

Dear Families,

I observed Sara's Lower Elementary collectives this week and was blown away, as I always am when I observe our guides, by the engagement children showed in their follow-on work and the joy that pervaded the gathering. In just 20 minutes with each group of children, Sara determined where each child had understood (or not) the lesson watched the day before, recognized their work, and shared a song or experience that allowed the children to laugh and be together as children. I hope the "gems of the week" that we have shared in Stepping Stones have given you a similar sense of these connections and the embrace of cosmic education that continues, even during distance learning.

It has been nearly a year since the state of emergency in Minnesota was declared and schools were closed. This year has not been easy for anyone and I want to acknowledge once again the remarkable work that each of you is doing to keep your children learning and participating during this difficult time. The end is in sight, even as we continue to need to follow strict protocols to keep our community healthy.

As of this writing, 68% of CMES staff and contracted employees have been invited to receive or have already received at least one dose of the Covid vaccine. The remaining staff are waiting for invitations from the Minnesota Department of Health, through the vaccination lottery for educators. We expect that all staff who wish to be vaccinated will be at least partially vaccinated by mid-March. **This timeline will allow us to continue our plans to reopen the school fully after spring break, on April 12.** At that time, all children will be welcome to attend in person. Distance learning will continue to be offered for children/families who prefer to remain at home. In the coming weeks, we will be reaching out with additional questions and information, to determine who will return and who will continue distance learning, to establish bus routes, and plan the school meal program, among other items.

In order to be ready for children to return, we need time to prepare our building and our program. The Department of Education requires that we take 2-5 days. Given that our environments have not been used as typical Montessori environments in a year, we will likely need a full week to be ready. In this month's [survey](#), we ask your feedback about the most convenient week for school and on-site childcare to be closed, while recognizing that no week is particularly convenient for a closure. During the days that we are closed, children will not have lessons or assignments, and the staff will be busy cleaning and preparing the environments, lesson planning, coordinating specialist schedules, and training support staff for in-person learning.

The State of Minnesota has implied that schools will be given additional funding this year to provide summer programming. While we are waiting for further details about this funding, we are exploring the possibilities of supporting children on-site this summer. The February [survey](#) also asks for your input into such a program: would you want your child to attend, what would be your priorities, and so on.

As always, we appreciate your patience and understanding as we make our way through this school year. I encourage you to continue to reach out directly whenever you have questions or concerns and we will work to get information and answers to you as efficiently as possible. As I wrote above, the end is in sight and we are so looking forward to returning to some sense of normalcy at 1611 Ames.

All the best,
Alyssa