

Cornerstone Monthly Newsletter

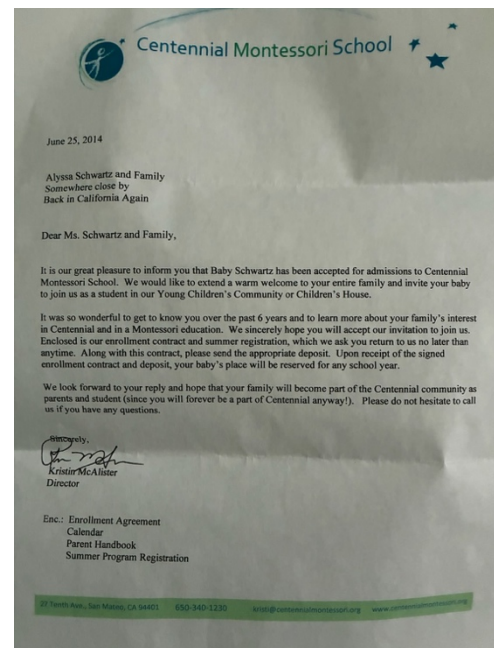
May 2026

Dear Families,

Welcome to the final newsletter of the 2025-26 school year! Ellie and I are going to California next weekend for a ridiculous 36 hour visit to celebrate the 21st anniversary of Centennial Montessori School, where I spent my first six years in the classroom (being a year late for major events is not atypical of life at Centennial). As a result, I have been spending my middle-of-the-night anxiety hours rehashing all the mistakes I made as a novice teacher. Most of those mistakes were ones in which injuries occurred or were near-misses – the time a child ate mushrooms off the play structure, the time a child got his finger caught in a door jamb, the time a child broke his elbow, and so on. I promise not all the children in my class were hurt! Sometimes I also dwell on the animal mishaps – Winkie the chicken who was eaten by a raccoon, Seekey the mouse who lived a mouse’s lifespan, the unnamed goldfish who my assistant convinced me to put outside who also got eaten by a raccoon. One year we hatched butterflies and “[Child’s Name] and the Butterfly Killers,” as our toddler assistant dubbed the group of children, used the container they were cocooned in as a bowling ball (luckily they survived!).

I’m sharing all this not because I was shockingly bad at my job – I really wasn’t – but because we humans are so good at emphasizing the worst, even when 90% of the time things are actually pretty okay. As I prepared for the CMES Annual Board Meeting a few weeks ago, I tried to identify the story of this year. A lot happened, as it always does when 200+ people are sharing spaces and experiences together. A lot of it was really hard, too: there was the Marsh flood, the saying goodbye to friends who moved away, Chip’s passing (Marsh was hit hard this year), the entire months of December, January, February. There was a lot of good that came out of this hard, though: building relationships between the Marsh children and the MCM staff, pancake breakfasts, new friends, the incredible generosity and care that our community took for each other in a difficult time.

When I left Centennial, one of my chief regrets was that my future children wouldn’t be able to attend. It was, and is, a special place, which is why I’m subjecting myself to 8+ hours of travel with a 4 year old in a span of two days. What I’ve learned, over this past year, and all the years before this one, though, is that all schools are special places. I am so grateful that my children get to attend Cornerstone, just like the parents at L’Etoile du Nord, up the street, are grateful. In 20 years, we’re going to remember everything that was bad this year, no question, just like 18 years later I still remember exactly what happened when Oliver cut himself with the apple slicer and





needed stitches. But the story of this year isn't going to be all that hard, awful stuff. The story of this year is the way our community came together and made space for the Marsh children, sent care packages to the children staying home in the winter, brought extra snacks for the children who were just a little too hungry to make it to lunch.

As we head into summer, I hope you will all hold onto these special moments. If you'd really like to feel warm and fuzzy, join us for Kindergarten Fly-Up and 6th Grade Graduation next week. Cornerstone kids are remarkable and it's an honor to be a part of their lives.

With affection,
Alyssa

Toddler Community



Last month the toddlers helped us prepare our yard for spring by clearing dead vines and leaves. This month they have been enjoying the new life growing around us, especially the dandelions. Plucking them every day they have enjoyed looking at and sharing the yellow ones and blowing on the fuzzy white ones to send their seeds flying. The toddlers have also enjoyed seeing the birds that nest in and around our yards, especially the geese that like to visit us from the school's roof!

Now that it's getting hot out we ask that families

send summer shorts and shirts for their drawers so that we can send home long sleeved shirts and warm pants. Families can also send sunglasses for the toddlers to wear when we are outside. Please label each item, glasses included, so that we can put their belongings in the correct drawers.





Children's House 1



I can't believe this is our last newsletter of the school year! What an incredible year it has been. We have had so much fun learning, growing, and making memories together. Throughout the year we've had the opportunity to get to know one another, and each of your children holds a special place in my heart. It has truly been a joy to watch them learn, grow, and shine in their own unique ways.

As we've gotten into the warmer days, we've been spending more time outside, and it has been such a joy to see the children working and exploring in our outdoor space. I love seeing their random laughter, their excitement, and simply taking a moment to observe how much they have all grown

throughout the year.

I will truly miss them all, and I'm so grateful to have been part of their journey this year. I'm also excited that I'll get the opportunity to continue working with some of them during the summer!

Thank you for sharing your amazing children with me this year
Claudia





Children's House 2



Lower Elementary – Garden

"To go out of a classroom to enter the outside world, which includes everything, is obviously to open an immense door to instruction." (Dr. Maria Montessori, From Childhood to Adolescence, p. 17)

"Going out" has a special meaning for the Montessori elementary classroom. The elementary child is seeking their independence and going out allows them that exploration needed for the development of responsibility. Going out also allows children to experience different aspects of life within the world around them. They see how society functions and see all kinds of different work.

This month, we had a few occasions to take children out to the greater community. Third years had the opportunity to go see all types of birds at the Carpenter Nature Center as a culminating experience to all their work with the Bird by Bird Program this year. They walked quietly, following a volunteer expert, using binoculars to identify the birds around them. They had to justify their observations with their knowledge of different physical and behavioral traits of birds.



Another group of children visited Sustainable Safari at the Maplewood Mall to gather more information about the animals they were researching and writing about. Beforehand, they had prepared many insightful questions inside little notebooks. While we were on the visit, the children met the veterinarian on site. It was amazing to watch these young people engage in conversation for about 20 minutes with the expert, eager to find out more about the amazing creatures on our earth. At the end of the day, one child remarked that she was learning so much! This experience was a beautiful reminder of just how impactful going out and experiential learning is in the Montessori setting.





Lower Elementary - Pond



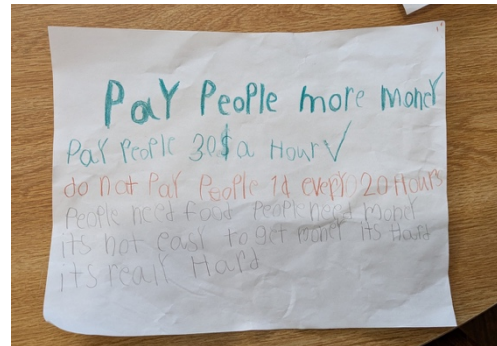
Dr. Montessori liked to look for the commonalities of people, and one thing she noticed was that all humans have certain tendencies. The Human Tendency that I've been thinking about recently is the human tendency to abstract, that tendency we have to take information we've learned and apply it to new contexts.

Sometimes people view school as separate from the rest of the world. A child might think they're learning something because it will, "be on the test," not because it has any connection to the wider world. Part of why I love Montessori is that it erases those lines we draw between "school" and "the world," and makes both spaces the richer for it. When students spend months learning about birds in the classroom take their knowledge out of the classroom to see how bird banding helps researchers learn more about birds. When students have issues or ideas that are important to them and have a

chance to bring that experience into the classroom and make signs to share those ideas with other students. When students take all the skills and habits they've built up over years in one classroom and use them to build even more skills in another. All these moments and more let us use our human tendency toward abstraction to flourish.



And so as we move into summer I hope you get the chance to keep seeing your children apply what they've learned to new situations over the break. Maybe you'll get to hear your student read to you at the beach. Maybe they'll remind you to bring a bike pump, because of course the first time out on the bike bus someone's going to get a flat tire. As one parent said of their child's activities while away from school on a trip, "It is partly his Montessori culture that has supported him to be successful and confident in Lakota culture." That won't be on a test, it's just going to make our universe, classroom and world alike, a better place.



Upper Elementary - Forest

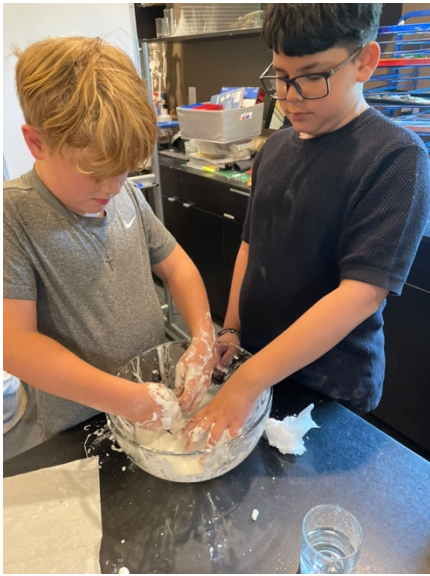
Wow! It is hard to believe it is the end of May and our school year is nearing completion. May was filled with so much activity and growth in Forest. The 6th years had a beautiful visit to Camp Osprey Wilds early this month. They experienced outdoor adventures including a high ropes course and a night hike. The entire class also had the opportunity to visit Camp Iduhapi where they engaged in cooperation challenges and learned about nature in Minnesota. It was a delight to observe the children's adaptability and willingness to take unexpected changes in stride. This community is such a gift.



We are currently reading the last book in the Tristan Strong series, *Tristan Strong Keeps Punching*. In the book Tristan is tasked with finding his lost friends and folk heroes that have been scattered across the country while fighting against an evil haint that is trying to take the power of his people's stories. One theme that is carried throughout this entire series is the power of stories and how the stories of people and culture matter greatly. This series specifically honors the stories of Black Americans and how their stories are powerful, true, and need to be told. The children are intrigued by these stories and have demonstrated their great propensity for justice as we discuss the stories that have been shared through this series.



Upper Elementary - Marsh



So much happened in May that I had to double-check and make sure it hadn't been longer than a month! It seems like May was the month to travel. Sixth years got to enjoy their overnight trip to Osprey Wilds in Sandstone, MN, early in the month. Children who participated in Junior Coaches and in Bird by Bird programs got special trips as well. Then, the whole upper elementary got to visit Camp Ihduhapi in Loretto for team-building challenges and outdoor activities. We had a visit from the Pollinator Lab at the UMN and some students planned a math market to sell baked goods (which they also made at school the day before!). We enjoyed welcoming third year visitors who were coming to experience a little taste of Upper Elementary before they move up next fall. We talked about May Day and worker's rights,

then gathered as a school to sing protest songs from history and today. We also wrapped up standardized testing and welcomed two new students to our community. In between special events, we were able to squeeze in math, language, science and art lessons of course. It's been a whirlwind - which will continue into June as we wrap up our year with work, reflection, and celebration. I look forward to seeing many of you in June at the Ice Cream Social and Graduation.



1611 Spotlight

This month I am excited to spotlight Catherine Kennedy, Communications Manager at Montessori Center of Minnesota. Catherine started at MCM about a decade ago, completing her AMI training as a Women United scholar. She then worked her way up at Cornerstone, starting as the Trained Float, then the Children’s House 2 Trained Assistant, and finally the Early Childhood Program Manager, shepherding CMS through both of my maternity leaves (the first one when she was brand-new to the position!). Catherine moved “across the hall” in the spring of 2024 to support MCM as a brand steward, and communication strategist within the Advancement department supporting both forward facing communications and fundraising campaign narratives for the organization in collaboration with MCM’s internal leadership team.



Highlighting Catherine is a special treat because she is not someone who wants to be the center of attention. She quietly and capably notices other people’s needs, directs them to the right resources, and acts, without any expectation of recognition, to fill those needs and make things better. Catherine is also one of the most ambitious people I know, without ever drawing attention to herself. Over the last few years, Catherine has completed a Master’s degree and is now enrolled in a PhD program, all while working a full-time job and raising her two fabulous children, Bakisa and Madiba. Catherine’s talents include sculpting, painting (she made the arresting canvas in the office), and singing (this woman can belt), among many others. She is someone who truly lives her values: she is intentional in building relationships and is the ideal person to round out the 2025-26 newsletters.