



JANUARY & FEBRUARY 2025

The Albrook Almanac

How We Honored Black History Month

By Maria McCusker

For Black History Month, we had the pleasure of Mrs. Gujral (Anjali's mom) coming into the class for a presentation. She spoke about Mr. Garrett Morgan, who invented the traffic light and made a traffic light craft that coincided with the book.

As a follow-up to this activity, we explored the significance of the red, yellow, and green lights and played the red light green light game in Circle.

Teaching our students about diversity and inclusion in a hands-on way. Activities like the Circle of hands can help kids appreciate and celebrate differences in skin tones and backgrounds. By making these concepts tangible and interactive, you're helping them develop empathy and understanding. We want to thank Mrs. Gujral for helping create such meaningful experiences!

Upcoming Events

February 27

Registration for New Families
Becomes Available

March 7

Professional Training
School Closed

March 13

Geography Night
6-7 pm

March 21

Early dismissal

March 28

Spring Event

Dance Caravan Club Winter 2025

By Sharon Hoffmann

Our 2025 Winter Dance Club ended its season with a superb performance by all. Over nine weeks, the dancers each learn two routines, dancing in unison with their friends. They develop coordination, listening abilities, and the skill of observation by matching movement to music. The most exciting event for our dancers is the culmination of their efforts, the performance for their families. The audience cheers for each dancer, encouraging each performer with love and support.

Fall club enrollment will roll out in late August. Watch your email for the announcement. We look forward to a new show this fall!

STEAM

By Elaine Dignam

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The Albrook School

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What do you notice? What do you wonder? These are the questions posed to the Albrook teachers during our recent S.T.E.M. seminar. Traditionally, science education encompassed memorizing facts, teachers providing all the information, and questions with only one correct answer. Our facilitator from Liberty Science Center in New Jersey teaches educators to adopt a new vision. This includes more investigation, independent thinking, and discussion of open-ended questions. As Montessorians, we are accustomed to child-led learning, where children are encouraged to further explore subjects of interest. Our continuing education seminar was a helpful reminder to inspire our students to notice or observe, investigate, and, above all, we must remember to stay curious and ask ourselves, "What do we wonder?"

Geography Night

By Nina Marvi and Zambetula Vazaios

The land is where our roots are. The children must be taught to feel and live in harmony with the Earth." Dr. Maria Montessori

This year's Geography curriculum night showcased not only beautiful Montessori materials that helped to build understanding of political, physical and cultural geography, it also highlighted our great, harmonious learning community. We feel fortunate to share our geography curriculum developed by Dr. Montessori with goals of acquiring knowledge, building peaceful relationships, and celebrating diversity.

In the Lower Elementary classrooms, students proudly shared their biome trioramas while also engaging with a variety of hands-on learning activities, including pin maps, biome maps, rocks and minerals, geography games and . In the Upper Elementary classroom, students enjoyed sharing their country reports that they have worked on for the past 2 months with one another alongside working with some wonderful learning materials. Learning materials included: pin maps, longitude and latitude puzzle, time zone map, the three branches of government, and physical geography card sets. They also had the opportunity to share their knowledge with their Lower Elementary peers during a shared curricular experience. It truly was a pleasure to watch our students become the teachers! Students also took great delight in learning about South American culture, which is one of our continents that is being studied, through food. As part of their homework, students baked and cooked culinary delights from a variety of South American countries.

In the preschool classrooms the children had an opportunity to share their many experiences with the beautiful geography materials. They worked with the land, water and air activities, placing the appropriate objects such as birds, amphibians and fish as well as cars and planes on the mats and trays. The land and water form works helped the children to identify lakes, islands, capes, bays and many more.

High on the lists of favorites were the puzzle maps of the continents with the children sharing their various map making endeavors. These were produced by tracing and using push pins to punch out countries, territories and states; work which takes a tremendous amount of concentration as well as fine motor skills.

Each preschool classroom shared their study of specific continents, noting the animals and people of their related biomes using the biome story cards and many 'hands on' artifacts.

It is clear that our geography curriculum and materials daily afford the children opportunities to absorb essential concepts through work with the hands. The imagination is captured as the children explore the world at large as well as what is at their fingertips in their own locality. The opportunity to share these experiences was relished by all.

Dr. Arthur Professional Development Session

By Zambetoula Vazaios and Lauren Lipman

On Friday, March 14th, Albrook Staff participated in a professional development session regarding how best to support ADHD/ADD students. During this workshop, Dr. Arthur shared her knowledge as a former school psychologist and a current practicing psychologist. Here is a list of strategies that she shared with us that could be used both at school and at home to best support these types of learners:

- Seat the child where distractions are minimized.
- Use a signal to help the child stay on task; create a special signal.
- Find ways to praise the child, focusing on the effort extended or completion of a task.
- Center constructive criticism between compliments.
- Find opportunities for hyperactive students to use their energy.

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gy.

- Have a child look directly at you when speaking to them.
- When giving directions, keep them short and simple.
- Create a system/schedule for homework to be accomplished.

Using empathetic language or humor can yield greater success in redirecting a student to get back on task or comply with a request.

Utilizing these strategies can help students who are challenged by ADHD/ADD to be more successful.

Spring Break in Stepping Stones

By Ms. Behar, Ms. Youn and Ms. Rala

It certainly felt more like February break than spring break with the cold, wet, and windy weather! That did not stop us from having fun. The children made various fun crafts, such as paper unicorns and paper birds. They were introduced to scratch art through a kit donated by a parent. We read plenty of books, and the children chose to work from the shelves. When the weather cooperated, we enjoyed some playtime outside.

Two students creatively used a tool kit puzzle to perform “surgery” on a stuffed animal brought for nap time. They said he had bees in his belly. The teachers added some masks for the turtle patients and future doctors. The future doctors did not want to take the masks off!

We ended the week by having a plastic egg hunt in the library. The students decorated brown paper bags to collect their eggs. To keep things peaceful and fair, each child was assigned a mutually agreed upon egg color and could only find eggs that were their assigned color. All the eggs were located, and the children had a blast!

Spring Expanded Care

By Cheryl Fritsch

During spring break, the Expanded Care children enjoyed various engaging activities. In addition to their classroom assignments, they baked sprinkled shortbread and quesadillas, created egg necklaces, crafted little chicks, and participated in many other art projects. They also played games in the gym and spent time running outside. The week concluded with a festive day of making bunny masks, baking carrot cake cookies, and watching *Winnie the Pooh's Easter*.

Spring Holidays

Mrs. Mukherjee and Mrs. Gujral visited the classrooms to celebrate the Indian holiday of Holi. They read stories, brought special snacks, and helped the children tie-dye "Holi 2025" t-shirts. Mrs. Rehman also visited the Van Gogh classroom to teach the children about Ramadan. She brought special cookies to share in honor of the holiday.

Black History Month

To honor Black History Month, Mrs. Gujral read the book *Mae Among the Stars*, which tells the story of Mae Jemison and her dream of becoming an astronaut. Afterward, the children enjoyed coloring and assembling their own spaceships.

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Women's Wellness & Health

Dr. Cummings-Becker led a wellness workshop for our teachers on women's health. It was informative and engaging, and she graciously answered questions following her presentation. Thank you, Dr. Cummings-Becker!

Community Engagement

We are grateful for the loving and generous community of parents here at Albrook School. Sydney and Taylor Becker's mom, Dr. Cummings. Asher and Ari's parents (Dr. David Salz and Dr. Sarah Iosifescu) and Leo Jannsen's mom (Dr. Laryssa A. Patti) collaborated to create an excellent educational experience. They visited Albers Hall to teach the children about the medical profession.

Dental Health Visit

As part of our health education, we welcomed our annual visitors from Smileworks Dental Office. They taught the children how to brush their teeth properly, what foods are best for dental health, and general oral care tips.

Handwriting

By Nina Marvi and Kelly Antoniello

Handwriting, or penmanship, is most often a skill that begins to develop in preschool and kindergarten as pencil control is acquired. Along with this pencil control, an appropriate pincer grip is formed, allowing the child to hold the pencil correctly while drawing and writing. Various fine motor skill activities using the Sensorial and Practical Life materials assist each child in forming a pincer grip and strengthening the hand for handwriting.

Along with these enterprises, children in the Montessori classroom have the additional benefit of tracing the sandpaper letters and numerals repeatedly, thus entering the shapes of symbols into the muscular memory of the hand. Because of these repeated exercises, the children will quite often form letters and numbers before they even recognize them all. In addition, as the child is ready, formal practice takes place on unlined and lined paper to ensure the correct formation and orientation of letters. This practice continues through the early elementary years when the child moves from manuscript to cursive penmanship.

Taking a multisensory approach to handwriting is a key to honing this much-needed skill, and the benefits extend well past the development of beautiful penmanship. Writing letters in the air with a finger, tracing sandpaper letters, and physically writing words out have been scientifically proven to help build a student's decoding skills and develop their automatic word recognition. The Montessori classroom's hands-on approach to handwriting is often in line with the Science of Reading, which stresses the connection between writing and reading skills.

It is true, however, that many children struggle with handwriting, whether experiencing optimal conditions for developing these skills or not. On February 26, Victoria Fuerst, Occupational Therapist, presented a workshop on handwriting to the Albrook staff. Along with providing the team with many suggestions for supporting each child with foundational and pre-writing skills, Ms. Fuerst stressed the importance of interventions when obstacles to success are evident. Her workshop illustrated how Occupational Therapy is often the key to progress being achieved when handwriting is problematic and hindering a child's academic progress. Through an individualized program tailored to the needs of each child, Occupational Therapists can highlight specific areas of weakness. Through this therapy and the use of various tools, the struggling writer can experience success in their endeavors.

Attitude of Gratitude in the Monet Class

By Maria McCusker

A gratitude attitude significantly contributes to a person's overall happiness and social development. We begin to draw awareness and foster a sense of gratitude at its simplest or most basic level with our youngest students in Stepping Stones.

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To understand what a sense of gratitude feels like, we must understand and be aware of our pleasant and unpleasant emotions. Here in the Monet class, we emphasize identifying these emotions. Once the students are aware of their feelings, we emphasize ways to show we are happy or thankful for positive experiences and people who help us.

Below are some ways we do this:

Identify situations when we would say thank you and point out why we say it.

Frequently ask the children at Circle time what makes them happy, eventually changing the language to what they are grateful for.

Draw awareness to our beautiful world around us and how it makes us happy, such as "Look, the sun is shining. I'm so grateful we can go out to play."

Sing songs and read books about the meaning of gratitude

Participate in school community-wide fundraisers.

Incorporate the theme of gratitude into our Spring Event art project.

The Benefits of SEL for your Child's Development: Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) has Profound Benefits for Children, Enhancing Emotional Intelligence, Academic Performance, and Overall Well-Being

By Keyana Martinez

From your child's first words to their first day of college, you'll watch and support them as they surpass a series of important developmental milestones. Along with these well-known stepping stones, there is another set of developmental skills that will prove just as important. Known as social-emotional learning, or SEL, this area of development is essential for making friends, communicating feelings and needs, and making good decisions as children and teens navigate the world.

SEL can also help kids interact with peers from different backgrounds as they grow up in today's increasingly diverse society. And since various areas of child development work together, a child's social growth can lead to other cognitive and educational achievements, too. As your child learns and grows over the years, you can offer continued guidance to help your child reap the many benefits of SEL.

Enhancing emotional intelligence through SEL

SEL can greatly impact your child's emotional intelligence (sometimes abbreviated as EI), which is their ability to understand, express, and manage their emotions. This is also commonly called emotional quotient or EQ. Although EI/EQ may sound like the latest breakthrough in technology, rest assured that it's just a simple way to make sure your child is learning about feelings.

When kids can identify what they feel, this can help them express their needs and wants in a healthy way. A high EQ can also prevent negative behaviors such as angry outbursts. The concept of emotional intelligence focuses mainly on self-management or self-regulation, but EI/EQ is connected to the way your child interacts with peers as well. Kids who recognize and understand their own feelings are more likely to understand how others feel. And kids who demonstrate empathy and compassion are less likely to engage in teasing or bullying.

Think of SEL as one of the best ways to help your child live by the "golden rule": treating others the way they want to be treated.

Academic success and SEL

Research has linked students who participate in SEL programs to higher academic achievement. This includes test scores, school attendance, classroom engagement, and teacher and peer relationships. Reports based on feedback and data from schools have also shown that SEL programs often lead to a decrease in mental health issues and behavioral problems. Simply put, when kids feel good about themselves, they can show up with a positive attitude and focus on their academic goals at school. Emotionally intelligent students are more likely to build healthy relationships with teachers and classmates, work cooperatively, and follow rules and

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routines, too.

So, what do school SEL programs look like and how can they benefit your child? While this depends on each school's program of choice and the way it's implemented, there are a few common expectations across the board. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), a leading organization in the development of SEL programs, recommends four key elements based on the acronym SAFE. This stands for:

- **Sequenced:** Providing connected and coordinated activities to foster skills development.
- **Active:** Employing active forms of learning to help students strengthen new skills.
- **Focused:** Dedicating time and attention to developing personal and social skills.

Explicit: Targeting specific social and emotional skills.

Following this formula, SEL programs teach kids emotional intelligence through step-by-step instruction and fun, engaging activities. Students learn how to practice relaxation techniques, resolve conflicts, and talk about their feelings with trusted adults. To ensure that schools are on the right track, CASEL also offers a program guide to help administrators find the perfect SEL program to meet students' needs. Check in with your school district if you want to learn more about how (or if) your child is learning SEL skills at school and what, if any, curriculum is being used.

In addition to school programs, kids also benefit from receiving SEL support at home. Outside of the school setting, developing social-emotional skills might not require a formal curriculum. You can help your child build SEL skills through strategies such as reading, play, music, and parents and teachers modeling emotionally intelligent behaviors.

The long-term impact of SEL

While social-emotional learning has become a hot topic in many households, classrooms, and even boardrooms within the past decade, it's not a temporary fad or trend. SEL is an essential area of development that can greatly impact children over their entire life span by helping them develop meaningful and lasting interpersonal relationships.

Numerous studies by the team at the Harvard Happiness Project demonstrate that people with strong social networks are not only happier but experience better health and increased longevity. In fact, research shows that the presence or absence of a healthy support network has as much or more effect on how long we live as well-known risk factors like smoking, alcohol consumption, and obesity. With continued research and SEL initiatives, the hope is that SEL programs will become as common as traditional academic subjects, such as reading, writing, and math.

Contrary to popular belief, SEL is not limited to early childhood development. In fact, like other developmental milestones, your child will continue to build their EI/EQ and strengthen their social-emotional skills throughout life. Here's an overview of what to expect as they build on these skills over the years:

- **Infants:** Babies first learn social-emotional concepts with parents and caregivers. They develop skills such as bonding, recognizing facial expressions, and expressing needs (e.g. crying for a bottle when they're hungry). While still dependent on adults, babies can start learning how to self-soothe in order to manage negative emotions (e.g. reaching for a stuffed toy or pacifier when upset). They'll develop an increased sense of self-awareness as they discover their own likes and dislikes and become more independent with self-help skills, such as feeding and playing with toys unassisted.

Toddlers: SEL for toddlers includes fostering verbal communication/expression and independence. As a parent, you can support your child's social instincts by providing opportunities to play with other children and develop friendships. You can help support independence and self-help by encouraging your child to choose books and snacks. Teaching SEL skills, such as using words to express their needs, can help stop tantrums and even prevent tantrums.

Preschoolers: Between the ages of 3 and 5, kids become more aware of their emotions and can learn to label them with increased vocabulary. These newfound verbal expression skills can help reduce frustration and outbursts of anger and tears. To encourage cooperation, you can teach your preschooler to play respectfully with others and practice sharing and taking turns.

Elementary school students: As children enter school settings, their social skills can grow by leaps and bounds. They begin to form more meaningful friendships and will learn how to follow a structured set of rules and routines that may differ from expectations at home. SEL skills for K-5 students can also help children develop self-awareness, develop self-regulation, build confidence, and develop character-building virtues as well.

Middle school students: Tweens experience many developmental changes throughout the middle school years, and their social-emotional development will follow suit. As your middle schooler experiences the emotional roller coaster of adolescence, SEL can help strengthen impulse control, independent thinking, and decisive action. In fact, many educators believe that SEL is as or more important for tweens and teens as they develop the skills and abilities required to handle life in the real world after high school. During these years, SEL programs include more complex strategies to help children learn skills such as self-motivation, goal setting, and stress management.

High school students: As teenagers face challenges with peer pressure, sexuality, and other stressors, SEL can help them navigate these tough situations and make difficult decisions. A strong social-emotional foundation early on can help prevent mental health problems and help teens manage issues like depression, anxiety, drugs, and alcohol. As they prepare for adulthood, teens can build on previous SEL skills while adding new ones, such as critical thinking, perseverance, leadership, and the ability to handle failure.

Speaking of adulthood, while SEL may go by other names, the life skills it teaches will continue to be useful far beyond the high school years. Social-emotional learning is a lifelong journey as adults will continually explore ways to manage and express emotions in healthy ways.

SEL is a critical area of child development — yet sometimes it is overlooked. It's important for parents to understand the positive, lifelong impact of a strong social-emotional foundation and offer guidance in the family environment, while reinforcing SEL lessons in school. The social, emotional, and academic benefits of SEL can set kids up for success in a diverse world. Good communication skills and the ability to work cooperatively will prepare children for the challenges they'll face in every phase of life. As more parents and schools incorporate SEL lessons and activities into their regular routines, the benefits may become more evident for many years to come.

The Albrook Spring Event

By Anisha Bhasin Mukherjee

The Albrook Spring Event was held on March 28, 2025, at the Hamilton Farm Golf Club, and what a night it was! Thanks to the generosity of our incredible community, we raised \$59,393! The evening was filled with delicious food, cocktails, live music, wonderful conversation, and mingling with friends old and new. This year, we introduced a digital format for our silent auction, and it was a huge success that made for a more efficient and seamless experience for all. The live auction, MC-ed by Mrs. Tarangul, was absolutely thrilling as families won exclusive trips to Tuscany and Mexico and luxury experiences such as glamping in the Grand Canyon and attending the Daytona 500!

The funds raised will directly benefit The Albrook School, and we can't thank you enough for your kind contributions. This year's theme, "An Attitude of Gratitude," has undoubtedly been both given and received. We are so grateful to have our children immersed in a culture promoting kindness and confidence.

Elementary Play

By Mrs. Lipman

This year's elementary play was the classic story of Winnie the Pooh. All the familiar characters appeared on stage, including Eeyore, Kanga, Roo, Rabbit, Piglet, Tigger, Owl, and Pooh! The entire elementary school spent the whole week fine-tuning their performance following months of rehearsals. Full run-throughs were held daily, with staff working behind the scenes to move scenery, run the sound, and assist the children backstage. The elementary teachers all assumed stage crew roles, and we were also grateful for the assistance of members of the preschool staff as well. Watching the whole community come together to support the play is always a pleasure.

The preschool and stepping stones students attended a special dress rehearsal on Thursday morning. They were a very attentive and enthusiastic audience! Not only did they love the humorous story of Winnie the Pooh, but they also enjoyed identifying their reading buddies on the stage! The excitement was palpable backstage the night of the show as the children got into costumes and prepared to perform. The children were fabulous on stage, bringing their full effort to the performance. As the director, I was thrilled to see the progress they had made and the confidence they demonstrated on stage.

Earth Day Celebrations Across Our Classrooms

Throughout the school, each classroom engaged in unique and meaningful activities to celebrate Earth Day, fostering a sense of environmental awareness and stewardship in our students. From planting seeds and learning about ecosystems to recycling and hands-on art projects, our children explored ways to help care for the Earth. Here's a glimpse of the exciting Earth Day activities in each classroom.

Monet Classroom

The students celebrated Earth Day in the Monet classroom by singing *Happy Birthday to Our Earth*. They were introduced to a colored globe to show the continent where we live and read *The Earth Book* by Todd Parr. The story emphasized simple ways to care for the Earth, which the children were excited to discuss. We wrapped up the lesson with a fun and easy art project.

Picasso Classroom

The Picasso students also read *The Earth Book* by Todd Parr. This book highlights simple ways even young children can help the planet, like turning off the water while brushing their teeth. The children enjoyed discussing these actions and understanding their importance in protecting the Earth.

O'Keeffe Classroom

In the O'Keeffe class, we focused on the signs of spring in celebration of Earth Day. We went on a "boot day" walk, observing the blossoms on the trees, the tiny yellow-green leaves sprouting, and the shoots emerging from the ground. We also listened to birds singing. Back in class, we had a lesson on the life cycle of a butterfly, connecting nature's growth to the changing season.

Degas Classroom

The Degas class celebrated Earth Day by singing spring songs, including *This Pretty Planet*. In the morning, we planted runner beans. In the afternoon, the children completed a sequencing activity about the life cycle of a bean plant.

Van Gogh Classroom

The Van Gogh class observed Earth Day by discussing ways to help the Earth, including the three Rs: Recycle, Reuse, and Reduce. The children enjoyed creating art with items from the recycling bucket. We also learned about different types of plants. The children helped plant our herb garden and pot plants for their mothers.

Miro Classroom

For Earth Day, the Miro Classroom engaged in a hands-on planting activity to connect with nature. The children planted seeds in moist paper towels inside ziplock bags, which we taped to the classroom windows to observe the effects of sunlight and water on germination. Over the next few days, the children eagerly watched as the seeds sprouted roots and stems. Once the seedlings were strong enough, we carefully transferred them into small pots, teaching the students how to handle young plants gently. Throughout the process, we discussed the