

Cornerstone Monthly Newsletter

September 2026

Dear Families,

Welcome to another year of monthly newsletters! In these somewhat regular installments, you will receive updates and photos from the classrooms, some thoughts from me, news from the school in general, and a spotlight on one or two staff members, so that you can better know our community. The goal, though not always the outcome, is that you will receive these at the end of each month and not the beginning!



I don't have any brilliant thoughts to share right now, so I'm going to leave you instead with more pictures of toddlers, because that's really what you're here for. It's what I'm here for, too, to be honest.

Happy October – we're excited to see you at conferences later this month!
Alyssa



Toddler Community

Over the month of September, all of us in the Toddler Community settled into the new school year. We welcomed some new faces to the environment, including our wonderful classroom assistant, Katie. While there are still tears for some at drop off, the toddlers spend the day enjoying their work in the classroom and their play outside. Maggie has been enjoying using the training she completed this summer to give presentations of practical life and artistic expression. The youngest toddlers have enjoyed learning to arrange flowers and wash mirrors. The oldest toddlers have

enjoyed working with the clay that was added to the classroom and big works like scrubbing tables and washing cloths. We are hoping to add some new works to the classroom in the upcoming month.



As we enter colder weather, please make sure to send long pants if you have not yet done so. Long sleeve shirts are not suggested for those who cannot independently roll up their sleeves and the classroom is kept warm. During rainy weather, when the rain is not too hard, we will still be going outside so please send raincoats and boots on rainy days or send a pair to leave at school. The toddlers love watching the rain and it is important for them to experience the joy of feeling the rain and splashing in puddles.



Children's House 1



Happy October CH1 Families,

The start of the school year has been amazing! We are so proud of how everyone has been settling into our classroom environment and learning our daily routines. It has been so special to watch the children become more comfortable and confident each day.

The children are beginning to build meaningful connections with the adults in the classroom as well as with their peers. We are seeing friendships form, children helping one another, and so many moments of kindness throughout the day.

As everyone becomes more familiar with the Montessori environment, we are seeing more independence, concentration, and

excitement during the work cycle. The children are learning how to care for their environment, make choices, and become an active part of our community.

Maria Montessori reminds us, **“The child is both a hope and a promise for mankind.”** We see this beautiful idea every day as the children grow, connect, explore, and discover their own abilities.

These first few weeks are not just about learning classroom routines they are about building a strong foundation where each child feels safe, valued, capable, and connected.

Thank you for trusting us with your children and for partnering with us as we begin this school year. We are so excited to watch them grow and see all the learning, independence, friendships, and joy that this year will bring!

Claudia



Children's House 2



What a wonderful start to the year! Our first weeks have been about welcoming new children into the community, getting to know one another, and practicing the everyday routines that help a classroom run smoothly and joyfully. You may hear children talk about “getting a presentation,” which is what we call a first demonstration of how to use a material. After a presentation, your child is free to choose that material whenever it is available and to work with it for as long as desired before returning the material to its spot in the environment, ready for the next child. This process is called the child’s “cycle of activity,” and is one of the many ways children build their executive functioning skills in the Montessori environment.

We have also been offering “Grace and Courtesy” lessons, which are short dramas presented to young children in neutral moments to



introduce and practice language used in social interactions, such as “How to Introduce Yourself,” “How to Ask for Help,” or “How to Offer a Hug.” As with any presentation, children are encouraged to repeat/practice many times whenever they like, and repetition builds confidence and the ability to use the specific language in the real-life moment.

Our adult team, from left to right, is Hana, Sara, Katte and Rachel. Rachel (mornings) and Sara Wade (afternoons) are co-leading the classroom while we

search for a permanent, full-time guide, and they will stay on through any transition so it is a gentle one. Katte returns for another year, and Hana, who just completed her Montessori 3-6 training, joins us as well.



The Theory Behind the Pedagogy

Each month, Sara Wade, long-time CMES guide and AMI Trainer in Training at the Elementary level, will share Montessori theory to set the foundation for the classroom updates that follow. This month, she describes the social nature of the elementary child.

In Montessori education we strive to prepare and provide environments in which children can develop to their greatest potential. Part of that preparation is understanding the needs of the child we are serving and supporting their natural characteristics. Dr. Montessori recognized that the elementary child has a unique set of characteristics and when supported these characteristics guide them in their natural development. One of the characteristics of the elementary child is a strong drive and need for social connection. All humans are social creatures, but the elementary child's social drive is unique and is a driving factor in their lives. The social drive is so strong in elementary children we often refer to it as a 'herd instinct.' We see that children of this age are

incredibly loyal to their peers and they care deeply for each other. For this reason the Montessori elementary environment is prepared so that social interaction and collaboration is supported and expected. The elementary child will find ways to communicate with and be with their peers, so we work with this natural drive, creating time and space for the children to work, grow, think, and learn together. We expect that the children will complete their work with partners and in small groups. They receive lessons in groups and are invited to work collaboratively throughout their day. This social environment allows the children to follow their natural drive while receiving guidance and support so that they learn how to collaborate effectively. Sometimes this means negotiation, compromise, and even conflict; all of which are great opportunities to build skills and learn how to truly collaborate. The mixed ages of the classroom support the social growth of the children, allowing natural leaders to emerge and for the children to learn from each other and create a community where everyone contributes and all have value.

Lower Elementary – Garden

"The crickets felt it was their duty to warn everybody that summertime cannot last for ever. Even on the most beautiful days in the whole year - the days when summer is changing into autumn..." (E.B. White, Charlotte's Web)



As the leaves turn and fall, Garden students have warmly welcomed the new school year and quickly settled into a beautiful routine. Our days are filled with excitement, laughter, and meaningful collaboration. First-year students have quickly embraced the elementary classroom by learning how to write in their work journals, gather materials from different shelves, and care for one another. Older children have taken the younger children under their wing by showing them how to do something new in the classroom or inviting them to play a game on the recess field. Children have come

together to create animal posters, craft imaginative stories about Pete the Cat, explore the states of matter through hands-on demonstrations, illustrate the diversity of life from the Timeline of Life, move models of hierarchical categories around the room for classmates to discover, and collect varieties of leaves from outside to investigate. The class worked together as a whole group while preparing for Peace Day by graciously sharing and listening to one another's ideas for what hand actions we'll use for the song "Peace Like a River." It's just been an absolute joy watching the children genuinely seek opportunities to help each other and learn from their peers!

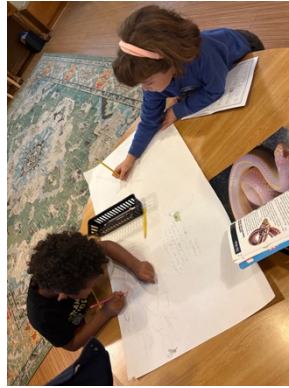
This month, we have been reading the classic *Charlotte's Web* by E.B. White. Although most children are familiar with the story, they have been delighting in hearing about life on the Zuckermans' farm with Wilbur the Pig, Charlotte the Spider, the Geese, the Sheep, and of course Templeton the Rat. Children have been especially tickled by the discovery of a garden spider that has spun her





own web outside the back window of the classroom. Naturally, she goes by the name of Charlotte, and she seems to make an appearance promptly every afternoon at 1:00 when read-aloud begins. We truly believe she is there to listen to the story with us -- which is absolutely *terrific terrific terrific*!

Favorite songs this month in Garden: *Peace Like a River* (traditional song), *The Planet Song* by Hopscotch, and *One Day* by Matisyahu.



Lower Elementary – Pond



Families who have been reading my newsletters for a while will know that it never ceases to amaze me the way an idea will ripple across the classroom, and this year has been no different. In Montessori we try to avoid telling the whole class to do the same thing at the same time, so you can imagine my amusement when I looked around the room these past couple weeks only to realize that every student HAD just chosen to read at the same time. Some students were reading to themselves, some to each other, and some with an adult, but every student had a book out to read.

The social instinct of elementary children has also shown up in the interactions between new and returning students. It's very heartwarming to watch older students welcome new students into work that they're excited about, and often very gratifying when

the work is something that was a struggle for them in the past. I've had the joy of watching everything from guided reading, division lessons, origami presentations, read alouds, weaving demonstrations, multiples help, and more over the past few weeks, and I know we're only getting started!

This influence doesn't just flow from older to younger students, and it's also been fun to watch the burst of energy around research that started with a couple students, and then flowed to almost every corner of the classroom on topics ranging from big cats, the elements, and space. Similarly, a group of students inspired by a few key details from our read aloud book set about drawing their

ideal houses on different planets in our solar system. And of course, when our class snake Mango is on the move, everyone needs to gather to see what she'll do next.



Upper Elementary – Forest



We have had a great start to the year in Forest. As a get to know you introduction to our classroom, we grouped the students into a mix of new and returning children. They spent two weeks interviewing each other, recording results, and then creating something to present to the rest of the class. It was a great way to see collaboration immediately between new peers, see bonds form through the process, and have the whole class get to know each other.

The synergy elementary children receive from collaborating on work is fun to watch. Someone will say, "I'm really interested in looking at pond water." Immediately, a few surrounding students will say, "That sounds interesting, me too!" A project is launched, and the unique qualities of each child involved expands the initial idea; "looking at pond water" turns into an elaborate plan that involves comparing, monitoring, microscopes, cleaning the pond, etc. In another example, a child wanted to read a poem out loud for Peace Day. Her friend joined, and they decided to write an original poem instead. Another friend joined, and they added a translation of their original poem in Spanish. They work together, and in doing so, expand their ideas and create work that each on their own hadn't imagined.

Our fall read aloud book is *Percy Jackson, The Lightning Thief* by Rick Riordan. It is a fictional story of a boy who is half human half Greek god, and his quest to save the world from conflict. The story is riveting, and the children are enjoying it. It has also sparked a class-wide interest in Greek mythology; the classroom's "Greek Myths" book hasn't been on the shelf since the school year began.





Upper Elementary – Marsh



The Marsh community in September has been living proof of the important collaborative work typical of the second plane. We welcomed many new children to Marsh this month, and it's been delightful to watch new friendships develop. Children have been sharing their skills so we see daily examples of them teaching each other! Many children are working together to master handwork like knitting, crocheting, and making dragon puppets. We've seen collaborations about peace posters, boat building, plans to clean the pond, a recycled fabric rug project, robot hands, board games, and group interviews with presentations. We are talking as a

community about differences between equal (equality) and fair (equity) and how to be a community where everyone gets what they need.



Work habits are a strong emphasis of the first month of school. Children have been developing skills of goal-setting, reflection, work balance, and following their curiosity to learn more about topics. As well as other work, children have also begun meeting in language groups and practicing many kinds of math. Our current read-aloud book is *Fifty-Four Things Wrong with Gwendolyn Rogers* by Caela Carter. The main character and narrator, Gwen, has many challenges in her life and her way of thinking about them has prompted many discussions about how people feel about themselves and what different people need.

1611 Spotlight

Longtime readers will know I love a good gimmick. As a devoted reader of the New York Times Vows section, I am always tickled when John Smith marries Jane Smith or Catherine Martinez marries Catherine Thomas. This month, we are embracing the gimmick and spotlighting two of our paraprofessionals who came to us as a couple, with nearly matching names!

Junie Elliott came to Cornerstone last fall, as a paraprofessional in Forest, where he continues to work. Here are 7 facts about Junie, in his words:

1. I grew up in Kailua Kona, Hawaii, followed by Duluth, Minnesota!
2. Outside of school I love to be outside and make art.
3. I love to cook – vegan food is my specialty.
4. I have 5 younger siblings
5. My favorite animals are skunks and cats.
6. I have many house plants I enjoy caring for!
7. My favorite foods are raspberries and veggie dumplings.

When we were looking for a new para to start the calendar year, Junie suggested his partner, June Remiker. June immediately became a fan favorite, floating between Lower Elementary environments. This year she has a permanent home base in Pond. June gave me more than 8 facts, so apologies, June, for matching your list to Junie's!

1. I play guitar in a punk band and recently started learning banjo.
2. I have over a thousand records.
3. I like to write poetry and love reading books.
4. I just finished a collection of essays celebrating tears.
5. I make lots of multimedia collages.
6. We're both vegetarian and huge animal lovers.
7. We love encouraging the children in their artistic endeavors.

Both June and Junie shared about their pets- two cats, Cherie and Hana, and a ferret (!) named Cowpoke.



Resources for Families

Hello families, my name is EG, I am the school social worker at Cornerstone Elementary. One of my skills is finding local resources to support our families! Please reach out for active links for resources relating to:

- free/affordable fall activities
- clothing, shoes, winter gear
- food
- housing, utilities, furniture, rent
- medical, dental
- mental health, substance use
- bus tokens, showering facilities
- holiday toys
- other miscellaneous resources

If you have needs that are not listed, please feel free to reach out and I'll see what I can do to help! contact me at egsaathoff@cornerstone-elementary.org