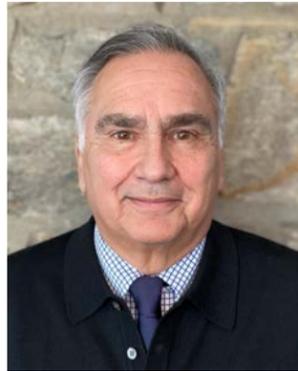




WE ARE THRIVING

FALL 2022



Dear Cornerstone Families and Friends,

I'm proud to share this Fall Newsletter with you as we recap the first quarter of the 2022-23 school year at Cornerstone Christian Academy.

Like the cover says, *We Are Thriving*.

As you will read in the pages to follow, this year is full of successes both big and small. Our campus has been bustling with activity and excitement as our programs—new and returning—have offered our students the chance to pursue their goals and interests outside of the classroom. The brand new Music Tech class gives Middle School students the opportunity to combine their love of music with cutting edge technology; The Common Place Orchestra offers stringed instrument lessons to all students from first through 8th grade; and our Dance Team and school choirs offer the chance for students to add a part of themselves to a collective group of praise and creativity. These extracurricular activities provide a palpable park on our campus and it is hard not to get swept up in the collective energy of our students and staff.

This year feels special.

That feeling stems from the success we have seen with our academic approach. This year's early MAP test scores (which stands for Measure of Academic Progress, and is conducted at Cornerstone every year in the Fall, Winter, and Spring) have shown that the hard work of our academic leadership, faculty, and students is paying off. These scores are truly a testament to Cornerstone's commitment to academic excellence, and our commitment to being a trauma-informed school that focuses on the whole child.

This newsletter provides a deep examination of that educational approach (which you can read about starting on page 4 of this Newsletter). You will hear about Principal Richell Manigault's approach to teacher professional development, and how it is helping to foster a community of trust and excellence among Cornerstone's faculty. You will learn about our Student Support Team, where School Counselor Meg Born, Dean of Students Kia Walker, our teachers, and specialists from CORA Services collaborate on identifying which of our students would benefit most from intervention, and how that is used to foster their academic growth.

You will see how our summer programs like K-3 Academy have positioned this year's Kindergarten class to learn and achieve at a faster pace than any in Cornerstone's recent history. You will find out what approaches, strategies, and tools—like IXL, and FUNdations—Cornerstone's educators have integrated into their teaching to result in these impressive academic outcomes.

WE ARE blessed to have a dedicated staff and faculty who provide so much of themselves in service of our students.

WE ARE certain that this year's academic success is a sign of things to come.

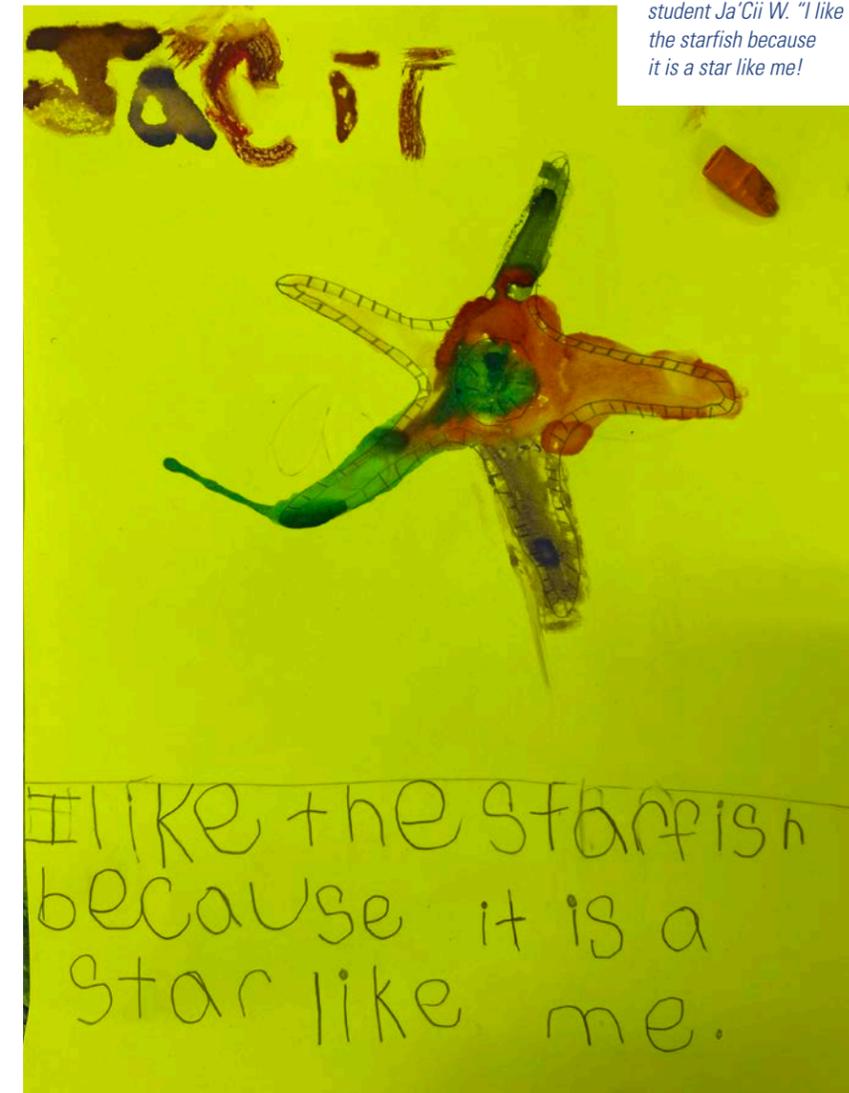
WE ARE thankful for our community of support. We recognize that our achievements are made possible thanks to your generosity, and hope that in sharing our success with you, it inspires your continued faithful support.

Sincerely,

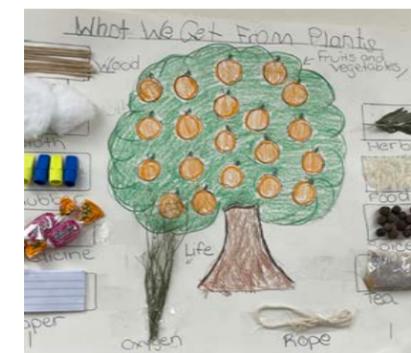
Robert M. Jara
President and CEO
rjara@cornerstonephiladelphia.com



Inside this Issue: Volunteers lend a hand on campus at our Fall Day of Service (Read more on page 14)



"Starfish" by Kindergarten student Ja'Cii W. "I like the starfish because it is a star like me!"



Above: Kindergarten poster projects as part of a lesson about trees.



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We Are Educators

How Cornerstone's approach to teaching the Whole Child is inspiring students and teachers alike.

Principal Richell Manigault writes neatly on a whiteboard in one of Cornerstone's classrooms, the words stand out in large, bold letters: *focus, grade level work, strategies for intervention, student voice*. While these are each important components of a successful learning approach, she isn't preparing to teach a class full of students. This lesson is geared towards teachers themselves, and is part of Cornerstone's ongoing Teacher Development—a program that Principal Manigault implemented for all faculty members when taking the role in 2021.

"I was a teacher first, and I know the concerns that most teachers have," she shares. "Support, collaboration, and ongoing training is essential."

Over the past several years, dating back to 2015, Cornerstone has been making a concerted effort to equip our learning community—teachers, support staff, students, and their families—with new practices, tools, and strategies. By using research-driven data and taking a collaborative approach, the aim is to address areas of need in an efficient and productive way, resulting in the best possible academic outcomes for our students.

And so far, all signs indicate Cornerstone is succeeding.

"We do measure quantitative data with standardized tests like MAP and the PSSAs," Mrs. Manigault says, "but I also focus on our students' voices. When I hear a student say 'keep trying, remember the process. You just can't quit!' I know our approach is working. That means as much to me as any test score."

Cornerstone's Approach

In addition to the increase in teacher professional development and coaching, Cornerstone has introduced many different tactics and tools to achieve successful academic outcomes. These include technology tools like **IXL**, which is an online platform that offers math and reading tutorials, and is used by students every day; **Guided Reading** helps students focus on core skills like phonics, fluency, and comprehension; and **Small Group** work in Math and Reading, where students work in cohorts within their class to target their specific learning style and level.

Other tactics extend beyond the classroom. Cornerstone has recently expanded its educational offering during the summer months by requiring all incoming Kindergarten students to attend **K-3 Academy**, and encouraging attendance at **Summer Enrichment** for students of all grade levels.

Academic intervention is also supported by the school's partnership with **CORA Services**, a non-profit service organization which provides Cornerstone with Reading and Math Specialists, a Speech and Language Therapist and School Psychologist—provided through Act 89 and Title I funding.

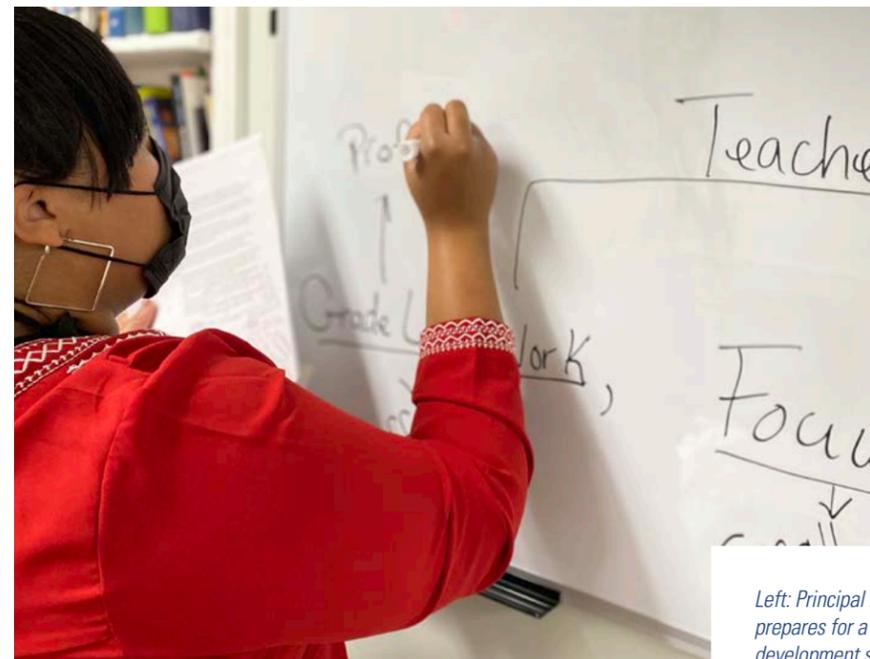
While these tools target specific learning needs, and work in concert with the in-class curriculum to boost our students' aptitude, the overarching component to Cornerstone's successful educational approach is rooted in our commitment to **Social/Emotional Learning** and teaching "the whole child."



Above: Second grade teacher Narda Cooper leads a Small Group reading exercise.

“We're looking deeper, at what's going on. What can our students do and how can we help? We are concerned with their soul and their mind.”

- NATASHA GRANT, 8TH GRADE/MIDDLE SCHOOL SCIENCE TEACHER



Left: Principal Richell Manigault prepares for a professional development session with Cornerstone faculty.



“ Seeing our students engaged is a key indicator of their social and emotional health. They engage because they are comfortable, and because they are building confidence to advocate for themselves and to not give up when something is hard. ”

- MEG BORN, SCHOOL COUNSELOR

Teaching the Whole Child

Spearheaded by Cornerstone’s academic leadership, the school introduced its **Trauma-Informed** approach in 2015. Teachers attended a four-day training on strategies and core **Responsive Classroom** skills, focused on teaching skills like self-awareness, social interactions, and problem solving. Some of the tactics involved include morning meetings, interactive modeling, and using specific teacher language. Ongoing training followed, as new studies from the *Center for Responsive Schools* provided new strategies and updates to the recommended approach.

During her weekly classes with all students K-8, Meg Born, Cornerstone’s School Counselor, uses the **Second Step** curriculum to teach life skills such as managing one’s emotions, having empathy for others, resolving conflicts, solving problems, and goal setting. These skills are the focus of the Responsive Classroom strategies that permeate Cornerstone’s school culture. “Teachers are trained to find out what is causing a specific behavior before applying a consequence,” explains Cornerstone’s Dean of Students, Kia Walker. “We ask ourselves, does this student need a consequence or do they need help?”

During one summer session leading into the start of the school year, the entire Cornerstone staff read *The Deepest Well* by Dr. Nadine Burke-Harris, a central step in the collective understanding of

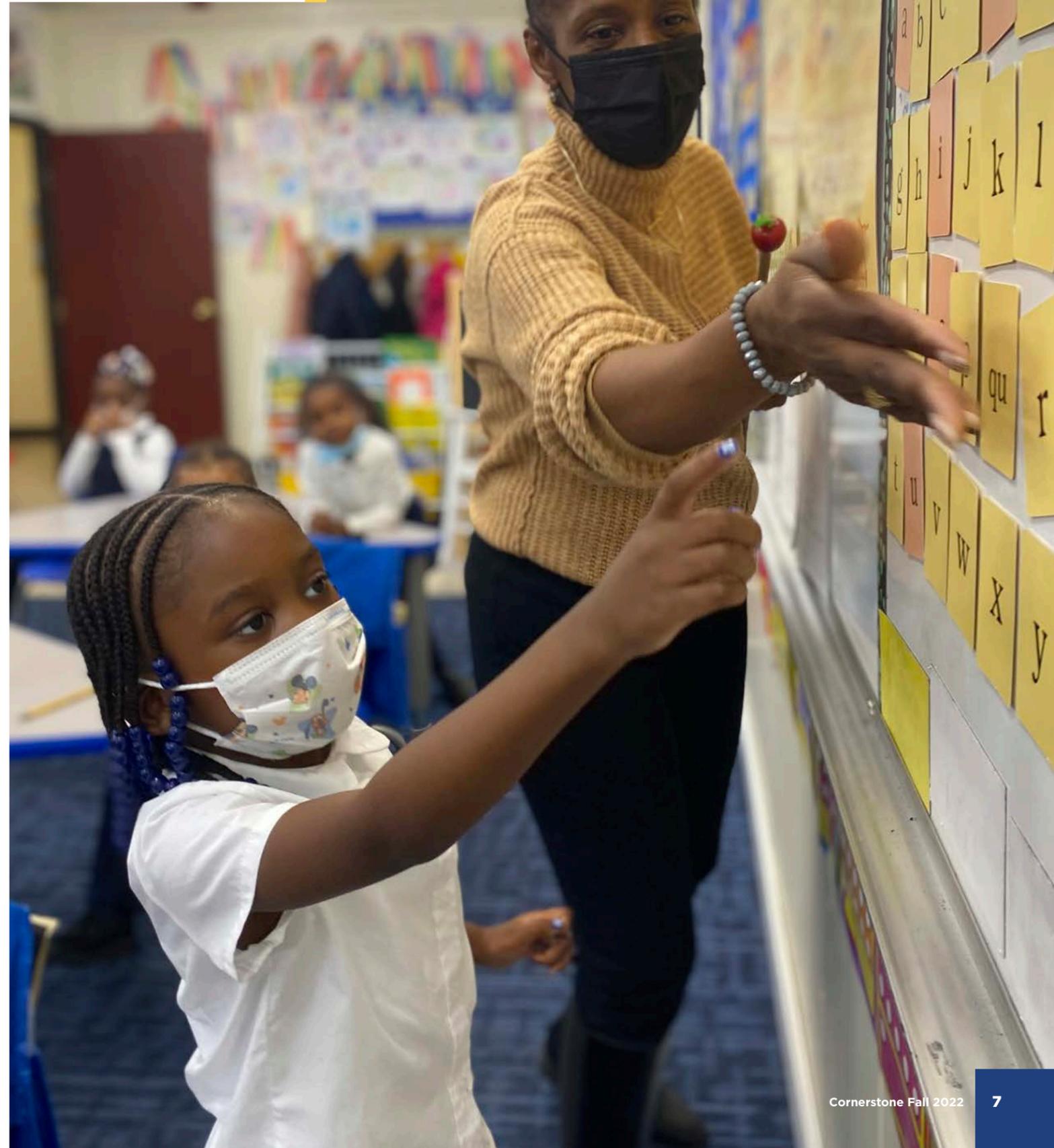
The ACES Study. This study illustrates that the more adverse childhood experiences one has, the greater the learning ramifications they are prone to face. This study was the start of Cornerstone’s faculty taking the time to use research-based analysis to understand the importance of student-to-teacher relationships.

This trauma-informed approach has helped to build a sense of community between faculty and students, as teachers are now able to better relate to their students through conversations and positive interactions. The question is now being framed to students as “what has happened to you,” instead of, “what is wrong with you?”

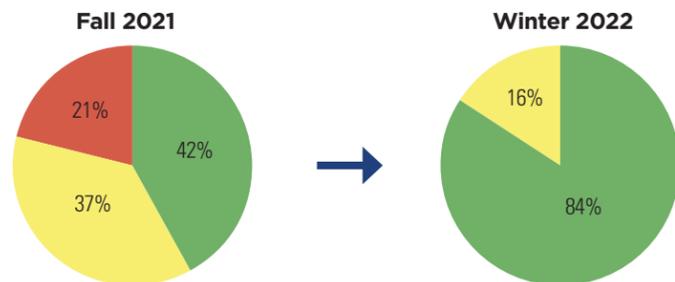
“This is crucial to our approach—when it comes to academic success and behavioral issues, one impedes the other,” shares Ms. Walker. “Negative classroom behavior may be seen as a cry for help, and could point to an issue outside of the classroom. Once we can identify and attempt to address that cause, we can understand why and how it’s affecting the student socially, emotionally, and academically.”

Mrs. Born offers a visual breakdown of this correlation: “I teach the hand model of the brain,” she explains. “Make a fist, and picture the base of your hand by the wrist as the Downstairs Brain. This drives our core survival functions—and it is our emotion center. If our Downstairs Brain is agitated or frustrated, it is difficult or impossible for our Upstairs Brain—the fingers

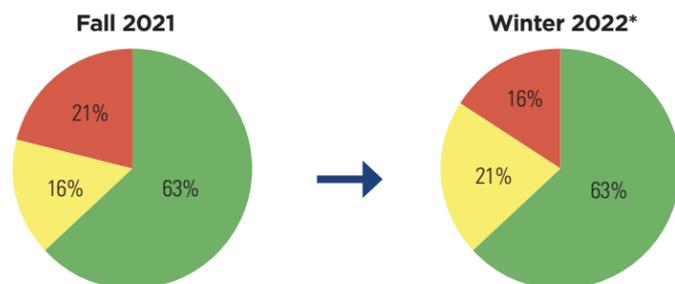
Mrs. Baldwin leads hands-on learning during FUNdations in Kindergarten. “Understanding what we’re doing helps our students help themselves.”



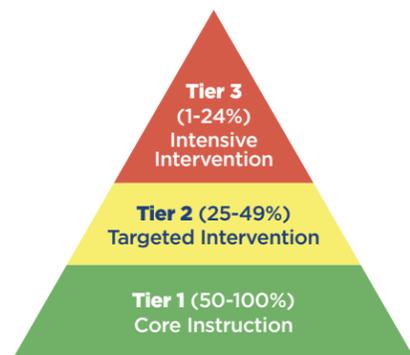
Kindergarten Reading Percentiles



Kindergarten Math Percentiles



*See reference on page 8.



in our visual model—to function clearly. And it is in this Upstairs section of the brain where we think, remember things, make choices, and learn.”

Part of the way Cornerstone fosters a healthy mental balance is in building a **Growth Mindset**. The key to this mindset is a focus on what Mrs. Born refers to as the power of the word ‘yet’. “I practice, I ask for help, I try again. It is not that I don’t understand it. It’s that I don’t understand it yet.”

It is no coincidence then, that one of the most often-repeated lines of scripture at Cornerstone is Philippians 4:13: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

Data-Driven Intervention

Perhaps the most concrete representation of Cornerstone’s approach and commitment to student academic success is the **Student Support Team**, or SST. Coordinated by the School Counselor, the SST is comprised of Cornerstone’s Principal, Psychologist, Reading and Speech Specialists, and Dean of Students. Meetings are weekly, and one grade is discussed per week, with that classroom’s teacher in attendance. The purpose of these meetings is to discuss the **Action Plan** for students who have been identified and referred to the group as needing support.

Crucially, an Action Plan is not an IEP (which sets specific goals for students with diagnosed learning needs and provides dedicated support to that student). Action Plans are a way for the SST to determine what the teachers and specialists want to focus on—such as reading skills—and to decide what interventions are necessary to best support the student.

“The SST gives us paperwork and a track record,” says 8th grade Science Teacher, Natasha Grant. “Having documentation provides some quantitative observations and allows us to reference the numbers.”

While Action Plans are reserved for academic and learning challenges, social/emotional concerns play a role in how faculty should observe quantitative data, such as MAP scores.

The Kindergarten Math Percentiles chart (found on page 6) is an example of reading statistics through a trauma-informed lens. While the numbers show the same number of students maintaining a Tier 1 result from Fall to Winter, our faculty can use their knowledge of individual students’ situations to recognize that the three students who regressed over this span, did so due to traumatic life events outside of the classroom. Growth occurred on individual bases but was mitigated in the aggregate due to extenuating personal circumstances.

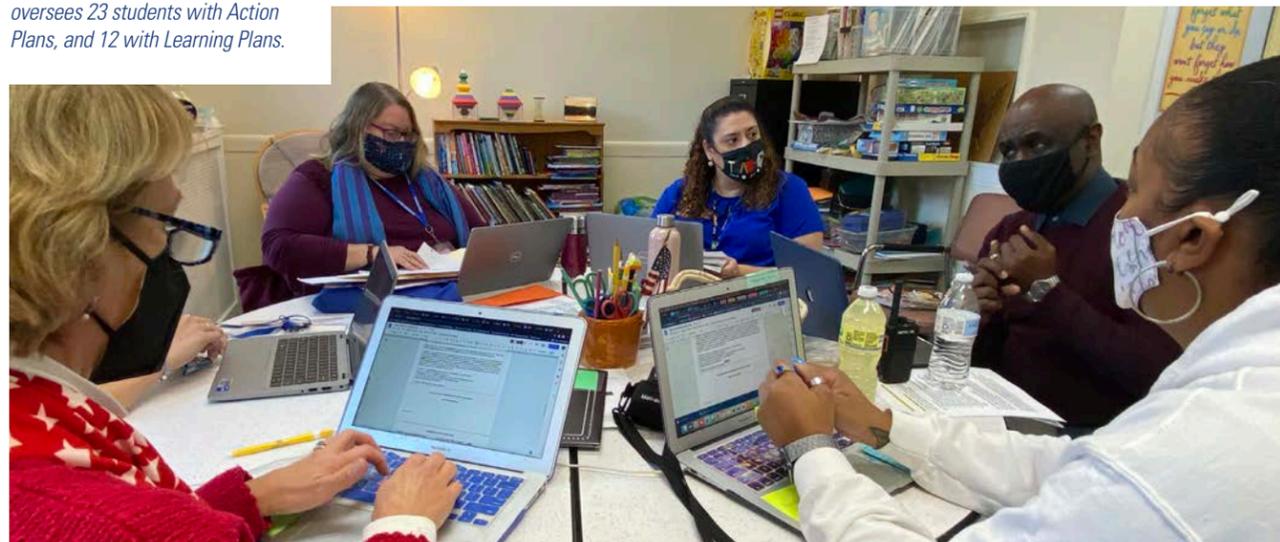
“Sharing our knowledge of students that are dealing with traumatic issues gives us (on the SST) advanced notice on how to approach their individual situation,” says Kindergarten teacher Pamela Baldwin, who praises Cornerstone’s approach and resources. “How many inner-city schools have 5-days per week intervention, a school psychologist, and school counselor at their disposal? It’s a real benefit to our students.”

“Other schools don’t have this team approach” agrees School Psychologist, Deb Miller who has worked with Cornerstone through CORA, and its predecessor, Elwyn. “Some schools attempt a similar approach but are not successful. Elwyn had 12 schools in a pilot program, but at the end, only Cornerstone was doing an active, solutions-focused Student Support Team.”

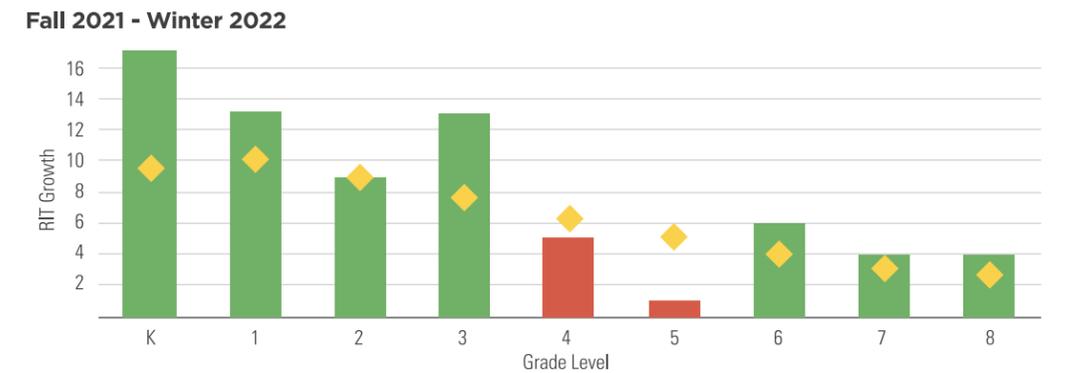
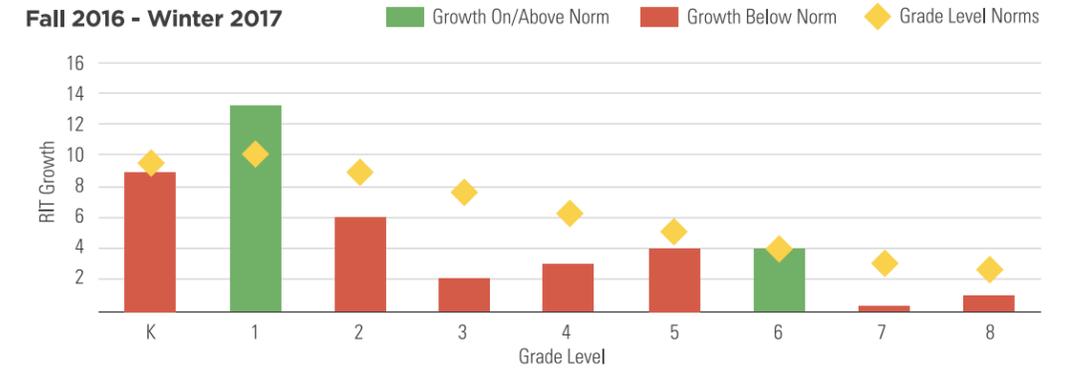
“Students here feel safe, loved, and supported. They know they can always go to the teacher for help. A lot of parents want their children here for that reason.”

- DEB MILLER, SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST

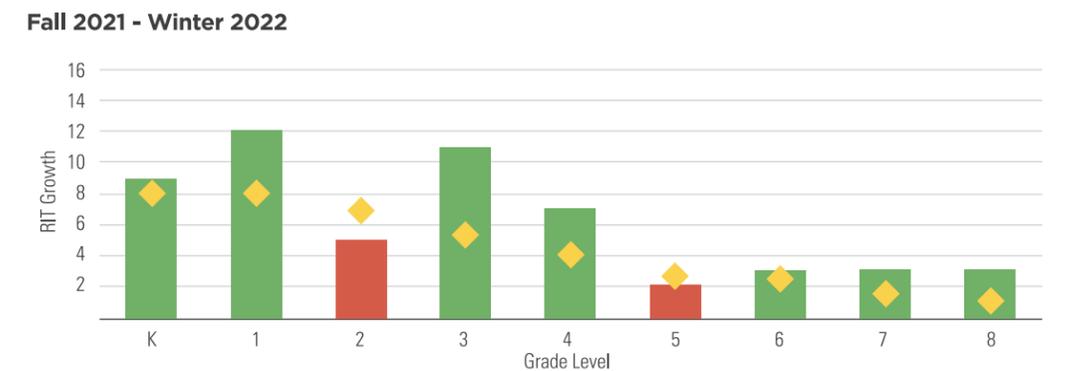
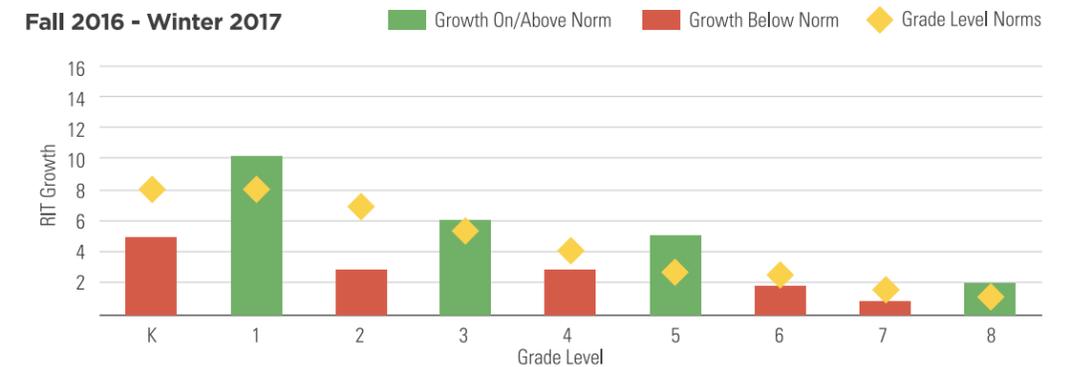
Cornerstone’s Student Support Team oversees 23 students with Action Plans, and 12 with Learning Plans.



Reading | MAP Score Comparison



Math | MAP Score Comparison





Learning tools that Cornerstone has implemented in the last five years include FUNdations, and Wilson Reading—both of which have had an impact on students' reading skills.

Success in Growth

To hear Cornerstone's educators talk about how they gauge success, it can be defined as growth. And growth is a process.

"You have to trust the process to get where you need to go," says Mrs. Baldwin. "If I'm teaching my students to count a group of objects, I'll ask 'what is the first step in the order of this process?' And I find then that their answers are more accurate, because they understand *why* we are learning this way."

If the process of a Cornerstone education has a beginning step, it is most certainly Kindergarten. But it's the work that happens before our KinderBees' first day that truly sets the tone for their educational journey. This year, 10 of the 16 incoming Kindergarten students attended **K-3 Academy** over the summer, and that exposure to the classroom setting—and introduction to the concept of learning—has had an immediate and drastic impact.

"This year I am seeing children who are eager to learn and who have great prior knowledge coming into Kindergarten," she beams. "Their focus is better and their ability to redirect is better. We are able to accomplish so much more—I'm about a month ahead of my usual curriculum pace."

"The professional development and coaching that Mrs. Manigault has implemented over the last two years has created strong teachers," says Ms. Walker, echoing that Cornerstone's re-focused approach to teaching is making an

identifiable impact. "One of the things we learned was for our teachers to **SEE**—be Systematic, Explicit, and Effective—in how they present their lesson plans and interact with their students. I now see students who are more engaged and can more easily retain information."

These effects ripple upward, all the way to this year's 8th grade class. "As we've progressed through the years, Cornerstone graduates always get into some of the best high schools," shares Ms. Grant. "This year's class is motivated, they don't leave points on the table. I see that their inherent work ethic has been enhanced from their time at Cornerstone."

It is tempting to use statistics to try to tell the whole story, and in certain cases the story they tell is a compelling one (see page 9).

"I do believe that numbers talk," Mrs. Manigault admits. "MAP results and PSSA scores do matter, and we have to be able to judge ourselves by the accepted standard."

But she does qualify their importance, "Testing matters, but so does behavior and the quality of work our students are doing—it all makes up who a child is."

That dichotomy gets to the heart of what it means to teach the whole child, and comes close to summarizing Mrs. Manigault's educational philosophy. "Our children have to learn how to compete. How do you think, how do you process things, and solve problems? That is what I am after. You learn to read to then move on to bigger things in life. Our students have the ability to solve real world problems."

Staying Focused

When asked—amid all of the positive responses from students, parents, and staff and the quantifiable progress on display—what the biggest challenges are that lie ahead, Mrs. Manigault's answer is simple: time.

"Time is the biggest challenge. We can't rush this process. This takes work. For example, if we have a 5th grader coming in at a 3rd grade level, that is a year and a half needed in order to get them on grade level."

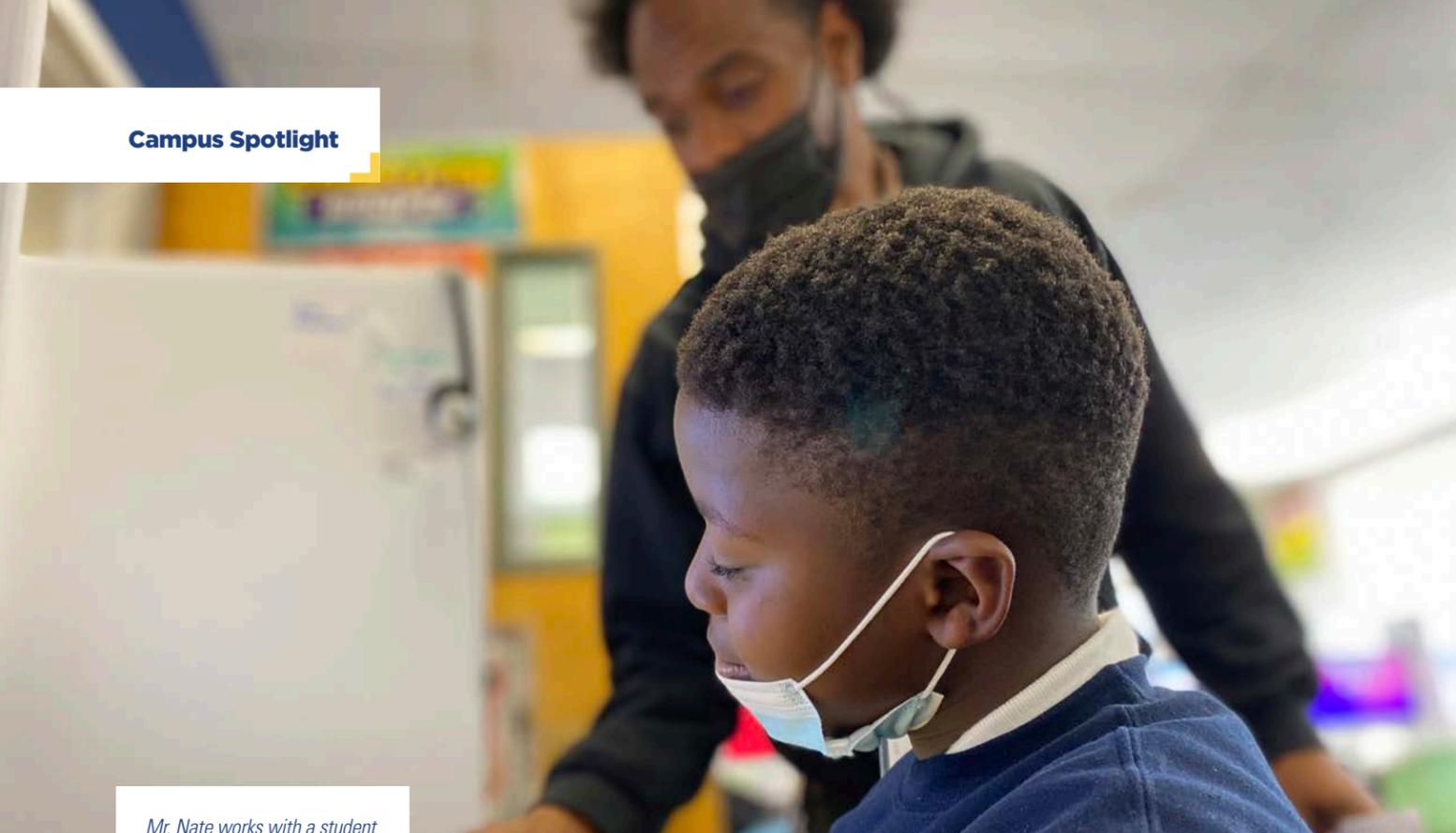
To continue this success will take a communal effort, and patience, and focus—there's that word again. Thankfully, there is buy-in, and trust, from the Cornerstone community.

"This is all about a community of support," says Mrs. Born. "We support one another and everyone has permission to try new things, to grow and learn together. It takes a special environment for people to be open to that."

"My greatest hope, and my greatest success," shares Mrs. Baldwin, "is when I see a student find their voice and come into their own. It's then I know that my work—our work—at Cornerstone has helped them to walk in the greatness of what they are called to be."

This school year is the first Kindergarten class with no Tier 3 students.





Mr. Nate works with a student during Technology class.

First Quarter in Review

Bringing the Beats: Students thrive in Mr. Nate's music technology class



Earlier this fall, Cornerstone welcomed Mr. Nathaniel Pyfrom as our new Technology teacher to start the 2022-23 school year. "Mr. Nate" has wasted no time in making his impact felt throughout the school, and has introduced a new **Music Technology class** for our 7th and 8th graders.

Click the QR code above to hear a sample of one of our 8th grade student's musical compositions.

In tandem with once-a-week technology classes, that focus on technological literacy and practical applications, the Music Tech class helps students in crafting unique musical compositions using music editing and production software.

As he shares, it's been an instant hit: "My students are so excited, they're already making amazing things. I can't wait to see what we produce over the course of this year."

Thinking Ahead: Middle School students attend High School Info Day

During High School Information Day 2022, Cornerstone welcomed representatives from Philadelphia high schools to answer questions and provide information about high school admissions and offerings.

Representatives from Monsignor Bonner and Archbishop Prendergast; Cristo Rey and The City School spent time over two sessions, interacting with and inspiring our Middle School students.

Cornerstone's Class of 2023 will spend this year determining which high schools they will be applying to, a process that will play out over the course of the entire school year. We want them to know that their future is in their hands—a concept bolstered by Mr. Gaines' presentation—which asked our students to consider the power of their choices.

High School Information Day is important for the lower grades of Middle School (5th and 6th) as well, as it is never too early to start thinking about life after Cornerstone. Events like this help drive home the importance of doing their best at all times—academically, spiritually, and interpersonally—to set up the brightest future possible.



Students pose for a photo with Mr. Joel Gaines of The City School and Mrs. Crummy-Brown of Cristo Rey.

String Theory: Making music with The Common Place Orchestra

This year, more Cornerstone students than ever are participating in The Common Place Orchestra—comprising fifty six of the 60 students currently taking violin, viola, and cello lessons for the 2022-23 school year.

The Orchestra has provided string instrument lessons for Cornerstone students (and others) since 2018. This year, the program has switched from small group lessons to a one-on-one learning experience. Making time for this extracurricular programming has been a priority for Principal Richell Manigault this year.

"The quality has been getting better and better," says Operations Director Elena "Nellie" Kauffman, who runs the program with her husband and Artistic Director, Joe Kauffman. "The students learn so much more with one-on-one lessons and individual attention."

Students are eligible to join the program starting in first grade, and instruction takes place during school hours for all students up to 8th grade.

In addition to weekly lessons, the Orchestra meets on Saturday mornings to practice as an ensemble, with students are working towards their performance at Cornerstone's Christmas Program on December 21st.



Lessons are held in the Performing Arts room of The Common Place.



Follow us at @ccaphilly

ccaphilly Dress Like a Teacher Day also means Cornerstone teachers get to dress like students! Way to take it to the next level Mrs. Lee, Ms. Ashleigh, Mrs. Jones, and Mrs. Cooper!!! #wearecornerstone
October 14



Volunteer Spotlight



Volunteers of all ages lend skills and smiles at Cornerstone's Fall Day of Service

Some of the most inspiring volunteer opportunities at Cornerstone are the quarterly Days of Service, where staff and volunteers gather to perform maintenance tasks around campus. The most recent event, Cornerstone's Fall Day of Service saw an impressive turnout of support from valued long-time partners, and new faces alike.

Friends from **Paoli Presbyterian Church, Lenape Valley Church, and Susquehanna University**, brought many dedicated and helpful hands to campus. In only a few hours, these energetic teams of volunteers helped us make an incredible impact on the students' learning environment.

It was extra special to see so many young people giving their time for service. Paoli Presbyterian brought two vans filled with youth volunteers, and Reverend Scott Kershner (pictured at right) led his team of Susquehanna University students in making the day a productive success.

Teams of volunteers repainted cubbies for the first and second grade classrooms, built furniture for Cornerstone's Advancement Office, hung wall-mounted screens in conference rooms and Computer Lab, and cleaned and beautified both indoor and outdoor spaces.

These days of service confirm that Cornerstone is indeed a community that reaches far beyond the campus walls. We are honored to work alongside such dedicated volunteers in service of our students.

If you or your organization are interested in becoming a Cornerstone volunteer, or to stay informed of all upcoming Days of Service opportunities, please contact Gayle Gaskin today at ggaskin@cornerstonephiladelphia.com.



Above: Volunteers from Susquehanna University. Below: Planting seasonal flowers around campus.



Cornerstone's Days of Service offer service opportunities for volunteers of all ages and abilities.



Cornerstone Donor Spotlight



Recently, Cornerstone Christian Academy received a generous gift to support student scholarship, through Harrisonburg Mennonite Church, in Harrisonburg, Virginia. This donation came from the estate of Susan Heatwole, a Harrisonburg congregant who sadly passed away earlier this spring.

Susan attended one of Harrisonburg's annual summer service trips to Cornerstone, and was thrilled to be a part of that tradition. She loved learning about our school first-hand, and meeting and interacting with members of the Cornerstone community, whom her gift supports.

As an individual, Susan highly valued learning and academic opportunity, and she delighted in the chance to be a part of Cornerstone's mission.

"She wanted to give a gift through Harrisonburg that would bring Good News to others in the name of Christ, and to extend her care for others through this gift to Cornerstone," says Mark Keller of Harrisonburg and a friend of Susan's. "This gift is special to our personal connection to Susan through the life of the congregation and friendship."

For information on Planned Giving, please contact Cornerstone's Director of Advancement, Lauren B. Maloney at lmaloney@cornerstonephiladelphia.com.

Ways to give to Cornerstone

Your generous financial contributions are essential to our continued growth. See below for all ways to support Cornerstone, including online at [wearecornerstone.com/donate](https://www.wearecornerstone.com/donate).

CHECKS AND ONLINE GIFTS

The most direct way to give:

Cornerstone Christian Academy,
P.O. Box 5520
Philadelphia, PA 19143.

You can also give online via credit card or electronic fund transfers (EFT).

RECURRING GIFTS

When making an online gift, you also have the option to set up a recurring gift on a monthly, quarterly or annual basis.

TAX CREDITS

Through the PA-EITC and PA-OSTC programs, individuals and businesses can direct your state taxes to support scholarships at Cornerstone.

GIFTS OF STOCK & SECURITIES

Contact your broker to make a gift of stock or securities to Cornerstone.

PLANNED GIFTS

Bequests, charitable gift annuities, cash and other planned gifts can be directed to Cornerstone. The benefits of a planned gift can include sizable income and estate tax deductions, favorable capital gains tax, income and a lasting impact at Cornerstone.

GIVE THROUGH YOUR IRA

As a qualified charity under the IRS, Cornerstone is eligible for an individual to donate up to a maximum of \$100,000 of your required minimum distribution from your IRA without paying income tax.

EMPLOYEE GIVING PROGRAMS

If your employer matches charitable contributions, you can increase your impact by directing their match to Cornerstone.

Our Mission

The mission of Cornerstone Christian Academy is to educate children, including those from underserved families, in an environment that provides the highest standards for academic achievement and spiritual development.

Our Vision

It is our vision to be a model urban Christian school where students are grounded in faith, shaped with Christ-like character, and equipped with knowledge and skills to excel in high school, college, and throughout life.

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Read about how Cornerstone's academic approach is providing successful outcomes this year.



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