

Cornerstone Monthly Newsletter

October 2025

Dear Families,

Earlier this week Ellie had probably the hardest morning she's had in her little life. She was overly tired, overly hungry, and maybe a little bit sick. In the midst of her tantrum, she noticed an eyeglass cleaning kit



that isn't normally within her line of sight. I asked if she wanted to try and showed her how to clean my glasses. Calm and excited, she asked if she could clean her sunglasses, and then her dad's sunglasses. Within the space of 3 minutes, Ellie went from nightmarish demon child to helpful, happy, and kind, all because she had found something

purposeful to do. Much of Dr. Montessori's writing is about the importance of work. In *The Secret of Childhood*, she wrote, "The satisfaction which they find in their work has given them a grace and ease like that which comes from music." Work is grounding and settling, it helps children to engage with themselves and their surroundings,



and it builds the foundation of their personality. My favorite jobs, besides this one, of course, have been ones where I've had my hands on materials, whether that's an espresso machine or a book cart. The Montessori child in me remembers how it feels to finish a task, to see the product of my activity, and that is deeply satisfying and soothing. (I have similar thoughts on Montessori and Marx, but that's a different conversation.)



Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, author of *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, studied people at work and discovered, much like Dr. Montessori discovered decades earlier, that individuals are at their most creative and content when they are absorbed in activities that require some, but not too much, effort. It's what Megan, more about her below, calls the "just right book." Something that makes you work for it, but not so much you're frustrated. The value of work and the intricacies of finding the just right activity for the just right moment is at the heart of our work as Montessorians, and I could go on indefinitely about what we see at school when the children are engaged in purposeful activity and how amazing practical life is. In the classroom updates to follow you can read about what that looks like at each level – the work of the Toddlers is not the same as the work of the 4th-6th years, but it all comes back to concentration, the power of getting our hands dirty, and finding meaning in the tasks that we grownups sometimes forget is what makes us human.

Happy Autumn,
Alyssa

Toddler Community



As the toddlers have settled into the routine of the school year they have blossomed into happy helpers within the Toddler Community. As we adults take care of the environment, they help us enthusiastically with laundry, preparing snack, sweeping, dishes, putting cots away, and more. They even help us change our shoes!

The toddlers can also often be seen helping one another. When one child is walking around the room without shoes, often another will bring them their shoes, and they'll help each other get dressed. When one starts crying, others will come over to pat their backs and give them hugs. There are a lot of hugs in

the Toddler Community, we see many outstretched arms and hear "I want hug" throughout the day. We are working on understanding that sometimes others don't want hugs at the moment and that when someone says "no hug" we must listen, but frequently a hug with one turns into a group.



We have been enjoying October in the Toddler Community. There have been beautiful fall leaves to hold and a well enjoyed pumpkin to play with that we are looking forward to opening up at the end of the month!



Children's House 1



Dear Families,

We are thrilled to share that CH1 has had a fantastic start to the school year! The children have been settling into our routines beautifully, exploring new materials, and forming connections with their peers. It's been such a joy to watch their curiosity, creativity, and independence grow each day.

We appreciate your support in helping your child feel confident and prepared each day. We look forward to a year filled with discovery, growth, and lots of smiles!

Warmly,
The CH1 Team



Children's House 2

It has been so fun to watch the children thrive in their routines as we get more settled into the school year. Children are helping to set up the room in the morning and clean up after meals. We also see children helping each other. We have welcomed a new not quite 3 year old, and the older children love taking turns helping him get breakfast and getting his chair pushed in at the table. The weather has been beautiful for fall fun outside and our gorgeous trees have given us a bunch of beautiful leaves to rake and admire. The older children have been getting a letters lesson every afternoon and impressing us all the time with how much they are learning. Children love the opportunity to put the lunch dishes away and set up snacks or get called for a math lesson in the afternoon.



Children go outside possibly at all points of the day: Montessori Education loves the outdoors. Until snow pants are needed, before-care and after-care will probably be outside. Please always send your children to school dressed appropriately for the weather, and consider layers. I recommend leaving a designated sweatshirt in your child's locker, because a coat might be right for the start of the day, but be way too hot while running around in the sun after lunch.



Lower Elementary Garden

It was a joyous October in Garden! We had five birthdays this month and children chose to share their special day with singing and sharing cherished photos and items from home. We also enjoyed spending our days collaborating with each other in the classroom and playing outside in the brisk but sunny fall weather.



An important characteristic of the elementary child is their developing reasoning mind. During this age, children are keenly interested in knowing why things work in the world around them and make important decisions about their learning. There were many questions posed by children in this month

- **Reading and spelling:** Why do we use the long a vowel team "ai" in the middle of a word but "ay" at the end of a word? And why does the "ai" say the short e sound in the word "said?" (This pronunciation is thanks to a holdover from the Old English!)
- **Math:** Why do we have to ensure that we are sharing fairly across the categories when doing distributive division with the racks and tubes? Why do we need to exchange between different categories when building a number with the golden beads?
- **Biology:** Why does the smooth green snake eat arthropods but not small mammals like other snakes? How does Zoe, our pet axolotl, slurp live worms so quickly for her meal? (Feeding Zoe is a daily spectacle in the classroom!)
- **Technology:** What do we need to learn about engineering so that we can construct a robot dog that can learn tricks and help people in the community?



These questions - and so many more - lead to amazing discoveries in the elementary classroom!

This month, we had the advantage of listening and discussing several different books that all have a common theme of whimsy and determination. We heard about children in a third grade class who experienced a variety of animals coming from the supply closet in *The Magical Ms. Plum*. We then learned about a special wish for an exotic pet bird in *Jasmine Toguchi: Flamingo Keeper*. We are now reading the second installment of the Badger and Skunk series, *Egg Marks the Spot*, where the two woodland friends go on a rock-finding expedition to ultimately excavate an incredible secret within a cave...while also meeting several friends and foes along the way.



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 repeat, that tendency we have to try things again, and again, and sometimes, again.

For elementary students this repetition needs to come with variety. Students love to jump rope, but once they've mastered the basics, it doesn't always hold their attention. So how do they keep it interesting? They could see how many times they can jump, try double dutch, or see how many students can fit on the jump rope to all jump at the same time.



It's one of the joys of being a teacher to see all the creative ways students develop to make repeating activities interesting for themselves. A work about singular and plural nouns becomes a memory game about matching singular and plural words. A work about the different ways humans meet their need for transportation becomes 3-D. A song about a tree in a bog suddenly has a lot more verses than it had before.



All this repetition leads to learning, and the repetition with innovation leads to mastery. You may have heard that it takes 10,000 hours to master a new skill. But it's not 10,000 hours of repeating the exact same thing, it's 10,000 hours of trying one way, then trying again incorporating a different idea, then trying again while applying a new insight from the last repetition. In this way, a student might feel like a work is very difficult the first time they try it, but after a couple tries will call me over with excitement to tell me about a method they developed to do a tricky map work, or a "hack" for finding equivalent fractions, or to read a fifth story in a series they started several weeks ago. And so students' mastery grows.

Upper Elementary Forest

October has been a whirlwind of learning and activity in Forest. Some of the things children have been investigating include mushroom spores, homonyms, algebraic equations, early human fire starters, Minnesota birds, how molecules form, and many others. The children continue to impress with their care for each other and the classroom. Many children are enjoying learning to read and play music, and are getting excited about our upcoming field trip to the MN Orchestra.



Our read-aloud book *The Wrong Way Home* by Kate O'Shaughnessy has us all thinking about how to choose role models and what messages we should listen to and believe. The book tells the story of a young girl and her mother who leave the place they've known as home to start a new life. Fern wishes to go back home, but is learning that the things she believed before may not have been entirely true and that trusting her mother's choices for her might be best after all.

Upper Elementary Marsh

October was a strong month of community building in Marsh. Children have been embracing big group work in many areas including checkerboard, squaring of binomials, language tower work, handwork, volcano building, and research about Brazil. Several children presented at Cornerstone Cafe at the beginning of October - something everyone will experience at least once this year. We were able to finish our read-aloud book, *Fish in a Tree* by Lynda Mullaly Hunt, cheering on the main character, Ally, as she grew in confidence and understanding. We wrapped up our school-wide SEL lessons by addressing anxiety, social justice, and resilience this month as well. As a group, we have also been doing some group games (10 down, who started the motion, heads or tails, etc), which is fun together and gives us chances to practice lots of communication skills.



We also had a very sad event occur in Marsh. On Monday, October 20, our beloved rabbit, Chip, fell ill and died very quickly. It was quite surprising and very sad. Children have been dealing with this by talking, writing, creating artwork, and crying when they needed to. They have been very supportive of each other and of the plans for a memorial rock and a book of collected pictures and

writing to honor our sweet rabbit. Thanks to all the families who wrote to share condolences.

I am very much looking forward to seeing everyone at conferences, where children will directly share all the amazing work they are doing!



1611 Spotlight

This month we are highlighting Megan Riemer! Megan is not only the reading specialist at CMES, she is also a member of the Board of Directors and a former Cornerstone parent. Megan started doing letters presentations in Children's House this fall and they are Ellie's favorite time of the day (it's hard to supplant Claudia as a favorite adult, but Megan is coming close!).

Hi, I'm Megan, Cornerstone's reading specialist. Before working at Cornerstone, I was a fifth grade teacher for 10 years. I absolutely LOVE my job as a reading specialist. I get to help children discover the joy of reading and help adults discover the joy of teaching reading. The "aha" moments for the children and adults that I support are my favorite!

Outside of teaching, I enjoy a good mix of relaxing and being active, especially outside. I love hiking, cross-country skiing, camping, swimming and have recently started clogging lessons (it's harder than it looks!). I have two cats, my partner Colbey and two children, ages 15 and 18, at home. My children are alumni of Cornerstone and are still working on balancing their freedoms and responsibilities in high school. And, if I'm honest, I'm still working on that balance as an adult!

