

## **Cornerstone Montessori Elementary School Board's Plan for Teaching and Learning**

### **Learning Program Description**

AMI (Association Montessori Internationale) was founded in 1929 by Dr. Maria Montessori to maintain the integrity of her work and her vision of education for children. Montessori as a name is not trademarked. In the Twin Cities alone, a Google search produced ten schools with Montessori in the title; however, that does not guarantee a rigorous commitment to Dr. Montessori's vision and principles in educating young people. By contrast, CMES hires only teachers who have been AMI certified, and CMES's Head of School, Liesl Taylor, is AMI certified, licensed by the state of Minnesota and taught in an AMI environment for over ten years prior to becoming Head of School. This level of rigor and consistency guarantees for families a high-quality authentic Montessori education.

Founded in 1907 by Dr. Maria Montessori (1870-1952), Montessori pedagogy educates children for life. Children have the freedom to explore and to develop their potential as they work with didactic materials, either independently or in groups, in a prepared environment. The Montessori Method is based in the concept of respect for self, others and the environment. Montessori classrooms are prepared to meet the developmental needs of the age span served within the environment.

The materials and furniture are designed for the child's physical needs (size and proportion) and psychological needs (areas of interest or skill development). Each prepared environment includes a full range of Montessori materials, a trained Montessori guide/teacher, and a trained assistant. The materials are designed to assist growth in practical life, sensorial, mathematics, language arts, music, art, science, history, and geography. The work the child performs with the materials is intended to develop mental and manual dexterity. While working with the materials the child develops concentration, self-confidence, respect, an understanding of order, and a joy of learning.

We believe that the child and his or her needs are the central and commanding focus of the learning process. It is the role of the teacher to observe, to know, and to defend the child as he or she proceeds through the stages of development.

We see in each child the future of our society, of our nation, and of our planet. The child in the process of fundamental development has unlimited possibilities, and the future rests on our ability to cultivate and nurture these potentials.

We believe that the learning process is governed by certain basic human tendencies or needs:

- The need to communicate, to use language
- The tendency for order: the need to organize, classify, and interpret reality
- The need for independence and activity, the drive to work constructively and purposefully
- The need for social relationships

In a Montessori school, the outdoor environment is considered an extension of the indoor environment. While there is a scheduled time for large motor activities that encourage collaborative group play and allow children to gain an understanding of the rules and movements associated with a variety of sports, the space is used not only during recess. The outdoor environment is also a “work space” that can be used during the Montessori work-cycle. Throughout the day and with the accompaniment of an adult, children may work on materials, garden, or simply explore the natural landscape of our outdoor space. We also offer the children a multi-purpose room to refine their large motor skills when weather keeps us from going outside.

The Montessori teacher facilitates activities within the environment while modeling respectful behavior. The teacher is not the center of the learning process, but rather helps guide each child while also respecting his/her choices. The teachers help the children reach their full potential by guiding them towards materials that meet their developmental needs and current interests. Individual and group lessons are varied and designed to meet each child’s learning style and pace. The teacher observes the children often and plans lessons based on his/her observations of the needs and interests of an individual or group.

Within the multi-age community, older children often serve as teachers and mentors for the younger children. These children share their experiences by helping others. This process not only helps create a sense of community and interdependence, but also reinforces previous learning for the older children. Self-direction encourages trust, acceptance, and non-competitiveness. The materials, teacher, and children’s community come together to assist the child in developing a strong self-image and sense of self-esteem, which is critical when building an attitude of learning and exploration to last a lifetime.

### *Children’s House (Kindergarten)*

Kindergarten is part of our Children’s House program, which in partnership with Cornerstone Montessori School – a private, preschool – serves children from the age of 33 months to 6 years. Cornerstone’s two Children’s House environments will have up to 30 children when at full capacity with 10 children enrolled in Kindergarten at CMES and the other children enrolled in the private preschool program. Each environment has an AMI-trained guide/teacher along with an AMI-trained assistant and an aide. Either the trained assistant or the aide is a native Spanish-speaker.

This program is an all-day program. We offer a nutritious, catered lunch, which the children enjoy as a community. For much of the children’s day they may choose work within the environment. There is also group time for music, stories, movement, and games. Children have time to play outside at least once a day (weather permitting). There is also the opportunity to use an indoor large motor space.

Children are free to choose work from the beautiful and well-defined areas of the environment. The adults in the environment serve as Guides who show the children how to use the concrete materials. Working with the materials not only helps develop coordination, concentration, independence, and a sense of order; it also helps the child become more disciplined and

accomplished. Children in a Montessori environment usually have healthy self-esteem because they are helped to do things themselves. The children have ownership of the environment and take good care of it, returning materials with care.

The Children's House environment unifies the social, physical, and intellectual functioning of the child. We provide children with an early and general foundation that includes a positive attitude toward school, inner security, a sense of order, pride in the environment, curiosity, concentration, self-discipline, and a sense of responsibility for the self and for the group. Thus, through interacting with the Montessori environment, the child constructs him or herself in a positive manner. This benefits the child in school and in life.

Instruction occurs one-on-one and in small groups conducted at the child's pace. Montessori materials are organized in a logical, sequential nature, providing a structure that guides a child's discovery. A series of presentations, activities, and developmentally appropriate materials are designed to enable the child to master specific skills.

The Children's House environment is divided into four distinct areas:

**Practical life:** among other life skills, children learn how to wash, cook, sweep, plant, and sew.

**Sensorial:** children learn through sight, touch, sound, taste, and smell using binomial cubes, geometric shapes, constructive triangles, tasting bottles, and other materials that enable the child to classify, clarify, and comprehend the world.

**Language:** children are introduced to nomenclature and vocabulary through spoken-language games. They are also introduced to the 26 letters of the English alphabet and their associated sounds. With the help of a movable alphabet, children are able to write words, sentences, and stories. Reading quickly follows with materials that help explore grammar and the structure of language.

**Math:** children are taken from the concrete to the abstract through manipulation, experimentation, and invention by using math materials.

### *Elementary (Ages 6-12)*

From age six through age 12 – the elementary school years – the child is driven by a natural curiosity and tendency to explore the expansive interconnectedness within and across disciplines such as the arts, math, and social studies. Dr. Montessori used the term “cosmic education” to refer to this stage of education best fitting this period of child development. The Great Lessons are at the center of Montessori elementary education. These lessons are stories that explore the beginnings of the universe, the formation of the stars and planets, the progress of plant and animal life, the arrival of humans and language, and the origins of mathematics, geometry, and the sciences. From these stories the child develops sensitivity to the way things live, to the interdependence of life, and to the fundamental needs of human beings. Timelines, charts, and research cards of human needs help the child in independent study and inspire more research in geology, sciences, biology, geography, and history. Montessori elementary children use their imagination and reasoning minds to explore all the parts of the universe. They may be engaged in a variety of learning activities at the same time.

At the center of the Montessori elementary classroom is the well-trained Montessori teacher. This professional is an “enlightened generalist” with knowledge deep enough to know details that add to the Great Lessons and connect the details into a big picture across the disciplines. The teacher’s role is to be the storyteller of our history and our world, as we understand it, to inspire the children, and then to guide them in acquiring the skills to pursue their interests and to explore the relationships among the different subject matters. This teacher is also trained in areas of child development. Because the Montessori child spends three years in the same classroom environment, the elementary teacher can be keenly tuned in to the unique personality of each child. This sensitivity permits the teacher to guide each child into areas of natural interest. The teacher or guide is in communication with the child and the family to help the child maximize his or her educational opportunities.

Much of the work of the elementary child is collaborative. The child learns in partnership with others through small group lessons and projects. At different times, each child is both a teacher and a learner. Because each child spends three years in the same classroom environment, the children have the freedom to explore subject areas as they become interested in them. The teachers, through the use of daily observation notes, lesson planning, and assessments, track each child’s use of materials and progress within a subject matter. The teacher uses the child’s interest to guide him or her to an exploration of all subject areas. The subjects that are covered in the Montessori classroom include mathematics, geometry, language, geography, science, art, and music.

Living in the world for the elementary child also involves working actively to make it a better place. Care of one’s environment is built into the Montessori curriculum. Children are responsible for keeping the environment clean, caring for the animals, and providing for the needs of guests. CMES children will take responsibility for recycling programs in their classroom environments, help maintain the grounds and the garden, and help the school be more energy efficient.

The Montessori curriculum is developed and reviewed by an international committee and not set according to US academic standards. As a consequence, there are elements in the Montessori curriculum, such as finding the cube root of a 9-digit number, that are not part of our state or national standards; also there are elements of our Minnesota state standards, such as the study of simple machines, that are not covered by the basic Montessori curriculum. There are however, specific provisions made in the training of Montessori teachers to ensure that the state standards are met in the Montessori classroom. CMES staff will continually evaluate state standards and Montessori curriculum to ensure that children who graduate from a level (kindergarten, third, and sixth grades) have met the state required standards.

One of the guiding principles of Montessori education is the development of the whole person, with particular emphasis on the development of reason and the will, along with a lifelong love of learning. For this reason, children in a Montessori environment are expected to work at their own pace and have a major role in setting their own work schedule rather than just doing specific assignments given by the teacher. This vast amount of freedom given to the children is tempered by three very important limits: the public school curriculum, the daily work journal used by each

child to track his/her progress, and frequent individual meetings between the child and the teacher. The trained Montessori teacher is expected to help each child progress through the state public school curriculum, which is available in the classroom for the children to refer to in planning their studies. As part of each child's assessment (including standardized assessments, Montessori records, the child's work journal, and Montessori teacher's observation notes), the Montessori teacher reviews with the child where the child is in terms of development within the Montessori curriculum and state standards and sets goals with the child for further development. There is also a consideration given to the developmental level of the child; that is, more of the responsibility for covering the state curriculum falls on the teacher's shoulders in the early grades with the child taking more direct responsibility as she/he matures.