

Cornerstone Monthly Newsletter

February 2026

Dear Community,

Sometimes (often), when I need to accomplish something that has a clear endpoint, I will circulate the building to turn over laundry, sweep up woodchips, scrape mud off snowpants, and do other housekeeping chores that calm my mind and let me feel like I've finished something. Today, while walking through the building, I came across one child completing a puzzle upside down, putting it together through shape alone, and another two children, one in second grade and one 4 years old, doing a puzzle on the floor together. We've been doing a lot of puzzles at my house, too. I've written here before about how real work is soothing for children and adults, how having something to do with our hands helps us think clearer and concentrate longer. What struck me today was the quiet camaraderie of the puzzling that was taking place. I can almost guarantee that the child doing an upside-down puzzle was not calm when they came into the space, and I know that the two working together were not. The simple act of sitting, of doing something in community, was all it took to bring three children down from a place of escalation. What a powerful experience for a child to have that self-soothing ability without an adult's intervention, and what a powerful symbol of how Cornerstone operates that children can access these tools all by themselves.



When I give tours to prospective parents, I talk about developmentally appropriate education and freedom and independence and all the things about Montessori that we love. But my favorite thing to talk about is Toddler Service and now, in the last couple years, Children's House Service. The children and toddlers look up to the elementary children with sheer adoration, and the elementary children talk about their younger counterparts like they're celebrities. Within the 3-year age span of a Montessori classroom, the children have the opportunity to lead and to follow, but within the 11-year age span of the school, the children have the opportunity to truly serve as role models and to truly care for others.



And for the very few of us who have had the privilege of raising our children in the building, that relationship is even stronger. Ellie and Sadie have special bonds with Catherine's kids, Bakisa and Madiba, from the summers they spent together before they were old enough to be enrolled. Visits from Lorenzo and Elena, Daylin and Nora's babies, let us experience what Dr. Montessori wrote about in *The Secret of Childhood*: upon a baby entering the environment, "at once the children sat still, controlling even their breathing, and so they remained, with the serene, intense look of those engaged in meditation." We can't have infants come for more than a visit, due to licensing rules, but it is truly special to be able to offer the children the range of human experience and to help form these intergenerational, as it were, bonds across the school.



Happy spring,
Alyssa

Toddler Community



A favorite daily activity is observing children looking at books on their own, or their engagement listening to a book that is being read. There are conversations on how to handle books with care: how to turn the pages, how to look at books either on a lap, a table or work mat. Of course, just like with any other work, the children learn to put books away. The joy with sharing books in a community comes from the element of choice, learning what's inside on each page (or anticipating favorite parts of books that get requested to be read over and over.) The story books add lots to the community conversations and also opportunities to take turns when there is more than one child participating.

Families should be sure to check out books from the local public libraries as well as from Cornerstone. Our Little Free Library in front of the school has books, along with others inside that are available. Also, Google *Little Free Library* and find locations for others in local neighborhoods. The toddlers can be empowered to bring their own book bag/backpack when venturing out to find some new books. Happy bonding with a child and a good book!

"Whenever you read a good book, somewhere in the world a door opens to allow in more light."

- Vera Nazarian



Children's House 1

This month we have welcomed a student teacher into CH1! She has been working closely with the children, and they have been very warm and welcoming toward her. We are excited to have the extra support and fresh energy in our environment.

With spring just around the corner, we are starting to see lots of mud outside. Please be patient and understanding as muddy clothes and shoes begin making their way home. Outdoor exploration is such an important part of our day, and sometimes that comes with a little extra laundry :).

Our friends in CH2 have been making beautiful flower arrangements for us, and we've also been sharing baked goods together, which has been a lovely way to build community between environments.

We have started making banana bread on Fridays! Occasionally, if we have very ripe bananas, we may bake earlier in the week as well. If you have any ripe bananas at home that you'd like to donate, feel free to send them in.



Children's House 2

Editor's note:

Rachel took over Children's House 2 just last week, as Kristin goes on maternity leave. As such, we'll give her a respite from writing to you! Instead, please know that the environment has been beautifully changed, children are receiving many new presentations, and all are enjoying Rachel's ukulele skills! With the change in weather, they are spending more time outside and looking forward to increased opportunities to work in the outdoor environment.





Lower Elementary – Garden



The elementary child wants to know the reasoning for things and needs to use their hands to find the answers. This characteristic was evident all throughout February in the Garden classroom. In math, children have been discovering divisibility of numbers with the golden beads while others explored relationships between different numbers with math flip cards. Children investigated the job of the stem by observing how water is carried up to the leaves, and why that's important for a plant's survival. Grammar command cards have been very popular this month, allowing children to physically act out the different parts of speech - like adverbs and prepositions - and their functions within a sentence.

We heard and talked about the power of language this month with the classic *Frindle* by Andrew Clements. The incredibly clever 5th-grader, Nick Allen, invents a new word for "pen" and convinces others around him to his word. This act first seems like a silly joke to amuse his friends and frustrate his language arts teacher. However, we soon

discover that Nick's story is actually a compelling example of communication and how words become part of our everyday language. At the end of the novel, Nick is gifted the newest version of Webster's Dictionary with his word "frindle" listed on page 541.



The afternoon we finished the book, several children investigated all the dictionaries in our classroom for the word "frindle." Unfortunately, we learned that the word is not published in standard dictionaries in our own universe -- yet every single word that we read and speak has their own amazing history. Please don't be surprised if your own child asks you to use a frindle at home or invents their own words to communicate ideas. Someday, we all might be using their words!



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 perfect, that tendency we have to change things so that it matches how we imagine it in our mind.

In some ways we can think about this as a tendency towards exactness. It's what's happening when students, rather than get a rough estimate of an object's weight, spend long minutes making tiny adjustments to the scale so that the weight is exactly, perfectly, balanced ("236, and a half, grams"). It's what's happening when a student, while waiting for a lesson to start, decides to rearrange the beads in the box so that they are just so. It's what's happening when a student hears that the 9th book of a series is going to be returned in two days can't bear the thought of not finishing the series, and so spends every moment of class for the next two days reading that 9th book.



This tendency is a powerful tool for learning, but can also be a source of frustration. Students trying to fold a piece of paper into an origami fish (or write a comic book, or quickly complete division problems) might get frustrated when their first few efforts don't match what they intended. They might give up, ask someone else to make them one instead, or crumple the paper up. Part of our job as adults in children's lives is to help them see the distance between where they are and where they want to be without judgement, and show them the next step to bridging that gap if they can't see it themselves. As students learn to see an attempt that doesn't match their vision not as a failure, but as a stepping stone to greater mastery, the tendency toward perfection makes their eventual triumph inevitable.



Upper Elementary - Forest



February in Forest has been exciting and busy as always. The 6th years have all been working hard on their Imaginary Island projects, which is a culminating project that spans many areas of study. We also have big work involving the study of the human body systems and writing about the origin of our names. As always big work and group work abound! Collaboration on huge math problems, working together to write music, and discussions during book club are some examples of how group work is happening regularly.

In February we read the autobiography *I am Malala* by Malala Yousafazi. The children demonstrated their great capacity for empathy and passion for justice as we learned about her fight for education. Malala's story is inspiring and helps us to remember that education is for every human and we all deserve the opportunity to learn in peace.



Upper Elementary - Marsh

Obviously, the big news in Marsh this month was our flood! On the morning of Friday, February 6th, our classroom was full of puddles, and we needed to relocate. Because of the generosity of the Training Center, we are now located temporarily in the lecture room. We make daily lists of things to retrieve from our classroom (affectionately called Swamp until we get to move back in). Children are being wonderfully flexible and have gotten into the groove of learning in our new space with some new limits (no sinks, no kitchen, etc). We expect to be here for several more weeks as the classroom gets new flooring and cabinets and some additional work. It will be exciting to move back in when it's all freshly fixed! We'll keep you updated as we move in that direction.





In addition to adjusting to our new normal, big work this month included continued Imaginary Island work, Cornerstone Cafe presentations, Black History Month research and history stories, lots of math with decimals and fractions, and lots of story writing. Children are researching animals and plants to prepare their competition brackets for March Mammal Madness - a fun contest modeled on the NCAA tournament.

If you are interested in participating yourself, take a look [here](#). We also just launched a new round of book clubs, so everyone has a new book to read and discuss with peers at our

weekly Wednesday meetings. We continue to read Freewater by Amina Luqman-Dawson as our read-aloud book.



We are all looking forward to spring and enjoying the occasional "balmy" 45 degree weather. Please be sure to keep sending warm clothes and extra clothes as we move into the season of variable temperatures and lots of mud.

1611 Spotlight



Hi everyone, my name is EG. I am the school social worker for CMES. I have been a social worker for 2 years now and find great joy in supporting children and their families any way I can! This is my first year at Cornerstone and I have loved getting to know the children and adults that make up our community. If you have heard your child reference "island" while recounting their day, that is what my space is called.

Outside of school, I keep busy with ballet, knitting, going for walks and runs, and helping both my siblings plan their weddings (pictured here with EG). I also enjoy thrifting, going to concerts and comedy shows, and spending time with my grandma. I recently got accepted to grad school and that will begin adding more to my schedule in May! :)

From the CMES Board of Directors

Open enrollment is under way! Please share Cornerstone with your communities! Applications can be found at www.cornerstone-elementary.org

CMES is also looking for new parent and community members to join the Board of Directors this summer. If you are interested or would like to know more, please contact [Julaine Roffers-Agarwal](#).