

# Cornerstone Monthly Newsletter

March 2026

**Dear Cornerstone Community,**

We started MCA testing today (that's the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments). All children in Minnesota in grades 3-8 are tested in math and reading each year; reading tests are given again in 10<sup>th</sup> grade and math again in 11<sup>th</sup> grade; and science assessments are completed in grades 5, 8, and once in high school. Testing is a weird thing in a Montessori classroom. There are so many things about it that make it inappropriate for a school our size and for children this age, and even as we work exceptionally hard to make it not a big deal for the children, it begins to feel like it's taken over our lives by the middle of April.

I tell parents regularly that MCAs are designed to assess curricula at the district-level, not necessarily an individual child's achievement, which is confusing when you receive a letter saying what your child's achievement is and when a child who doesn't participate counts as a "did not meet standards" instead of a "did not participate." The MCAs really are about district-level decisions, though, which is why some school districts give teachers a bonus if their students perform well (talk about incentivizing teaching to the test...).

When we assess all children based on the state standards, we can see if we're covering all of those standards in our instruction. For example, if all of the children in a district are unable to "demonstrate understanding of figurative language" (standard 3.1.8.1), then the district needs to look at how it is teaching figurative language. If some children can demonstrate understanding of a metaphor and others can demonstrate understanding of a simile, the teachers and school leadership can look at how they are teaching figurative language and why only some of the concept is being understood. This is valuable information! It is good that we know what children are understanding about the content they are taught. And the concept of knowing whether a child, in the aggregate or individually, is meeting state standards or not is also valuable information. Because the tests really aren't about achievement, even if that's the perception we hold: they're about whether or not a child has proficient understanding of the material they are expected to be taught in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade or 6<sup>th</sup> grade or 11<sup>th</sup>. At Cornerstone, though, we know that children won't all learn the same information at the same time, nor will they be ready for the same information at the same time. A 4<sup>th</sup> grader might not yet be interested in sorting quadrilaterals in a hierarchy (standard 4.2.4.3), but in 5<sup>th</sup> grade they are all about geometry. And the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade standard of "using addition and subtraction...to create short-term and long-term spending and saving goals" (standard 3.3.5.13) might not be at all meaningful to a child who hasn't yet had experience with money.

Where does this leave us, then, knowing that we do want the information that the MCAs provide but also knowing that they really aren't the best judge of what a child knows? To be clear, if I actually had the answer to this, I would be in a different job right now, one that might pay more. But what I do know is that the way we handle them at Cornerstone is probably the right way: we take them seriously (it's good to show what we know), but not too seriously (it's okay to not know everything). And for the district-level concerns, we pay attention to the big gaps – does everyone know how to "make observations of plants and animals" (standard 0L.1.2.1.2)? – but not to the

ones that reflect the three-year cycle of our instruction (maybe “investigable questions...about the changes in energy, related to speed” (standard 5P.1.1.1.1) is something that it’s okay to learn in 6<sup>th</sup> grade).

Over the next few weeks, if your child is taking the MCAs, it’s a great opportunity to take a deep breath and remind them that they can show what they know but don’t need to stress over it. And for those of us at school, it’s also a great opportunity to remember that our job is to follow the child.

Happy spring,  
Alyssa

## Toddler Community



The Toddler Community has been busy this month! With many transitions over the winter, both into Children's House and into our community, for the first time all school year we have a full roster of twelve with ages spanning from 16 months to 2.5 years. With such a breadth of age and development it has been enjoyable to watch the children interact with each other and help each other. Some of our seasoned toddlers have taken to helping their newer classmates with things such as handwashing, cleaning up, and getting dressed.

With the snow gone from our yard the toddlers have been enjoying riding tricycles, drawing with chalk, and running after bubbles during recess. With temperature and mud fluctuations they have still been wearing their snow pants for recess and we ask that on cooler days if they are coming with raincoats instead of winter coats that they have a sweater as well so they don’t get cold. We are as eager to see the plants in our yard sprout and bloom as the children have been.



## Children's House 1

Hello CH1 Families,

We've had a really great month in the entertainment! The children are becoming more independent and confident in their work, which has been so nice to see. They've been especially interested in practical life material and in the language area, and we're seeing lots of growth in both.

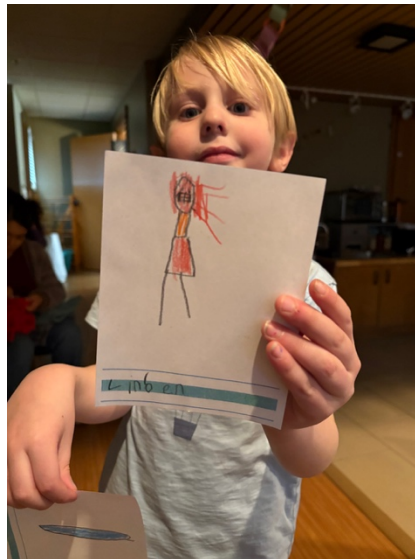
We're also continuing to work on kindness and taking turns.

Reminders:

- We are a sugar-free school; we are seeing some children come in with candy
- We've been seeing more toys come to school. Please keep toys at home.
- For safety, we do not allow open-toed shoes.

Thank you for all your support - we love working with your children! Happy Spring!

Claudia



## Children's House 2

Enjoy some pictures from the Children's House 2 team!





## Lower Elementary – Garden

What does practical life look like in the elementary classroom? When children are in the Children's House, they work on building skills such as pouring, cutting, and washing in isolation. As they grow older, they apply these skills to care for themselves, their peers, and their classroom environment. At the end of the work cycle, children put away their materials, which may include sweeping up scraps on the floor with a broom. Children take on daily jobs, like watering the plants, feeding the axolotl, wiping the windows, sorting the pencils, organizing the shelves, and washing the tables. Sometimes, through their research, children find recipes. With some careful planning and preparation, they work together to make something tasty - like freshly squeezed lemonade - for the whole community.



This month, we started reading *The Land of Stories: The Wishing Spell*, the first book of the popular series by Chris Colfer. It's been such a delight watching the children react to the many funny and intense moments of the story - such as when the trolls and goblins were chasing Alex and Conner, the main protagonists of the story - and making beautiful connections to the text as we go. The children have been eager to share their ideas about the characters, setting, and plot while also using their imaginations to explore the fairy tale world through the eyes of two young adventurers.



## 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 work, that tendency we have to put things into action, often using our hands.

Work doesn't always sound like the most fun thing to do, but for Dr. Montessori work could be reading a good book, playing music, or any other activity that engages the mind through activity. Even work that might not initially seem particularly joyful, like learning how to add and subtract fractions, can feel satisfying through the magic of materials to move around, good company, and a growing feeling of mastery.

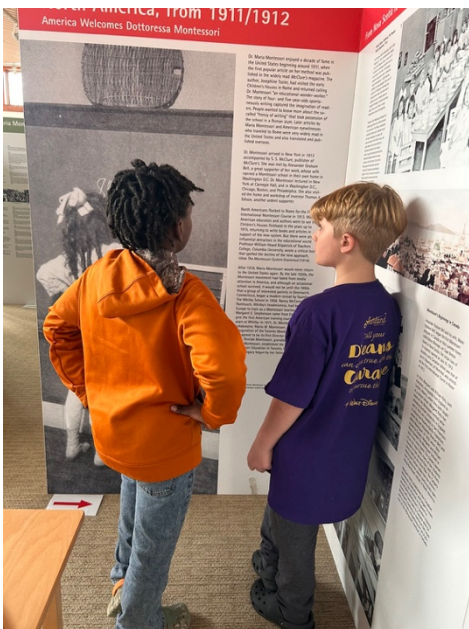


This is where the Human Tendencies can start to blend together as well. The desire to perfect leads to work, which leads to perfection, which leads to growing confidence to take on more work. Free communication in the classroom makes work more enjoyable to do, as children chat about

their stories and decide that the *carrotcter* (carrot character) from one person's story should get a cameo in everyone else's story. The class builds a shared sense of concentration, and a happy buzz develops as children enter a collective flow state of concentration, building their sense of self through work, together.



## Upper Elementary - Marsh



As we move into spring, growth is all around!

As a community, we continue to grow in flexibility due to our continued displacement. Our home classroom is still affectionately called Swamp until repairs are completed - hopefully in the next month? - and we continue to work out of the lecture room, affectionately called Highland Hills. Liza, the executive director of MCM, was kind enough to prepare a pancake breakfast at the end of the month to thank us for our flexibility.

We are also reflecting on our growth as we prepare for conferences on April 1 and 2. Every child has been thinking about their work, their growth and progress, and their goals for the future. Conferences are such a fabulous opportunity for them to share with their families and for me to help them celebrate their growth!

We are wrapping up our Book Clubs, eagerly updating March Mammal Madness brackets, trading goods during Imaginary Island work, learning scientific notation, using rulers to measure precisely, learning calligraphy, examining the periodic table, doing math with negative numbers and fractions, and exploring rocks and crystals - among many other things! We also finally received ants to populate our ant farm (they were delayed in shipping because of temperatures) and watching them build tunnels is fascinating.

I'm looking forward to checking in during conferences with every family before Spring Break - and then seeing everyone again afterwards in mid-April. Happy growth to all!



## Upper Elementary - Forest



It is March in Minnesota. That means unpredictable weather and a lot of exciting nature to explore. Many children in Forest have been curious about pond life and the migrating birds that are returning. We have been investigating the needs of plants and conducting some experiments with plants inside the classroom. We hope to be planting and transplanting some things into our outdoor container gardens very soon. All of the children are working hard on big projects and preparing for conferences. They are eager to share their work and demonstrate the variety of learning that has been happening this year.

This month I had the privilege of sharing my favorite book with the children during read aloud, *A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeline L'Engle. It was a joy to share a story that is close to my heart. I shared with the class that I read it first in about 6th grade and it opened up the world of fantasy writing for me. As we were reading the children recognized several pop

culture references that come from this book, written in the 1960s! Some of them were surprised to learn that they could enjoy a book that was written so long ago!



## 1611 Spotlight

Hello everyone! My name is Sulmy and I've been blessed to be a part of the Cornerstone Montessori family as a Paraprofessional for the Lower Elementary for over 6 years. I feel incredibly inspired working with children each day and being part of such a supportive and caring community. I find my work with children deeply fulfilling and one of the most enriching experiences helping them grow, learn, and feel empowered in themselves everyday. Outside of work I recently got engaged which has been such an exciting and special time in my life and I also became a first time home



owner! I'm looking forward to this new chapter and all the joy it will bring! I also treasure spending time with family and loved ones, taking my dog on nice long walks, going to soccer games and just living life day by day. I am grateful to be a part of this amazing community and appreciate the opportunity to connect with both children and families everyday.



*Editor's Note: Sulmy joined us in the thick of Covid as the Pond on-site assistant and instantly made everything better. One staff member described her as, "a gentle fairy who landed here and brought us joy." Even in a non-pandemic environment, it's still true!*