn Smith, this full-day workshop welcomes parents, caregivers and educators. We will explore what Dr. Maria Montessori meant by the terms freedom, liberty, license, limits, responsibility, and discipline – and how to put these ideas into practice with babies and toddlers. Learn how to prepare the environment to support the development of the will and self-discipline.

Learn more and register at montessoricentermn.org/workshops

AMI Talks: Montessori and Music as Healing Instruments for Children with Trauma

Listen to the newest AMI Talk about Montessori and Music as Healing Instruments for Children with Trauma, where MCM's Interim Executive Director and Co-Director of Pedagogy and Primary (3-6) Training Liza Davis discusses how supportive environments can mitigate trauma's impact on brain development. Liza's presentation is followed by Susan Shea who speaks on the healing power of music when working with children with trauma.

You can access the podcast here:

➔ Apple Podcasts: <https://lnkd.in/dQrVD9Bx>

➔ Spotify: <https://lnkd.in/dNFeENPy>

➔ Soundcloud: https://lnkd.in/dpe_zzrM