



CORNERSTONE MONTESSORI SCHOOL
&
CORNERSTONE MONTESSORI ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

2026-2027
Program Guide

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St. Paul, MN 55106
651-774-5000

www.montessoricentermn.org or www.cornerstone-elementary.org

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Please see Cornerstone Policy Handbook for school policies and procedures.

INTRODUCTION

Dear Families,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the 2026-7 school year at Cornerstone Montessori School (CMS) and Cornerstone Montessori Elementary School (CMES)!

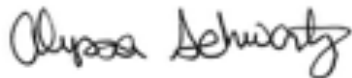
This program handbook is intended to provide important background to your child's experience. An accompanying policy and procedures handbook contains the daily guidelines for our operations.

We believe that your child's education is a partnership and we ask each family to commit to communicating with Cornerstone to best support your child. All families should be familiar with Cornerstone programs and policies, as outlined in the handbooks, and commit to following them.

We likewise commit to sharing with you your child's progress, both academically and socially, and providing a safe and supportive environment for your child to grow.

Please do not hesitate to call or email if you have any questions about the content of this book or any aspect of your child's experience at Cornerstone.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alyssa Schwartz". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Alyssa Schwartz
Head of School

STAFF DIRECTORY

Call 651.774.5000 to contact CMS, CMES, or an individual staff member

Administration

Head of School	Alyssa Schwartz (she/her)
Director of Business Operations, CMES	Chris Bewell (she/her)
Administrative Assistant, CMS	Emma Galvez (she/her)
Elementary Program Manager	Lindsay Ruble (she/her)
Administrative Assistant	Daylin Galdamez (she/her)

School Operations

Kitchen Manager	Heather Trudeau (she/her)
Cleaning Partner	Corazon Parra (she/her)

Toddler Community (16 – 33 months)

AMI Trained Guide	Laurie Pittman (she/her)
AMI Trained Guide	Margaret Skelly (she/her)
Spanish Speaking Assistant	Katie Castro (she/her)

Children's House 1 (3-6 years;

Kindergarten)

AMI Trained Guide	Claudia Vasquez-Lopez (she/her)
AMI Trained Assistant	Angela Kaufman (she/her)
Classroom Assistant	Melanie Booker (she/her)

Children's House 2 (3-6 years;

Kindergarten)

AMI Trained Guide	Rachel Morris (she/her)
AMI Trained Assistant	Hana Lee (she/her)
Spanish Speaking Assistant	Katte Maldonado (she/her)

Early Childhood Float

After Care Assistant	Madelyn Avila Flores (she/her)
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Kymani Queen (she/her)

School Social Worker (CMS)

Nora Springer (she/her)

Lower Elementary (1-3 grades)

AMI Trained Teacher - Pond	Tom Fendt (they/he)
Teacher Assistant	Noa Strohman (he/him)
AMI Trained Teacher - Garden	Dannika Wright (she/her)
Teacher Assistant	Hannah Gruber (she/her)

Upper Elementary (4-6 grades)

Classroom Teacher - Forest	Libby Bird (she/her)
Teacher Assistant	Tera Iverson (she/her)
AMI Trained Teacher - Marsh	Jess Goff (she/her)
Teacher Assistant	Machin McHargue (she/her)

CMES Specialists and Paraprofessionals

English Language Learners Teacher	Cynthia Crooks (she/her)
Literacy Specialist	Megan Riemer (she/her)
Math Specialist	Jessy Fabel (she/her)
Special Education Teacher	Emma Cornwell (she/her)
Special Education Teacher	Mariana Cruz Sanchez (she/her)

Special Education Teacher
Special Education Teacher
School Social Worker
Special Education Coordinator
Montessori Mentor
Paraprofessional
Paraprofessional
Paraprofessional
Paraprofessional
Paraprofessional
Paraprofessional
Paraprofessional
Paraprofessional
Paraprofessional
Paraprofessional
Paraprofessional

Monica Olson (they/she)
Suzi Splinter (she/her)
EG Saathoff (they/them)
Tricia Domally (she/her)
Sara Wade (she/her)
Norma Abbott (she/her)
George Carr (he/they)
Sophia Devi (she/her)
Junie Elliott (he/him)
Sulmy Galdamez (she/her)
Amonni Harris (she/her)
Jasmine Jones (she/her)
Addison Luhman-Flores (she/her)
Isabel Mesa (she/her)
Estefani Paz Garcia (she/her)
June Remiker (she/her)
Mikayla Wintheiser (she/her)

ADMINISTRATION

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Cornerstone Montessori School (Private Early Childhood Program)

The Board of Trustees for the Montessori Center of Minnesota serves as an umbrella board for the Montessori Center of Minnesota, Cornerstone Montessori School, Community Outreach, and the International Montessori Museum. This board was incorporated in 1973 and is comprised of eleven members who meet six times a year and serve three-year terms. Kelsey Echols is the President of the Board.

Cornerstone Montessori Elementary School (Public Charter)

The Board for Cornerstone Montessori Elementary School is the governing entity for our state and federally funded public school program. Meetings are held the third Tuesday of each month; meetings are announced on the school website and open to the public. A book containing board meeting minutes is available in the office. Board members include teachers, parents, and community members. The Head of School is a non-voting member of the board.

The Cornerstone Montessori School Board members:

Board Chair/Treasurer — Julaine Roffers-Agarwal	Trustee — Jenna Oakley
Vice Chair — Rachel Droogsma	Trustee — Megan Riemer
Secretary — Tom Fendt	Trustee — Gina Rippl
Trustee — Jessica Hietala	Ex Officio — Alyssa Schwartz (non-voting)

STAFF

Guides in the Cornerstone early childhood program are Montessori trained under the auspices of the Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) and are teacher-qualified per the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF). All teachers and guides at Cornerstone Elementary are trained and certified under the auspices of AMI and have a MN State Teaching License or a waiver approved by the Minnesota Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board.

OVERVIEW

Cornerstone Montessori School (private early childhood program) and Cornerstone Montessori Elementary School (public charter school) are individual schools, which partner together with a united mission to provide a quality, authentic Montessori education to an ethnically and economically diverse population. Even though the private school and the public charter elementary school maintain separate governance and financial systems, both organizations work to provide a seamless educational experience to the children and families at Cornerstone. The schools partner with families to achieve this goal.

Cornerstone Montessori School and Cornerstone Montessori Elementary School are fully accredited AMI Montessori programs for children ages 16 months to 12 years. Cornerstone Montessori School has a 4-star rating with Parent Aware.

MISSIONS

Cornerstone Montessori School (Private Early Childhood Program)

Cornerstone Montessori School seeks to create a broad community of multicultural and economically diverse families who share the mission to nurture the child's natural desire to learn and grow through quality Montessori environments, leading to a harmonious and peaceful world.

Cornerstone Montessori Elementary School (Public Charter School Program)

Cornerstone Montessori Elementary School supports 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.

The vision of Cornerstone Montessori Elementary School 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.

SCHOOL HISTORY

Cornerstone Montessori School opened in September 2008, offering Montessori environments for children ages 16 months through 5 years. As a program of the Montessori Training Center of Minnesota, a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization, Cornerstone was founded largely due to generous donations from area foundations.

In January of 2011, Cornerstone Montessori Elementary School was recognized as a Minnesota Charter School authorized by Volunteers of America. Cornerstone opened in fall of 2011 serving children in grades K-2. In the fall of 2012, CMES continued to grow, serving children in grades K-3. In 2013, CMES welcomed its first class of upper elementary children and now serves children in grades K-6 in six classrooms (two Children's House classrooms include the Kindergarteners, and four elementary classrooms include 1st-6th grades). Cornerstone Montessori Elementary School was founded due to a recognized need for an authentic, AMI Montessori elementary program on St. Paul's East Side. The charter application and start-up of the school was largely driven by work from members of the founding board and founding team, which included committed members of the community, parents, and Montessori teachers and trainers. CMES is now authorized by the University of St. Thomas.

THE MONTESSORI APPROACH

Founded in 1907 by Dr. Maria Montessori (1870-1952), Montessori pedagogy educates children for life. Children have the freedom to explore and to develop their potential as they work with didactic materials, either independently or in groups, in a prepared environment. The Montessori method is grounded in the concept of respect—for self, others, and the environment. The Montessori rooms are prepared to meet the developmental needs of the age-span served within the environment.

The materials and furniture are designed for the child's physical needs (size and proportion) and psychological needs (areas of interest or skill development). Each prepared environment includes a full-range of Montessori materials, a trained Montessori guide, and a trained or highly qualified assistant. The materials are designed to assist growth in practical life, sensorial, mathematics, language arts, music, art, history, geography and the sciences. The work the child performs with the materials is intended to develop mental and manual dexterity. While working with the materials, the child develops concentration, self-confidence, respect, an understanding of order, and a joy of learning, all in the context of community.

We believe that the child and their needs are the central and commanding focus of the learning process. It is the role of the guides to observe, to know, to inspire, and to advocate for the child as they proceed through the stages of development.

We see in each child the future of our society, of our nation, and of our planet. The child in the process of fundamental development has unlimited possibilities and the future rests on our ability to cultivate and nurture these potentials.

We believe that the learning process is governed by certain basic human tendencies or needs:

- The need to communicate, to use language

- The tendency for order: the need to organize, classify, and interpret reality

- The need for independence and activity, the drive to work constructively and purposefully

- The need for social relationships

In a Montessori school, the outdoor environment is considered an extension of the indoor environment. While there is a scheduled time for large motor activities that encourage collaborative group play and allow children to gain an understanding of the rules and movements associated with a variety of sports, the space is not only used during recess. The outdoor environment is also a “work space” that can be used during the Montessori work-cycle. Throughout the day and with the accompaniment of an adult, children may work outside with materials, garden, or simply explore the natural landscape of our outdoor space. We also offer the children indoor movement opportunities, and may partner with our neighboring Boys and Girls Club for the use of their gym to support the children in refining their large motor skills, either when weather prohibits us from going outside, or to meet physical education standards.

The Montessori guide facilitates activities within the environment while modeling respectful behavior. The guide is not the center of the learning process but rather, with respect for each child's unique nature and ability to make choices for him or herself, and with the goal of all children reaching their full potential, the guide nurtures academic and social/emotional development by

giving key presentations to connect the children with materials to meet their needs and current interests. Individual and group lessons are varied and designed to meet each child's learning style and pace. The guide observes the children often and plans lessons based on their observations of the needs and interests of an individual or group.

Within the multiage community, older children often serve as teachers and mentors for the younger children. These children share their experiences by helping others. This process not only helps create a sense of community and interdependence, but also reinforces previous learning for the older children. Self-direction encourages trust, acceptance, and non-competitiveness. The materials, the guide, and the community of children come together to assist every child in developing a strong self-image and sense of self-esteem, which is critical when building a love of learning and exploration to last a lifetime.

TODDLER COMMUNITY (AGES 16 TO 32 MONTHS)

PHILOSOPHY

When young children are stable walkers, they are ready to join the Toddler Community, which consists of 12 toddlers, two overlapping AMI Montessori trained guides, and one Spanish speaking assistant. The program is an all-day Montessori program with the option for children to attend half days. Breakfast/morning snack, lunch, and an afternoon snack are served. For children who attend the full School Day program, there will be the opportunity to nap.

Toddlers are curious, active learners who use their senses to gain information about the world around them. A beautiful, safe and orderly environment has been specially prepared to meet the young child's need to move freely, to explore, to make discoveries, to develop language skills and to grow in independence. The children are drawn to the attractive materials equipped with small tools that provide successful experiences. They often exclaim, "I did it myself!" which expresses their joy and sense of accomplishment.

The Toddler Community is divided into several areas in which the children move freely throughout the day. Practical Life activities include sweeping the floor, dusting, caring for plants, shoveling, etc. The child is familiar with these activities from home and enjoys taking care of the environment. Performing these activities develops a strong sense of order, self-confidence, concentration, and helps to promote the child's need for independence.

The children also have opportunities to care for themselves as they learn to dress and undress themselves. In the beginning, loose fitting, easy on and off clothes that are free of zippers, snaps, and buttons, help the children develop their ability to do it themselves. Each child has a locker in the mudroom to store extra clothes, and there is additional storage in the bathroom. Children are often observed helping one another put on a sock or slipper as they work together to get dressed.

Learning to use the toilet independently is another important part of the child's independence. Many children develop an interest through observing other children. When children are showing signs of readiness, we work closely with the child and family to support the child with a stress-free approach. By respecting each child's individual pace of development, toilet learning happens in a very natural way.

Developing spoken language and learning how to communicate with others is another important part of the toddler's development. At this age, the child has a natural burst in language. We support this through many different language materials and activities that encourage learning vocabulary and participating in conversations. Every day the children enjoy poems, books, songs and finger plays together. The Toddler Community Assistant will speak to the children in her native language of Spanish providing the children with a bilingual learning environment.

There are many ways that the child is provided opportunities to develop their fine motor and large motor skills. Indoors, there are fine motor activities including puzzles, stringing beads, using a scissors, playing musical instruments, etc. Children also develop their fine motor skills through many art activities such as painting at the easel or with watercolors, working with clay, gluing, etc.

Children have opportunities each day to spend time outdoors to enjoy a variety of large motor activities such as riding tricycles, playing with balls, walking on a balance beam, enjoying time in the sandbox, etc. When weather does not permit outdoor play, children have large motor time indoors.

It is a goal of the staff at Cornerstone to develop partnerships with the families and caregivers as we develop a strong sense of community. Maria Montessori talked about the “secret of childhood” – that within each child is a unique and special plan for each child’s potential and development. As we work together, we will support and respect each child’s special path as he or she blossoms and flourishes during these important early years of development.

SAMPLE DAILY SCHEDULE

Time	Activity	Description
7:45-8:30 a.m.	Before Care	Children registered in Before Care program are greeted as they arrive, hang their coats in mudroom, put on indoor shoes, use the bathroom, eat breakfast, clean their dishes, and help in the environment preparation (folding napkins, wetting sponges, etc.).
8:30-8:45 a.m.	Arrival	Children arrive and are welcomed to join in the morning’s activities.
8:45–10:45 a.m.	Montessori Work Cycle	The children have an independent work period, during which they complete primarily individual, independent work and some small, collaborative group work. This involves working with Montessori materials, practical life activities (care of self and care of the environment), preparing food, eating family-style breakfast, working with the art, music, eye-hand coordination, and language materials. The children will be offered the opportunity to use the bathroom throughout the morning.
10:45–11:00 a.m.	Transition	The children get ready to go outdoors or to the multi-purpose room for large motor movement activities.
11:00–11:30 a.m.	Recess	Time together outside or in the multi-purpose room. Outdoor activities will include gardening, practical life activities (sweeping, weeding, shoveling, etc.), large motor activities (riding tricycles, walking on the balance beam, jumping, etc.), playing in the sandbox, playing ball, enjoying nature, etc. Indoor recess activities will include large motor games, obstacle courses, ball games, etc.

11:30–11:40 a.m.	Transition	Return to the Toddler Community, wash hands, remove outerwear, change into indoor shoes. Some children will help set the table for lunch, and others will select independent work.
11:40–11:45 a.m.	Collective	Children are invited to sing songs and do finger plays before having lunch.
11:45–12:15 p.m.	Lunch	Catered nutritious family-style lunch.
12:15–12:30 p.m.	Transition/ Dismissal	Children get ready for nap or Half Day dismissal.
12:30–2:45 p.m.	Nap/Rest Time	Children sleep with blankets brought from home on individual cots. Sheets and blankets are washed regularly.
2:45–3:00 p.m.	Transition	Children begin to awaken, go to the bathroom, and help to set the table for the afternoon snack. Some children sleep longer and join the group as they awaken.
3:00–3:30 p.m.	Afternoon Snack	Family-style afternoon snack is served. Children clean up following snack.
3:30–3:45 p.m.	Extended Day Dismissal	Dismissal of children in Extended Day program.
3:45–5:15 p.m.	After Care	Children registered for After Care may help with practical life activities such as laundry, washing dishes and cleaning the environment. Some will choose to begin another work cycle of individual work. Time will also be spent outdoors. Children are dismissed as parents arrive.

INDEPENDENCE IN TOILETING

Participating in toilet-related activities is an integral aspect of the daily routine within the Toddler Community. Instead of being a goal-driven activity, it serves as an opportunity for children to practice and acquire various skills associated with self-care. These skills include tasks such as pushing down and pulling up their pants, using the toilet, dressing and undressing, as well as proper handwashing. Over time, each child develops an association between their bodily sensations and the need to use the toilet, eventually learning to use it at the appropriate moments. This progression is a gradual one, with some children becoming independent sooner than others.

Helping the children to use the toilet is one way that we assist them in gaining independence. There is no pressure whatsoever for children to use the toilet and each child's individual timetable for comfort with toileting is respected. The children are naturally curious and are often very interested in watching one another use the toddler-sized toilet and the potty chairs.

At school we take the following steps to support children in developing toileting independence:

1. Throughout the day, children are invited to utilize the toilet on multiple occasions: upon their arrival, following breakfast, prior to outdoor activities, after lunch, before naptime, after naptime, and before departure. Additionally, they are guided to the bathroom when they have a bowel movement or when they are wet. A supervising adult is always present to provide hands-on assistance or oversee these bathroom visits.
2. For children who have not yet experienced life without diapers, we initiate the transition by introducing cloth diapers. These cloth diapers allow the child to perceive dampness and subsequently be changed into a dry diaper. During any diaper change, the child sits on a potty chair, is cleaned, and then helped into a dry diaper. Shortly, your child will begin wearing cotton underwear for progressively extended periods of time.
3. Children who possess some level of awareness about toileting will shift to using cotton underwear right away. During naptime and outdoor activities, they might still wear cloth diapers if necessary.
4. When a child is invited to use the bathroom, they collaborate with an adult until they exhibit the capacity to independently push down their underwear, sit on the toilet, manage personal hygiene, pull their clothing back up, and subsequently wash their hands. The use of disposable diapers may be necessary if the child is unwell, experiencing diarrhea, undergoing skin care for diaper rash, or heading home.
5. We kindly request that your child wears cotton underwear over a disposable diaper each day they attend school. This practice simplifies bathroom visits upon arrival: removing the disposable diaper is all that is needed, allowing them to promptly engage in their school activities.

We encourage the use of cotton pants because this natural fiber gives children the opportunity to gain information about how their bodies work. Disposable diapers do exactly what their advertising says - they absorb the moisture so that the child does not feel wet. When children wear cotton pants they can feel the sensations of elimination. After the child becomes aware of the sensation, it then becomes a matter of timing – feeling the sensation, getting to the toilet, pulling the pants down, etc.

More than perhaps any other skill, toilet learning happens the most effectively when patterns are mirrored between school and home. Transitioning your child from diapers to using the toilet can be a smooth and positive experience for both your child and the entire family, or it can be a difficult one! Here are some helpful tips to make this process easier and more enjoyable for everyone involved:

1. Change diapers standing up: Once your child is able to stand, consider changing their diapers in the standing position. Use descriptive language to explain each step and label the items you use, such as diapers, wet wipes, the trash can and more. Involve your child in the process by encouraging their participation, like asking them to hold the diaper or to help you open the velcro tabs (until they can do it by themselves).
2. Change diapers in the bathroom: Using the toilet, as well as other activities like brushing teeth and taking a bath, are related to a specific place in our home, the bathroom. Encourage your child to sit on the potty as part of the routine, without any pressure for results. This will help them associate the bathroom with the natural process of using the toilet.

3. Avoid power struggles: Instead of using coercion, punishments or rewards, lead by example and maintain a **consistent routine for diapers changing**. Demonstrate your own positive attitude towards using the bathroom and express how good it feels to listen to your body's needs. For instance, you can say, "I need to use the bathroom because my body feels much better afterward," "I like the smell of the hand soap in my hands after I use the toilet," and "I use the toilet as soon as I get up every morning."
4. Familiarize your child with different bathroom environments: When you're out and about at places like family or friends' houses or the grocery store, maintain the same diaper changing routine, language and matter of fact attitude. You may say: "It is time to change your diaper, let's find the bathroom!" Involve your child in the process by asking them to hold items like wet wipes and explore the new surroundings together.
5. Encourage choice in dressing: Allow your child to make decisions about their clothing. Opt for easy-to-put-on and take-off clothes and offer simple choices like, "Do you want the green or blue shirt?" or "You can take off one sock, and I'll help you with the other one." By involving them in the dressing process, they will gain confidence and independence.
6. Trust the process at school: When your child is at school, trust that the toileting learning process will naturally occur through repetition and consistency. The routine of using the bathroom multiple times a day will help them learn to use the toilet successfully, just as every child eventually does.

By implementing these strategies and keeping a positive attitude, you can create a supportive environment for your child's toileting learning journey. Remember that patience and encouragement are important, and that with time and practice, your child will successfully transition to using the toilet independently.

PRIMARY/CHILDREN'S HOUSE (AGES 33 MONTHS TO 6 YEARS)

PHILOSOPHY

The Primary environment is also referred to as the Children's House. It is a specially prepared environment for children from the ages of 33 months to six years. Cornerstone's Children's House environments will enroll 30 children when at full capacity. Each environment has an AMI trained guide (teacher) along with two assistants, one of whom speaks Spanish with the children.

This program is an all-day program with the option of children staying for a partial day. Breakfast is served to early arrivals and offered to all children when they arrive in the morning. We offer a nutritious catered lunch, which the children enjoy as a community. Snack is available daily in the afternoon. For much of the children's day they may choose work within the environment. There is also group time for music, stories, movement, and games. Children have time to play outside or in a large indoor space at least once a day.

Children are free to choose work from the beautiful and well-defined areas of the environment. The adults in the environment serve as guides who show the children how to use the concrete materials. Working with the materials not only helps develop coordination, concentration, independence, and a sense of order; it also helps the child become more disciplined and accomplished. Children in a Montessori environment usually have healthy self-esteem because they are helped to do things themselves. The children have ownership of the environment and take good care of it, returning materials with care.

The Children's House environment unifies the social, physical, and intellectual functioning of the child. We provide children with an early and general foundation that includes a positive attitude toward school, inner security, a sense of order, pride in the environment, curiosity, concentration, self-discipline, and a sense of responsibility for the self and for the group. Through interacting with the Montessori environment, the child constructs him or herself in a positive manner. This benefits the child in school and in life.

Instruction occurs one-on-one and in small groups conducted at the child's pace. Montessori materials are organized in a logical, sequential nature, providing a structure that guides a child's discovery. A series of presentations, activities, and developmentally appropriate materials are designed to enable the child to master specific skills. Each series of presentations and materials is grouped by broader content areas that complement and interrelate with one another.

The Children's House environment is divided into four distinct areas:

Practical life: among other life skills, children learn how to wash, cook, sweep, plant, and sew.

Sensorial: children learn through sight, touch, sound, taste, and smell using binomial cubes, geometric shapes, constructive triangles, tasting bottles, and other materials that enable the child to classify, clarify, and comprehend the world.

Language: children are introduced to nomenclature and vocabulary through spoken language games. They are also introduced to the 26 letters of the English alphabet and their associated sounds. With the help of a movable alphabet, children are able to write words, sentences, and stories. Reading quickly follows with materials that help explore grammar and the structure of language.

Math: children are taken from the concrete to the abstract through manipulation, experimentation, and invention by using math materials.

SAMPLE DAILY SCHEDULE

Time	Activity	Description
7:45–8:30 a.m.	Before Care	Children registered in the Before Care program are greeted as they arrive in their Children’s House, put on indoor shoes, use the bathroom, and eat breakfast. After eating breakfast they might help in the environment preparation (folding napkins, wetting sponges, etc.) or choose work.
8:30–8:45 a.m.	Arrival	Children arrive and are welcomed to join in the morning’s activities.
8:45–11:45 a.m.	Montessori Work Cycle	The children have an independent work cycle, in which they primarily do individual, independent work and some small, collaborative group work. This involves working with Montessori materials, practical life activities (care of self and care of the environment), preparing food, eating snack with a friend, working with the art, music, eye-hand coordination, and language materials.
11:45 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.	Lunch, Clean Up, Transition to Recess/Nap/Dismissal	Catered nutritious family-style lunch. Children are responsible for cleaning up after themselves. Children transition to recess, nap, or dismissal, depending on enrollment and time of year.
12:15–1:00 p.m.	Outside Time	Time together outside or in the room if required due to weather. Outdoor activities include gardening, practical life activities (sweeping, weeding, shoveling), large motor activities (riding scooters, hopping, jumping), playing in the sandbox, shooting basketball hoops, feeding the birds, enjoying nature, etc. Indoor activities include large motor games, obstacle courses, ball and board games, etc.
1:00–3:00 p.m.	Afternoon Work Cycle	Children participate in second Montessori work-cycle.
3:00–3:30 p.m.	Transition/Snack	Children prepare room for the next day, play outside, eat snack, and get ready to go home.
3:30–3:45 p.m.	Extended Day Dismissal	Dismissal of children in Extended Day program.

3:45-5:15 p.m.	After Care Program	Children registered for After Care may help with practical life activities such as laundry, washing dishes and cleaning the environment. Some will choose to begin another work cycle of individual work. Time will also be spent outdoors. Children are dismissed as parents arrive.
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TOILETING POLICY

Children in the Children's House must be able to use the toilet independently, including during naps. These environments are not licensed to support children in diapers or pull-ups. Each environment is equipped with a toilet and urinal which children have access to throughout the day. If a child is having challenges or experiencing regression, the child's parents and guides are encouraged to speak directly to develop a management plan to best assist the child.

ELEMENTARY (AGES 6–12)

PHILOSOPHY

From age six through age twelve—the elementary school years—the child is driven by a natural curiosity and tendency to explore the expansive interconnectedness within and across disciplines such as the arts, math, and social studies. Dr. Montessori used the term “cosmic education” to refer to this stage of education best fitting this period of child development. The Great Lessons are at the center of Montessori elementary education. These Lessons are stories that explore the beginnings of the universe, the formation of the stars and planets, the progress of plant and animal life, the arrival of humans and language, and the origins of mathematics, geometry, and the sciences. From these stories the child develops sensitivity to the way things live, to the interdependence of life, and to the fundamental needs of human beings. Timelines, charts, and research cards of human needs help the child in independent study and inspire more research in geology, sciences, biology, geography, and history. Montessori elementary children use their imagination and reasoning minds to explore all the parts of the universe. They may be engaged in a variety of learning activities at the same time.

At the center of the Montessori elementary classroom is the well-trained Montessori teacher. This professional is an “enlightened generalist” with knowledge deep enough to know details that add to the Great Lessons and connect the details into a big picture across the disciplines. The teacher’s role is to be the storyteller of our history and our world, as we understand it, to inspire the children and then to guide them in acquiring the skills to pursue their interests and to explore the relationships among the different subject matters. This teacher is also trained in areas of child development. Because the Montessori child spends three years in the same classroom environment, the elementary teacher can be keenly tuned in to the unique personality of each child. This sensitivity permits the teacher to guide each child into areas of natural interest. The teacher or guide is in communication with the child and the family to help the child maximize their educational opportunities.

Much of the work of the elementary child is collaborative. The child learns in partnership with others through small group lessons and projects. At different times, each child is both a teacher and a learner. Because each child spends three years in the same classroom environment, the children have the freedom to explore subject areas as they become interested in them. The teachers, through the use of daily observation notes, lesson planning, and assessments, track each child’s use of materials and progress within a subject matter. The teacher uses the child’s interest to guide them to an exploration of all subject areas. The subjects that are covered in the Montessori classroom include mathematics, geometry, language, geography, science, art, music and history.

Because the classroom cannot – and should not – always answer all of the child’s questions, the elementary child is involved in “going out” to explore beyond the classroom environment. The going out of the Montessori classroom is based on individual or small group interest in extensions of study. The Cornerstone Montessori Elementary School children will extend the classroom into the city by arranging a visit to a museum, library, factory, nature reserve, or other site that can provide them with information that will enhance their studies. Going out usually involves a small group of children with a trained staff person. Whole classes may also take field trips to learn more about the environment and city in which they live.

Living in the world for the elementary child also involves working actively to make it a better place. Care of one's environment is built into the Montessori curriculum. In the environment children are responsible for keeping the environment clean, caring for the animals, and providing for the needs of guests. Cornerstone Elementary children will take responsibility for recycling programs in their classroom environments, will help maintain the grounds and the garden, as well as help the school be more energy efficient.

The Montessori curriculum is developed and reviewed by an international committee and not set according to US academic standards. As a consequence, there are elements in the Montessori curriculum, such as finding the cube root of a 9-digit number, that are not part of our state or national standards; also there are elements of our Minnesota state standards, such as the study of simple machines, that are not covered by the basic Montessori curriculum. However, there are specific provisions made in the training of Montessori teachers to ensure that the state standards are met in the Montessori classroom. Cornerstone Elementary staff will continually evaluate state standards and Montessori curriculum to ensure that children who graduate from a level (at Kindergarten, third and sixth grades) have met the state required standards.

One of the guiding principles of Montessori education is the development of the whole person, with particular emphasis on the development of reason and the will, along with a lifelong love of learning. For this reason, children in a Montessori environment are expected to work at their own pace and have a major role in setting their own work schedule rather than just doing specific assignments given by the teacher. This vast amount of freedom given to the children is tempered by three very important limits: the public school curriculum, the daily work journal used by each child to track their progress, and frequent individual meetings between the child and the teacher. The trained Montessori teacher is expected to help each child progress through the state public school curriculum and this is available in the classroom for the children to refer to in planning their studies. As part of each child's assessment (including standardized assessments, Montessori records, the child's work journal, and Montessori teacher's observation notes) the Montessori teacher reviews with the child where the child is at in terms of development within the Montessori curriculum and state standards and sets goals with the child for further development. There is also a consideration given to the developmental level of the child; that is, more of the responsibility for covering the state curriculum falls on the teacher's shoulders in the early grades with the child taking more direct responsibility as they mature.

SAMPLE DAILY SCHEDULE

Time	Activity	Description
7:45–8:30 a.m.	Before Care	Children registered in the Before School program are greeted as they arrive, put on indoor shoes, use the bathroom, and eat breakfast. Children play outside, play board games, and engage in academic work.
8:30-8:45	Arrival	Children arrive and are welcomed to join in the morning's activities. Breakfast is served until 9:00.

8:45–11:45 a.m.	Montessori Work-Cycle	The children have an independent work cycle, in which they do primarily small, collaborative group work and some individual work. This involves working with Montessori materials, working with the art, music, eye-hand coordination, geometry, history, and language materials. Breakfast is offered until 9:00 a.m.
11:45 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.	Lunch & Lunch Clean Up; Outdoor/Large Motor Time	Children are offered a nutritious, catered lunch and clean up afterwards. Time together outside includes gardening, practical life activities (sweeping, weeding, shoveling), large motor activities (throwing and kicking balls, hopping, jumping), feeding the birds, enjoying nature large motor games, obstacle courses, ball and board games, creative play, etc.
1:30–3:30 p.m.	Afternoon Work Cycle	Children complete second Montessori work cycle.
3:30-3:45 p.m.	Dismissal	Children are taken to buses or are dismissed to a parent/guardian.

PROGRAMS

HALF DAY & EXTENDED DAY PROGRAMS

Cornerstone Montessori School (Private Early Childhood Program)

CMS offers Half Day (8:45–12:30) and Extended Day (8:45–3:30) options at both the Toddler and Children’s House levels. Children in either program are expected to attend Monday through Friday, 12 months of the year.

*****Please Note:** Before and After Care programs are available based on need. Cornerstone Montessori School guides are honored to spend the day with your child, and we hold the philosophy that children must also have the opportunity to spend adequate time with their families each day.

The Half Day Program includes a Montessori work cycle, lunch, and large motor activity when possible. The Extended Day program allows for a second Montessori work cycle in the afternoon, nap if needed, and an extended time for large motor activities.

Cornerstone Montessori Elementary School

CMES offers a school day program for all children, as well as a before care program from 7:45 to 8:30 a.m. The elementary school day ends each day at 3:30 p.m. Children are expected to attend Monday through Friday, September through early June.

Children in the Kindergarten program may register with CMS for Before/After Care (7:45-8:30 a.m./3:45-5:15 p.m.). All elementary children are eligible to attend the after-care program at the Conway Center. Parents must register their children independently and notify Cornerstone to be added to the bus list.

****Children in CMES must stay until 3:30 p.m. except in rare circumstances for appointments.*

Drop-off for all children is 8:30-8:45 a.m.

FOOD PROGRAMS; LUNCH AND BREAKFAST

Catered lunches and breakfasts are provided for all children of Cornerstone. Seasonal and nutritious, the menu for lunch includes a grain, protein, fruit, and vegetable. Breakfast includes a bagel or cereal, a source of protein, and fruit. Monthly menus are posted for parents to view. (Note that there are occasional unforeseen changes to the menu as decided by the caterer.) Guides/teachers encourage children to try all food as a way of building an understanding of nutrition and open-mindedness. Dairy milk is provided during lunch and breakfast for all children; soy milk or lactose-free dairy milk is available upon request.

Children in CMS receive lunch and breakfast as part of their tuition. Children in Cornerstone Elementary receive lunch and breakfast for free. Families of children enrolled in both schools are expected to submit a Household Income Statement/Application for Educational Benefits to determine their qualification for Free or Reduced Lunch. These forms help Cornerstone fund its meal programs and do not affect whether children receive food.

Menus are distributed mid-month for the following month and families may choose their order at that time. Families may choose regular lunches, vegetarian lunches, or to bring lunch from home. Families may not choose meals on a day-to-day or week-to-week basis.

Families may choose to bring lunch from home. However, catering to food likes and dislikes on a day-to-day basis can promote increasingly narrow options for healthy and nutritious eating in children. **Cornerstone strongly encourages all families to participate in the school lunch program as it helps promote the ideas of community living and life-long healthy attitudes towards enjoyable mealtimes, coming together with each other around a variety of healthy foods from which the children can choose to eat.** If a child does bring a lunch from home, it must include milk and all other nutritional requirements recognized by the USDA (available upon request from the office) and follow the school's no sugar and no nut policies. There will be specific guidelines distributed at the Back to School Fair each year. **Artificial or overly processed foods, such as chips, and foods that do not follow the school's policies, will be kept in the office and sent home with a note at the end of the day. We cannot heat or reheat lunches brought from home.** The food for lunches is ordered based on the families' orders from the menu. If a family does not request lunch in advance, a meal will not be available for the child.

As part of the lunch process, the children help prepare the environment and set the tables. Table manners, such as learning how to properly use utensils, to wipe one's mouth, how to sit at the table, and how to engage in appropriate, pleasant conversation are also encouraged during this experience. After lunch, the children clean the environment.

*****Please note:** if your child has specific food allergies or dietary needs, please let the staff know so that we can arrange for a safe and tasty meal.

FLEXIBLE LEARNING DAYS

In the event of extended school closures due to weather or other circumstances, Cornerstone Montessori Elementary School (K-6th grades) may provide up to five flexible learning days per school year. Flexible learning days will be optional for families and will allow children to continue their education in multidisciplinary ways without synchronous instruction. No technology will be necessary to participate in flexible learning days.

SPANISH

At Cornerstone Montessori School (early childhood program) we introduce conversational Spanish by having a native Spanish speaker in each environment. Young children, between the ages of birth and six, have a sensitivity and unique ability to learn language, including foreign languages. The Montessori guide communicates with the children solely in English while the Spanish-speaking assistant strives to speak to the children only in Spanish. As a result, the children absorb the language and vocabulary of both languages simultaneously. Unlike adults, children have an ability to understand and replicate language—accents and grammar included—without difficulty.

MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

Children thrive in a safe environment that affirms a variety of cultures and languages. In this community, the value of each human being is affirmed and celebrated. It is with great pride that we recognize our children's community and staff as being diverse: racially, socio-economically, linguistically, culturally and geographically. The Montessori curriculum allows children to make discoveries about our differences and similarities as human beings. We seek and welcome cultural diversity to our school community as an expression of the intricate web of life. Through celebrations, discussions, and research and study about the world community, children learn to embrace concepts of cultural diversity and become champions of tolerance in a multicultural, multiracial, multilingual environment. We ask parents to join with us in celebrating the diversity of our community as a strength of our program. Parents are encouraged to connect with each other and to engage with all the members of our community.

FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP

CORNERSTONE COMMITMENTS

At Cornerstone we make the following commitments to best support the development of each child:

Cornerstone is committed to providing a seamless educational experience to children from the age of 16 months through 12 years. The staff, boards, children, and families that make up our community at CMS and CMES, are committed to a shared mission to support the success of each child and to provide an authentic and quality Montessori education to a diverse community of families.

Cornerstone is committed to joyful learning at each stage of development. Education begins at birth and every educational environment at Cornerstone—Toddler Community, Children’s House, and Elementary—are intentionally designed to meet the unique needs of the children in those environments and their particular stage of development. These components work together to create learners who are internally motivated, who love to learn, and who are able to be active members of a community.

Cornerstone is committed to an authentic implementation of the Montessori methodology and environment. All of Cornerstone’s lead teachers have completed or are in the process of completing Montessori training from the Association Montessori Internationale (AMI). We adhere to the Montessori principles of the prepared environment, multi-age classroom environments, beauty, the balance of freedom and discipline, and uninterrupted morning and afternoon work periods of three hours for primary and elementary children and two hours for toddlers.

Cornerstone is committed to being a respectful environment. Cornerstone staff, families, and children will model and cultivate respect (for self, others, materials, and for the environment). Actions and language used on the premises should be respectful at all times. Conflicts will be resolved peacefully and through mediation when necessary.

Cornerstone is committed to partner with caregivers to support each child’s success and growth. Caregivers are a child’s first and most powerful teachers. We know that education takes place both at home and at school. Children will receive the best possible education when their caregivers and their school work together.

Cornerstone is committed to operating on St. Paul’s East Side. Cornerstone’s early childhood program and public charter Montessori Elementary programs are the only Montessori programs with AMI accreditations for families living on St. Paul’s East Side. We have been a member of the community since 2008 and want to continue to be a positive force in the growth and development of the East Side.

Cornerstone is committed to diversity. A Montessori education prepares children for life. In today’s global community, children must learn to live and work with people and ideas drawn from multiple sources, backgrounds, and cultures. Cornerstone actively recruits families from diverse racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds. We warmly welcome families with non-traditional structures.

Cornerstone is committed to offering a high-quality program that is financially affordable to families from all income levels. CMES is a free public charter school. CMS is a tuition program where tuition is kept lower than most programs of similar quality. To keep its program affordable, Cornerstone preschool maintains a scholarship fund that is open to all enrolled families. Cornerstone preschool's commitment to affordability carries with it a significant requirement for fundraising. Only 65% of Cornerstone preschool's budget is supported with direct tuition payments. The remaining 35% requires the implementation of a detailed fundraising plan that depends on the shared efforts and contributions of MCM board members, staff contributions, parents, and other community members.

CAREGIVER COMMITMENTS

To best support the growth of their child in our program, we expect families to make the following commitments to Cornerstone:

Caregivers are expected to be involved. Families are expected to work with the Cornerstone staff to assure that each child is well cared for and is able to reach their full potential within the school. We ask families to share relevant information that will help us in working with their child. We want to support the work of the caregivers, and we ask to be supported as educators. We invite caregivers to visit and observe in the classroom environments beginning in late October.

Conferences are held twice each year for each family. We will also meet with caregivers whenever they wish, or respond by phone if needed. Please don't hesitate to call or email your child's guide or the administration with questions or issues.

Caregivers are expected to have children here on time in order to start the day with the rest of the class. *School begins at 8:45 a.m. for all children.* Families who arrive after 9:00am *must* report to the office.

Children who are late often have a harder time starting work and disrupt other children who have already begun their day. In addition, children who are late miss out on work time and may fall behind. For example, a child who is late by 10 minutes just once a week misses out on six hours of time working toward goals in a year.

Caregivers are expected to have children attend school regularly. Children who miss a lot of school will miss many lessons and are often behind their peers academically and out of sync with the social environment. Regular attendance is required. Caregivers are required to call the school no later than 9 a.m. if their child will be absent for the day. *If a child misses more than 7 days at Cornerstone Elementary due to unexcused absences, we must report the child as being truant. Excused absences are those due to illness, medical appointments, extreme family emergencies, and travel preapproved by the Head of School. This information is reported to the MN Department of Education.*

Caregivers are expected to make sure children have adequate sleep. Studies continue to show that children and adults do their best when they have an adequate amount of sleep. Children who are in the Toddler Community should have 11 to 12 hours of sleep each night, children in the Children's House should have at least 10 to 11 hours of sleep, and elementary children should have

at least 9 hours of sleep. Sleep will assure that children retain what they have learned and are able to be their best each day.

Caregivers are expected to follow the rules of respect (for self, others, materials, and the environment). All staff members and children are expected to follow these rules as well. Caregivers should be respectful and generous with other members of the community. Actions and language used on the premises should be respectful at all times. Disagreements should be resolved peacefully or be brought to the attention of the Head of School.

Caregivers are expected to read to their child daily. Children develop a love of books when they are read to. This is also the best way to develop vocabulary, deepen comprehension, and become critical thinkers. Even if your child is reading fluently, please take the time to read to them each night. It is a wonderful bonding experience.

Caregivers are expected to read and comply with the policies in the school Handbooks. The Policies and Program Handbooks will help you best understand your child's education and daily routine and the policies that the staff, families, and children must follow.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT & VOLUNTEERING

Cornerstone depends on the support and talents of the broader community to accomplish its many tasks. When you donate your time and energy, you make a valuable contribution to the children. You also get the opportunity to connect with other caregivers and staff.

There are a variety of ways you can contribute your time and talent during the year. A few suggestions are listed below.

- Assist staff and children with special events and open houses.
- Contribute articles, photos or other assistance to the school newsletter.
- Participate in projects such as cleaning, sewing, painting, or landscaping.
- Assist in material making.
- Assist in the planning, setting up and clean up for social events.

Volunteers are recruited at the Back to School Fair and during the year through "Stepping Stones," the weekly newsletter. You may also contact administration or your child's guide to volunteer.

TITLE I PARENT AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT PLAN

The purpose of this plan is to establish partnerships with the caregivers and community to support Cornerstone Montessori Elementary School in providing a high quality education to every child in this district. It is essential that school and home work together to promote the success and achievement of our children. Neither home nor school can do the job alone. Caregivers play extremely important roles as children's first teachers. Their support for their children and for the school is critical to their children's success in school and in life. As a Title I School Wide Program, Cornerstone Montessori Elementary School intends to include caregivers in all aspects of the school's program. The goal is a school-home partnership that will help all children in the district to succeed.

BUILDING SCHOOL CAPACITY FOR INVOLVEMENT

To make sure there is effective involvement of caregivers and to support a partnership with caregivers and the community, Cornerstone Montessori Elementary School will do the following to improve student achievement:

1. Provide to parents/guardians of Title children assistance in understanding the State academic standards, the state and local academic assessments, the parent and family engagement rights of Title I, how to monitor their child's progress, and work with their child's teachers to improve the academic success of their child.
2. Provide materials and training to help parents/guardians work with their children to improve their children's academic achievement. This could be literacy training and using technology, as appropriate, to foster parental involvement.
3. Educate teachers, pupil services personnel, principals and other staff, with the assistance of parents, in the value and utility of contributions of caregivers, and in how to reach out to, communicate with and work with parents/guardians as equal partners, implement and coordinate parent/guardian programs and build ties between caregivers and schools.
4. When possible and appropriate, coordinate and integrate parent/guardian involvement programs and activities with other Federal, State, and local programs, including public preschool programs, and conduct activities together, such as family resource centers, which encourage and support caregivers in more fully participating in the education of their children.
5. Ensure when possible that information related to the school and caregiver programs, meetings, and other activities, is sent to the parents/guardians of participating children in a format and, to the extent practicable, in a language the parents/guardians can understand.

PART I. SCHOOL PARENT AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT PLAN *REQUIRED* COMPONENTS

1. Cornerstone Montessori Elementary School will engage parents/guardians and families who have Title students in developing/revising the district and school plan.
2. Cornerstone Montessori Elementary School will convene an annual meeting each fall, at a convenient time, when the parents/guardians of participating children are available to attend. The Title I annual meeting will inform parents/guardians about the Title I program, explain the requirements of parent and family engagement and the rights and responsibilities of the parents to be involved.
3. Cornerstone Montessori Elementary School will offer flexible meeting times during morning, evening or weekends and may provide transportation, child care or home visits.
4. Cornerstone Montessori Elementary School will involve parents/guardians in the planning and review of the school improvement plan and the joint development of the schoolwide plan when applicable. If the schoolwide plan is not satisfactory to the parents/guardians, submit comments on the plan when submitted to the district. [Section 1114(b)]
5. Cornerstone Montessori Elementary School will provide to parents/guardians of Title students:

- a. Timely information about programs offered to engage in their child's education.
- b. An explanation of the curriculum, state and local academic assessments including alternate assessments, and the achievement levels of the state academic standards.
- c. If they request, opportunities for regular meetings to hear their suggestions and participate in decisions related to their child's education.

PART II. SHARED RESPONSIBILITIES FOR HIGH STUDENT ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Cornerstone Montessori Elementary School will communicate with parents/guardians regarding the academic success of their children. Cornerstone Montessori Elementary School will:

- Conduct conferences with parents/guardians twice annually. The parent/teacher compact will be available at conferences.
- Provide frequent reports to parents/guardians on their children's progress; and
- Provide parents/guardians with reasonable access to staff, opportunities to volunteer and participate in their child's school experience with special projects, cooking, sharing aspects of their culture, etc., and observation of classroom activities. Caregivers are welcome to visit the school.
- Make sure that two-way meaningful communication between family members and school staff is addressed and when at all possible, is in a language the parents/guardians and family members can understand.

PART III. ACCESSIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Cornerstone Montessori Elementary School will meet the requirements of parent and family engagement of Title I, to the extent practicable, we will provide full opportunities for the participation of parents/guardians with children with limited English proficiency, parents/guardians with children with disabilities, and parents/guardians of migratory children, including providing information and school reports in a format and, to the extent practicable, in a language such parents/guardians can understand.

PART IV. ADOPTION

The Cornerstone Montessori Elementary School Parent and Family Engagement Plan is developed jointly with, and agreed on with, parents of children participating in Title I programs, as evidenced by meeting minutes and sign-in sheets.

The Parent and Family Engagement Plan will be in effect for the period of the 2026-2027 school year. The school will distribute this Parent and Family Engagement Plan to all parents during the Back to School Fair and make it available to the community via the website.

Cornerstone Montessori Elementary School

**CAREGIVER AND TEACHER COMPACT
2026-2027**

The following compact is between Cornerstone Montessori Elementary School and the caregivers of the children who attend the school. The compact will be published annually in the parent program handbook and distributed at the fall meeting for everyone in the community to see.

1) The school will provide a high-quality curriculum and high-quality instruction in a supportive and effective learning environment.

- The school will provide regular communication with parents/guardians about the progress of their child at the school.
- The school will schedule parent/teacher conferences twice during the school year.
- The school will provide translation/interpretation as necessary so caregivers can understand communication from the school.
- The school will communicate with families about the state's academic standards and the school's standing regarding academic testing.
- The school shall provide materials and training to caregivers to help them work with their children to support the child's development.

2) Caregivers are encouraged to be a part of their child's education.

- Parents/guardians are encouraged to communicate with their child's teacher with any concerns they may have about their child's development or education.
- Caregivers are welcome to visit school and are encouraged to observe in their child's environment.
- Caregivers are welcome to volunteer at school.

3) Caregivers will support their child's education by doing the following:

- Helping students with homework as they are able to do so.
- Attending conferences.
- Contacting the school to discuss concerns.

4) The school will hold an annual meeting each year to discuss the Title I program and the Parent/Teacher Compact with interested caregivers.

Parent/Guardian Signature

Date

Teacher Signature

Date