



**Center For Inquiry**

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Where Questions Matter

# **Family Handbook**

Dear CFI Families,

We are thrilled that you are all a part of the CFI community for our 29th year at the Center for Inquiry! When you join the CFI community, you become a member in a very special circle of families and lineage of inquirers.

The people here at CFI know that *how* we learn matters as much as *what* we learn, and one of those distinguishing features is that we learn *from* one another on a regular basis. Traditions like Gathering, Share Fairs, and even Opening Picnic help to keep our sense of community and connectedness alive and thriving. You'll find information about them and many other community traditions in this book. This handbook is designed to help you and your family access and contribute to those traditions and ways of learning together that matter so much to us at CFI. Also included in the handbook are information about district policies often referenced and school-wide logistical processes. Those additions are designed to help you better understand your family's expectations and responsibilities as a member of this community.

Thank you for taking the time to read this handbook and revisit it as much as you need as a reference. Your presence in our community is both welcomed and encouraged. Thank you for being willing to contribute to this unique and wonderful school!

Gratefully yours,

Emily Whitecotton  
Principal of the Center for Inquiry

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## **Foundational Information**

### **Mission Statement**

The students, parents, and staff at the Center for Inquiry, a genuine collaboration between the University of South Carolina and Richland School District Two, are responsible for developing ourselves as more thoughtful caring and intelligent people who delight in learning and are committed to creating a more compassionate, equitable, knowledgeable, and democratic world.

### **Vision Statement**

The Center for Inquiry fosters a rigorous learning environment where everyone is a teacher and a learner committed to creating, sustaining, and investing in a culture of inquiry where all voices are heard and valued. We strive to be a compassionate community where we nurture learners who will make a positive impact on the world.

### **Inquiry-based & Integrated Instruction**

We are the place *where questions matter*. When we value questions, we allow ourselves the opportunity to develop pathways and processes that will support us in truly learning for a lifetime. We were established in 1996 as a function of a partnership between Richland School District Two and the University of South Carolina. We were designed to be a demonstration site for inquiry-based and integrated instruction. As time went on, we became a part of Richland Two's Choice landscape and Magnet programming. Last year, we reignited that University partnership with some exciting collaborations with the University on the horizon!

Faculty and staff at the Center dedicate ourselves to constructing engaging experiences that take into account students' questions, families' cultures, and class interests to achieve our Mission Statement (see below). Our teachers *start* their planning with the grade levels standards appropriate for their class, but rarely *end* with the standard. We teach the processes of inquiry throughout each Unit of Study in ways that allow students to truly experience the connections between different disciplines while holding accountability to grade level state standards.

At CFI, we explore, think, ask questions, and solve problems as readers, writers, scientists, mathematicians, artists, athletes, and community members. We are living the lives of these learning identities, not just learning content alone. In taking up the work of a scientist, we become better at problem solving, investigating, experimenting, calculating, and

communicating while learning the content itself. Throughout the school day, you'll find teachers supporting and challenging students by employing whole group, small group, individual instruction, and a group reflection time toward their ownership of the learning they do together. In this way, strong community bonds are built in each classroom between students, teachers, and families.

### **Assessing & Reporting Student Growth**

At CFI we document student progress and growth in several different ways. We do not use grades on a report card, however, you will receive a Comprehensive Progress Report at the end of each quarter. For 2nd-5th grade students, this report shares information on what the class has learned, a paragraph about your child's growth, a goal for the coming quarter, and a rating for every SC state standard category for each learning identity: reader, writer, mathematician, scientist, social scientist, and community member. Your child's teacher draws from multiple assessment sources to write these reports including: classwork, homework, classroom tests, conferring notes, projects, and standardized assessments. For our Kindergarten and 1st grade students, our teachers write these reports twice a year, and provide a conference and a slightly shorter report with the family the other two quarters. We also document progress for families through Gatherings (see below), Expert Project Share Fairs (see below) and Student Led Conferences (see below).

### **MAP & Benchmark Assessments**

Students in grades 1-5 will take the Measures of Academic Progress test in the Fall of each year. Students in grades 1, 2, & 3 will take MAP in the Spring as well. MAP is administered on students' Chromebooks. Questions are randomly selected from a bank of test questions that are controlled for difficulty. Thus, all the students in the same grade do not receive the same test. The computer program has the ability to adjust the difficulty of each question based on the student responses entered. Teachers use the results along with the other assessments mentioned above to better support their student's achievement throughout the year. Benchmark assessments are administered each of the first three quarters of the school year to 3rd - 5th grade students. These assessments have questions that are connected to the standards students study throughout the district in each quarter. Teachers use this information to bolster student understanding toward state testing.

### **State Testing - SCReady Testing**

All students in South Carolina public schools, grades 3-5 participate in the South Carolina testing program designed to measure whether students meet challenging state standards for

student achievement in the areas of Mathematics, English Language Arts, and Science (4th grade only).

SCReady tests are administered in the spring during the last 20 days of the school year and results are typically sent home with the first progress report in the fall. Scoring results are categorized as Does Not Meet, Approaches, Meets, and Exceeds. Parents of any students scoring Does Not Meet on one or more sections of SCReady will be contacted by the student's teacher for a conference where the teacher will discuss instructional strategies that they feel would be especially beneficial for the school year. As parents review their child's scores, they should consider them along with all of the other information you receive during the year concerning academic progress --progress reports, other assessment information, performance on school work, and feedback from the teacher. SCReady is only one more important piece of information about your child's progress.

For additional information on any state tests, you may visit the South Carolina Department of Education website.

### **USC Partnership**

We are thrilled to announce that we have a University Partnership re-ignited this year! What this means for our students is that we will have the benefit of hosting USC Interns in several of our classrooms throughout the year. Our USC Interns are such an important part of our community, and they bring so much to our classrooms as another caring and knowledgeable adult in the room. We will also be hosting USC Early Childhood Education classes on-site at CFI. Some of our classroom teachers will partner with professors from the University to collaboratively plan lessons that will engage the pre-service educators in supporting the learning that goes on in the classroom.

### **Eligibility, Application, & Selection**

We are a Magnet Center within Richland School District Two, so attendance at our Center follows the processes and procedures used for admittance into all other Magnet and Choice Programming in Richland Two. Please see the [Richland 2 Magnet Programming Website](#) for each year's dates on the Choice Calendar for information on eligibility, lottery entry, selection dates, and enrollment processes. See the [Richland 2 Magnet Handbook](#) for more information.

### **Logistics**

## **AfterCare**

We are looking forward to a wonderful year in AfterCare this year. Our AfterCare program runs from 2:55pm through 5:45pm every full school day and from 11:20am through 5:45pm on Early Dismissal Days. We have caring, experienced, and dedicated staff who plan activities, structure free play, and get to know your children as people and learners. Each day we have time to play, time for homework, and a snack. We provide AfterCare as a service to our families, but also as a way to raise necessary funds for programming at CFI. By actively participating in our AfterCare program, you are continuing to support and help grow the programming we can offer at school.

After Care fees are \$60/week or \$1080/semester. Your Parent Portal account must have \$540 balance before each quarter begins, and a \$0 balance at the end of the year for your child to remain enrolled in AfterCare. To enroll your child in CFI's AfterCare program, you must have a \$0 balance in your Parent Portal account as the year starts. By enrolling your child in the AfterCare program, you agree to pay AfterCare fees in a timely manner. If you keep up with the payment each week or pay ahead of time, you'll be all set to stay enrolled in AfterCare through the school year. In our July editions of Center Connections we include information about enrolling in AfterCare.

## **ALERT**

ALERT is the district acronym for the programming offered to students who qualify as academically gifted. Students can qualify by scoring at a certain level on the CogAt test taken in 2nd grade and the Performance Task Assessment in 3rd, 4th, and 5th grades. The PTA is only given to students who did not qualify in 2nd grade but have other test scores that suggest they could qualify.

## **Attendance**

Showing up to school is the first step to benefitting optimally from what CFI offers. Attendance is crucial to student achievement and developing a sense of belonging at school. Both belonging and achievement are cornerstones of our work, and will provide your child with the very best chance for success. Remember that state law prohibits having over 10 absences in a school year. To support your family in ensuring that attendance expectations are met, beyond 10 absences, we will need to create an Attendance Improvement Plan together. If attendance does not improve with the implementation of the plan, the next step for supporting school attendance will be removal from our Magnet Program. Please see the Beginning of the Year packet of forms for more information.

At each Center, there are school-wide attendance/tardy/early dismissal expectations. Following these school-wide attendance expectations supports student learning and provides the very best access to the Center-specific programming that your family sought when enrolling at your Center.

At the Centers, accumulated absences/tardies/early dismissals often demonstrate a student could be better served at their Zoned School where transportation is available. Centers' Leaders have developed a three-phase probation and improvement plan process (see attached document) that supports students toward meeting their attendance/tardy/early dismissal goals at their Center.

However, if a pattern of absences/excessive tardies or early dismissals develops, the last phase of the probation and improvement plan process is dismissal from the program. You can expect to receive a letter from our front office staff at 3 absences/tardies/early dismissals and 5 absences/tardies/early dismissals. Then, you can expect letters from your Center's Leadership at 6 absences/tardies/early dismissals (beginning Phase I of the probation/improvement process) and at 11 absences/tardies/early dismissals to begin the Attendance Intervention Plan process.

### **Birthday or Whole Class Treats**

There are times when parents like to celebrate with a whole class by bringing snacks. First, please consult your child's teacher about any food allergies in the class before planning any whole class snacks. There are also state guidelines that we need to follow with the snacks we share. We have a wonderful [list of examples, put together by the Leadership at Bookman Road Elementary](#). Please use this document for guidance when sending whole class snacks. Keep in mind that teachers will determine if and when the snack will be consumed at school. It may be that the snack gets sent home to be consumed after school, depending on what has been planned for the day.

### **Breakfast & Lunch**

We eat lunch in the cafeteria at the middle school. The cafeteria staff provides a monthly lunch menu for students. Breakfast is grab-and-go (granola bars, toaster pastries, etc.) style and we serve it as students are entering classrooms. Everyone's first meal for each period is paid for by a grant through the district.

### **Cell Phones & Smart Watches**

According to Richland 2 School Board Policy, elementary students may not use or display cell

phones, smartwatches or personal electronic communication devices while on school property during school hours. CFI also prohibits students from using cell phones, etc. during AfterCare or at CFI events without the permission of a faculty member or administration. Faculty members will ask students to put the phone or smartwatch in a backpack on the first offense. Any further offenses will result in the faculty member confiscating the phone or smartwatch to be returned at the end of the day, and then losing the privilege to have the phone at school at all if it returns.

### **Communication Through ParentSquare**

ParentSquare is our district's communication platform. ParentSquare provides updates and communication from schools and the district through an app, emails, and texts. Be on the lookout for school-wide, classroom, and grade level communication through ParentSquare.

### **District Issued Electronic Communication Devices (Acceptable Use of Technology)**

Students in Richland School District 2 have access to a Chromebook through the district. Families will receive further communication regarding the Acceptable Use Policy that students must sign in order to use their device and district email account. These devices and accounts are to be used for school assignments only. Additional information about this topic can be found in the Richland School District Two [Student Handbook](#).

### **Dress Code**

Several dress code changes will take effect at the start of the 2024-25 school year.

- Pants, jeans, and skirts must be long enough to cover the lining of pockets.
- Shirts must cover students' midriff.
- Bonnets are now included on the list of head coverings such as hats that students cannot wear inside schools.
- Hoods cannot be worn on the head inside the building.
- Slippers, bedroom or house shoes cannot be worn.

These updates apply to all students and are in addition to the existing Richland Two Board of Trustees policy. The [student handbook](#) on the Richland 2 website has more information about the dress code. Click Dress Code to read the full policy.

### **Drop Off & Pick Up**

Each morning and afternoon, we use the bus loop in the back for our carline. If you need to change your child's pick up arrangement please email their teacher as well as Grace Cuffy

(gcuffy@richland2.org), Danielle Burnell (dburnell@richland2.org), and Liz Baranik ([ebaranik@richland2.org](mailto:ebaranik@richland2.org)).

### **Educational and University Visitors**

Because the Center is nationally recognized for our innovative instructional practices, visitations are held for interested educators and pre-service teachers. CFI visitors are required to register in advance with the office. Visitors are only permitted on campus during designated visitor days. A typical visitation day includes an orientation, a tour of campus, classroom visitations, and a debriefing session with a CFI faculty member. One visitation day is specifically designated for parents who are interested in applying to CFI for the upcoming school year. Pre-registration for this time is not required. The date of this visitation is publicized on the district and CFI websites.

### **Emergency Procedures**

CFI participates in practices and drills throughout the year, often at the same time as the students at the middle school next door. By law, we are required to hold fire drills, inclement weather drills, earthquake drills, secure drills, and lockdown drills. In the event that something happens in the surrounding area that requires us to follow our standard security procedures, you can expect communication from either school or district personnel.

### **Emergency School Closings**

In the case of inclement weather, the district decides whether school will be closed or delayed. This decision will be communicated in multiple ways from the district level. In the case of an emergency closing during the school day, the decision will be communicated through multiple district channels as well. AfterCare is not available during emergency school closings.

### **Field Studies**

Center students are fortunate to engage in many field studies. Field studies are selected by the teachers to complement aspects of the curriculum. During fifth grade, students have the opportunity to attend an overnight field study. This trip is scheduled in advance and parents receive information regarding the trip and fee payment several months prior to the trip. For this trip there is also a special parent meeting and question/answer session to ensure that everyone is comfortable and confident for a great trip.

We also take a whole school trip to the Zoo each year. All grade levels study animals and plants as a part of our state science standards, so visiting the Zoo together allows all grade levels the chance for observation toward their life science studies later in the year.

Parents are encouraged to accompany classes on most field studies and to help chaperone. Often, however, field study sites limit the number of adults that may accompany the class or require additional fees. Chaperones are expected to pay any additional fees incurred as a result of their participation in the field study.

If for any reason your family has difficulty with a field study expense, please reach out to your child's teacher, Dr. Whitecotton, or Ms. Cuffy. We want every child to have all the opportunities we extend, and we can help.

### **Homebound Instruction**

Following the South Carolina Department of Education guidelines, the procedure for requesting medical homebound instruction is established by the school district. Please contact Dr. Whitecotton to submit a request, if your child demonstrates a medical need for homebound instruction. State Board of Education Regulation 43-241 requires that a licensed physician certify that the student cannot attend school as a result of an accident or illness, despite the aid of transportation, and that he or she may profit from instruction given in a home or hospital. The physician must complete the state's medical homebound instruction form provided by the district.

### **Home/School Communications**

You can expect *Center Connections*, our school newsletter to show up on your ParentSquare feed (with the email or text alerts that you set) each Friday evening. It features school level announcements and information about upcoming school events. Each month, a calendar of events is also included.

You can expect weekly communication from your child's classroom teacher regarding class news, information about class events, and curriculum. You can expect faculty to respond to your emails within 48 business hours.

At the beginning of the year, your child's teacher will send out their communication plan for their parents which details times and methods for contacting them during non-school hours. Parent Conferences should be arranged by reaching out to the teacher to set up an appointment.

### **Integrated Arts Classes**

At CFI we offer PE, Music, Art, and a Media/Technology Integrated Arts course for students each week. The teachers who teach these have diligently planned their curriculum to best support the learning happening in students core classrooms as well.

### **Lost & Found**

We keep a Lost & Found area in the Gathering Room for students' items we find around the school. At the end of each quarter we find a site to donate any items that we still have in the Lost & Found. Please keep your eyes open on ParentSquare for our notifications about donation dates close to the end of each quarter.

### **Medication**

In accordance with the South Carolina Nurse Practice Act and the Medical Practice Act, beginning in August 2013, a healthcare provider's original signature (not stamped or a copy) will be required for ALL medication administration in Richland School District Two Schools. This includes prescription medication, non-prescription/OTC, topical medications, eye drops, cough drops, and herbal medications.

Please take time to speak with your child's healthcare provider regarding medications that must be taken at school. Most routine medications can be administered before or after school hours. If the medication is required on an "as needed " basis (e.g. Tylenol, Ibuprofen, rescue inhalers, etc.) the healthcare provider needs to write the specific parameters for the use of the medication.

Please remember that all medications must be brought to school by the parent in the original factory packaging, the original prescription bottle, or the original box (in the case of Epi-pens and inhalers). This is for your child's safety, that the right medication is administered to the right child, at the right time.

Again, medications will not be administered at school without written parental permission and a healthcare provider's signature. As the parent, it is your responsibility to obtain the physician's signature for the medication to be administered at school, not the school nurse's. Please visit the District website or contact our school nurse for the needed forms.

More detailed information can be found in the Richland Two [Student Handbook](#) under "Health Rooms."

### **Parent Involvement & Visiting Classrooms or Lunch**

We love coordinating with family members who have time, availability, expertise or just an interest to share that will further the learning of our CFI students. Please reach out to your child's teacher if you'd like to be involved in classroom life during the school day to coordinate. If you are hoping to simply visit the classroom or to visit lunch, please review the Richland 2 expectations for these 30 minute visits here: [Classroom Visits](#). All visitors must sign in at the front office through Lobby Guard. Their classroom time and planning time are both incredibly valuable, so coordinating with them is the best way to ensure that they'll have availability or that you'll be a part of learning in the way that best supports student focus. Please avoid stopping by the classroom before or afterschool unannounced as those are prime times for teachers to prepare and reflect.

### **Photo, Video, and Media Release**

Student work, pictures, and some video will often appear on class blogs or in *Center Connections*. It is the policy of our school that a parent permission form is sent home at the beginning of each year requesting approval for inclusion of pictures, video, and work on the website and in any educational research that our faculty might engage as a result of our University Partnership. Note that at no time will a student's whole first and last name be used in conjunction with their photograph.

Please keep in mind that to respect the privacy of all families, parents may not take post or send pictures of students, other than their own children on the internet or social media.

### **School Hours**

We follow the elementary schedule in Richland 2 each day. The instructional day begins at 7:40am and dismissal starts at 2:30pm. We provide EarlyCare starting at 6:30am each morning for a fee of \$3 a day or \$12 for the week. Students may start arriving each morning at 7:10am. The office opens at 7:40am. We provide AfterCare for \$60 per week per child (\$5 sibling discount) see below for more information.

Students are considered tardy at 7:45am each morning. We will still be running the carline from the back bus loop. We will close the back doors by 7:40am each morning as the school day starts, and families can bring their children up to the front door for drop off. After 7:45am, all families should sign in to LobbyGuard. Morning transitions are often difficult. Establishing a regular routine that ensures prompt arrival at school each morning helps students be prepared to be responsible members of their classroom community. Please see the Attendance section below for absence/tardy/early dismissal thresholds district-wide. If the number of

tardies/early dismissals becomes excessive, the student may forfeit their spot at the Center for Inquiry and be required to attend their zoned school.

### **Security & School Resource Officer**

To ensure security on our campus, we appreciate your cooperation in the mornings, ensuring that students are the only people entering through the back doors. If you need to visit school (to deliver a project or for a scheduled meeting with a teacher) from 7:10-7:40am before the school day starts, please plan to sign in at the LobbyGuard Kiosk in the front office area.

Throughout the day, we will keep all doors but the front door locked. Teachers have key cards that will allow them access throughout the day, coming in from lunch and recess, etc. We have our own School Resource Officer through a Richland County Sheriff's Department grant. Please keep in mind that anyone not listed on the Family Information Sheet or in Powerschool will not be able to pick up your child from campus without direct communication from a parent/guardian. More information is available in Richland School District Two's [Student Handbook](#) on the district website.

### **Sexual Harassment, Intimidation, & Bullying**

Board Policy JICFAA outlines a definition for harassment, intimidation, and bullying that reads, "harassment, intimidation, or bullying of students is prohibited. Harassment, intimidation, or bullying of students is prohibited. Harassment, intimidation, or bullying is defined as a gesture, electronic communication, or a written, verbal physical, or sexual act reasonably perceived to have the effect of the following: harming a student physically or emotionally or damaging a student's property, or placing a student in reasonable fear of personal harm or property damage; or insulting or demeaning a student or group of students causing substantial disruption in, or substantial interference with, the orderly operation of the school."

Each school in the district conducts a bullying protocol when there is suspicion of bullying at school to determine whether or not we consider a situation bullying or a mutual conflict. When situations are determined to be mutual conflict and not bullying, even those conflicts are taken very seriously and responded to with the appropriate support in place to better move forward with the positive, productive, and orderly operation of the school.

It is important to distinguish between mutual conflict, harassment, intimidation, and bullying. Often elementary students have mutual conflicts with each other as they learn and grow socially. We support, teach, and encourage students to work through conflicts together with each other to become independent problem solvers with the help of their parents and faculty

members at CFI. If a parent or student has a concern, it is best to begin a discussion with the classroom teacher, possibly involving the school counselor.

If there is ever a suspicion of sexual harassment, administrators at CFI follow the administrative processes at the district level through the Title IX office. The definition of sexual harassment in the federal legislative language that we use includes, “Unwelcome conduct determined by a reasonable person to be so severe, pervasive, and objectively offensive that it effectively denies a person equal access to the recipient's education program or activity.” See the [Code of Federal Regulations](#) for more detailed and varied definitions. Please reach out to CFI Leadership, if you suspect sexual harassment.

### **Snacks**

Procedures around snacks vary by the teacher, so please see your child's teacher's communication about snacks. We want students prepared for steady decision making throughout the day, so when sending snacks, we encourage nutritious snacks, and discourage candy and soda.

### **Transportation**

All Richland 2 Magnet program students must provide their own transportation to and from school.

## **Rights & Responsibilities**

### **Rights & Responsibilities**

At CFI, we are a learning community. To keep our community thriving and growing, all of us need to participate and contribute to the progress and success of the whole. Because that process takes all of us, instead of school rules, we have Rights & Responsibilities. When the Responsibilities are fulfilled, our Rights as community members are ensured.

#### **Responsibilities**

We have a responsibility to keep our belongings organized and clean up after ourselves.

We have a responsibility to demonstrate respect with our words and actions.

We have a responsibility to ask questions and seek understanding.

We have a responsibility to encourage others.

We have a responsibility to communicate clearly and listen carefully.

#### **Rights**

We have the right to work and play in a safe and organized environment.  
We have the right to be happy and to be treated with kindness and respect.  
We have the right to learn new things.  
We have the right to be ourselves and express our opinions.  
We have the right to hear and be heard.

### **Faculty & Staff Responsibilities**

The faculty and staff at CFI are committed to living and learning with their students and their parents/guardians to create a productive and healthy learning environment. Some examples of the ways that faculty and staff uphold their Responsibilities to protect the Rights above:

- Sharing information through school and class newsletters, blogs, and individual calls/emails
- Providing information regarding inquiry-based and integrated learning experiences to help families understand curricular structures and classroom routines
- Pay attention to health and allergy guidelines for all students
- Provide regular reports on academic progress through a variety of means including work sent home, Comprehensive Progress Reports, Student Led Conferences, Parent Conferences, and state/district test reports

### **Family Responsibilities**

Parents and guardians can fulfill their responsibilities to protect the Rights above by:

- Being involved in your child's education by contributing time and talents to support the Mission of CFI
- Attend Student Led Conferences, Parent Conferences, Curriculum Nights, and read information in teacher newsletters
- Respect and listen to diverse opinions and experiences
- Communicate with faculty, staff, and students in a professional and respectful manner

### **Disciplinary Procedures**

The majority of disciplinary situations are best handled in the classroom within the context of a caring relationship with the teacher and supportive community. However, there are times when a student needs space out of the room, a more serious boundary, or a school level consequence to help reset and get back on track. Each situation is different, but the goal is always for students to be back in the classroom meeting teacher and family expectations and learning productively and peacefully. Just as there are MTSS supports for Academics, there are MTSS supports for Behavior as well. If we see patterns or repetition in student choices, we will be starting the work to get the school-wide help through these MTSS channels, and the Magnet program procedures listed below.

There is an expected code of conduct that includes all School Board Policy and District-wide conduct expectations when you enroll in a Richland 2 Magnet Program. At each Center, there are school-wide and classroom specific expectations for how students, staff, and families should live and learn alongside one another. Following these school-wide and classroom expectations will help all students avoid any behavioral infractions.

At the Centers, accumulated behavioral infractions sometimes demonstrate that a student could be better served at their zoned school. Sometimes a traditional setting is able to offer support in ways that we cannot due to our staff size. In tandem with our teachers' strong classroom communities and consistent behavioral instruction, Centers' Leaders have developed a three-phase probation and improvement plan process ([see attached document](#)) to support individual students toward meeting behavioral goals at their Center.

However, if a pattern of 3 suspensions develops, the last phase of the probation and improvement plan process is dismissal from the program. Level Three disciplinary infractions (see Richland School District Two website for Board Policy) may result in immediate dismissal from the program.

### **CFI Traditions & Learning Community Connections**

#### **CFI Teacher Appreciation Week**

A place like CFI doesn't exist without incredible teachers who generate energy and enthusiasm for the work we do every single day. Appreciating them is a very important part of our life here at the Center. Each year CFI celebrates Teacher Appreciation week in February. Our families always know how to share their love and appreciation for our teachers.

#### **Cultural Festival**

Our Cultural Festival is a celebration of all the incredible cultural diversity we have in our families at CFI. In years past, we learned about Juneteenth, Jamaica, HBCUs & Greek Life, Jewish Culture, Autism, Mushroom Hunting, the Philippines, food from Thailand, and so much more! We learned how to write our names in Korean and all about Greek Dancing. We have such deep and diverse roots that nourish our CFI families. Cultural Festival is our way to celebrate where we come from, understand how it shapes who we are, and share the wisdom that our families' ways of being offer the world. But we need your help to make it happen. Each year we seek support from families for you all to develop projects that highlight and teach about your heritage, traditions, practices, games, places to visit, foods, or other ways of being.

### **Curriculum Nights**

Curriculum Nights are designed as 45 minute sessions (K-2 from 6-6:45 & 3-5 from 6:45-7:30) for teachers to host families in classrooms, providing you the opportunity to live the learning that your children live each day. Teachers make decisions about what they will do on Curriculum Night based on what they want to help families better understand. For example, they might structure parts of a workshop for them to live or set up math games and a reflection time about the math students used to strategically play the games. Curriculum Nights are also a fantastic way to help families have clarity around ways to support their child with learning at home. These nights will happen once per semester.

### **Fall Festival**

Fall Festival is our version of a field day at the end of October. Our PTP and Homeroom Parents do an amazing job each year planning and facilitating 6 fun and challenging stations for students to enjoy.

### **Gathering**

When anyone asks what makes us different at CFI, one piece that former families never leave out in their answer is Gathering. It is the structure that supports our students in learning how to confidently and competently publicly speak to a larger group, even at 5 years old. Gathering is a time on Friday afternoons (or the last full day of the week if there is a student holiday at the end of the week) from 2:00pm to 2:20pm where one class shares their learning with the whole school. The class responsible for Gathering also takes care of morning announcements for the week. The families of the class responsible are invited to Gathering. The Gathering Schedule will be posted on our events calendar on the website, which will include a link to the GoogleMeet for Gathering each week for any families who can't make it in-person.

### **Inquiry Matters Conference**

One of the early commitments of the school was to serve as a demonstration and inspiration site for inquiry-based and interdisciplinary learning and teaching. This is a commitment we sustain year after year with the Inquiry Matters Conference. Each spring we invite teachers from across the state to join us for a professional learning conference on-site at CFI. Teachers who attend get to join CFI faculty members and other inquiry-based teachers to learn about innovative ideas they are using in their own classrooms. Students often join us to help the

teachers present. Who better to talk about the learning we do here than the learners themselves?

### **It's a Grand Day**

This is a very special way that we celebrate grandparents, other visitors who serve as students' grandparents, and Veterans Day at CFI. Each year we invite students Grand Visitors (grandparents or older members of students' family/community). This event allows students' extended family members and community members the chance to see what learning is about at CFI. The Visitors arrive around 12 noon, and enjoy a reception and video in the Gathering Room. By about 12:45, we welcome them with a short talk about learning at CFI, and what they might notice in classrooms. From about 1pm-1:45pm, grand visitors join students in classrooms. There are some teachers who use this as an opportunity to let the grand visitors experience the learning in general ways (playing math games, sharing students' published writing, read alouds, sharing a class discussion of different historical events they may have lived through, etc). Some teachers use this as an opportunity for students to honor their Visitors with artifacts students create for them or even interviewing them for their perspective on certain events.

### **Opening Picnic**

Opening Picnic is like our version of an Open House. It is a time for our families to share a meal together and then tour classrooms. Other schools host this time before the school year starts. Here we host it in late August or September, and it is a time for students to show their families what they've created together with the rest of their class. We love seeing the joy and confidence that students bring when they get to take ownership of their learning homes and learning communities, even at the very beginning of the school year!

### **Passing of the Cans**

At CFI we are a community that values service and taking action toward a better world. One of the ways we express that value and encourage contribution is through Passing of the Cans. This is the name for our annual Center-wide food drive right before the winter holiday break. We call it Passing of the Cans because before the school had a building, we were in portables. When we collected canned foods in the classrooms, they had to get out to their central location for pickup and delivery to the food bank. Students lined up, bucket brigade style, and passed the cans, hand over hand until all the cans were in the trucks ready to go. Now that we have a building, this is less necessary. However, the passing process allows the students a chance to

understand the impact of our collective efforts in a hands-on way, so we've continued the practice each year.

### **PTP**

PTP, Parent Teacher Partnership, is our parent and family organization at CFI. All families are members of the PTP by being a part of the CFI community. This organization is supported by a budget that we fundraise for throughout the school year with CFI nights at restaurants in town, CFI events, and some merchandise sales. We have a PTP Board made up of committed parents who lead our PTP Committees and an Executive Board of leaders for the organization as a whole. Be on the lookout in Center Connections for our invitations to be a part of the PTP Facebook group and to get involved on the PTP Committees. Reach out to Kristin Dillensnyder [kristindillensnyder@gmail.com](mailto:kristindillensnyder@gmail.com) for more information.

### **Share Fairs**

One of the ways that we enhance motivation and provide students an authentic audience for their work is through a structure we call a Share Fair. Once students complete an Expert Project, the teacher will schedule a time in the Gathering Room for them to present their work to the other classes in the school and families who rotate through. These are always joyful celebrations of learning that offer the presenter another opportunity to publicly share their ideas and the attending audience a chance to get really good at listening, asking questions, and providing thoughtful feedback to other inquirers.

### **Student Led Conferences**

Student Led Conferences are individual conferences that the teacher schedules with each family to feature a prepared presentation of their child's growth as a reader, writer, mathematician, scientist, social scientist, and community member through the current school year. We love Student Led Conferences at CFI because they are such a beautiful way for our students to reflect and set goals for themselves. Teachers help in the preparation, but seek to support the student in truly leading the celebration of their growth during the conference.

### **Movie Night**

This is a night that we share a movie and some pizza together as a CFI community. The PTP uses the pizza sales as a fundraiser for our PTP budget.

**Family Dance**

We love to dance together at CFI. In May each year, we gather together to celebrate the year coming to a close and boogie down. Over the past few years, we have included another pizza fundraiser and a photo booth.

**Splash Day**

Splash Day is our spring field day. We just add water to the same kinds of fun and challenging events that we host for the Fall Festival. This is another wonderful opportunity to volunteer and celebrate the end of the school year with us.

**5th Grade Graduation**

Each year we close the year with this final event for our fifth grade students, celebrating the incredible young people they are growing to be. Fourth and fifth graders and their families gather together to share in the celebration because it is also the time that the fifth graders literally pass the torch of their leadership at CFI to the fourth grade students. Several families volunteer their time to help decorate the gym at Summit Parkway Middle to prepare for the event.