



MARCH & APRIL 2026

The Albrook Almanac

2026 Winter Club Season

By Sharon Hoffmann

Another winter club season comes to a close, welcoming in all of the activities that the Spring brings to Albrook. We enjoyed the tastes and smells of our Baking Club with our own Mrs. Fritsch, the brilliant colors and shapes of painting and sculpture in our Art Club and the continuing skill building in our Elementary Chess program. Our Art Club, lead by Artist Peggy Davo, was so popular this season, we added a second class on Fridays to make sure all were able to express their talent! As always, our Dance Club ended with a flourish, the final dance performance with costumes and even a bit of singing topped off our Winter 2026 Club Season.

We hope to see you all next year when the Fall Clubs begin in September!

Language in the Montessori Classroom

If you've ever wondered what your child is *doing* during their Montessori day, especially when it comes to language, you're not alone. Unlike traditional classrooms, you won't see worksheets coming home, but rest assured, your child is deeply engaged in meaningful, structured language learning every single day.

In a Montessori classroom, language isn't confined to a specific time block, it's woven into everything your child does. From greeting a friend in the morning to describing how they completed a work, children are constantly practicing communication.

This reflects a core Montessori belief: children learn best through real, purposeful experiences. Language is not taught in isolation. It grows naturally through interaction, exploration, and expression.

Montessori language development follows a thoughtful progression, designed to meet children exactly where they are. Here's what that looks like in action:



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The Albrook School

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1. Spoken Language (Early Childhood Focus)

Children begin by expanding their vocabulary through conversation, storytelling, songs, and classified materials (like naming objects or matching pictures). Teachers model rich, precise language, helping children learn how to express themselves clearly and confidently.

2. Phonemic Awareness

Before children learn to read, they learn to *hear* sounds. Activities like identifying beginning sounds or playing sound games help children tune into the building blocks of words. Songs and stories are an integral part of this work. Games enhance understanding as well as enjoyment of these concepts. Objects and pictures are associated with symbols and the building blocks of phonics are set in place through practice and reinforcement.

3. Writing Before Reading

In Montessori, children typically learn to write before they read. Using hands-on materials like sandpaper letters and moveable alphabets, they physically build words using sounds. This approach taps into muscle memory and helps children understand how language is constructed, rather than just memorizing it. They may randomly write letters as well; internalizing their experiences at a sensorial level.

4. Reading Development

Once children can encode words (build them), decoding (reading) follows naturally. They begin with phonetic words and gradually move to more complex texts as their confidence grows. Short phonetic words and phrases progress to longer phonetic material which includes consonant blends. Next come long vowels, digraphs and diphthongs. Sight words are a crucial part of the equation in combination with practice and deliberate instruction of these decoding tools.

Your child's language work might include:

- Tracing sandpaper letters to connect sound and symbol
- Building words with the moveable alphabet
- Listening to stories and discussing them
- Retelling familiar stories
- Relating their own experiences to texts that are read
- Author study
- Comparing texts
- Developing opinions about books that are read
- Identifying key details in what is read
- Noting the main characters and the settings of stories
- Creating stories individually and as a group
- Labeling objects in the classroom
- Writing simple words, sentences, or even stories
- Engaging in conversations with peers and teachers

A key part of Montessori philosophy is fostering independence. In language, this means children are not just repeating information, they are *using* it. They choose their work, practice at their own pace, and experience the satisfaction of figuring things out themselves. Teacher guidance allows each individual to choose appropriately and to recognize their own progress as they proceed through the classroom materials. Over time, this builds not only strong language skills but also confidence and a genuine love of communication.

The Montessori language curriculum is about more than reading and writing, it's about helping children find their voice. By

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focusing on hands-on learning, natural development, and meaningful communication, Montessori education supports children in becoming thoughtful speakers, engaged listeners, and enthusiastic readers and writers.

So the next time your child comes home and tells you a story, points out letters on a sign, or “writes” you a note, even if it’s phonetic, know that you’re seeing the Montessori method in action.

And it’s working.

In Lower Elementary, language work expands beyond foundational skills into deeper comprehension, communication and inferencing. Children read to gather information, conduct research, and explore topics connected to the broader Montessori curriculum. They practice structured writing through reports, creative stories and reflections during reading groups. All the while developing grammar and word study skills that help them understand how language works. In this second plane of development, language becomes a tool not just for learning, but for thinking, questioning, and working through multi-step problems and directions. Perhaps most importantly, it allows for sharing ideas with others.

If you’re curious about specific materials or want to better support language development at home, your child’s teacher is always a great resource. Montessori is a partnership, and you’re an important part of it. Reach out and join the partnership!

Introduction to Albrook’s Preschool Program

by Elaine Dignam and Maria McCusker

Ms. McCusker and Mrs. Dignam met with parents of current Stepping Stones students to discuss the transition into the primary three to six year old classroom. We discussed the emotional readiness of the young three year olds and how this will further develop as they normalize into their new environment. The parents in attendance visited primary classes and they observed how the mixed age group worked together. After our class visits, we discussed the daily schedule and we answered questions.

The following are some points to help ease the transition to the mixed age class.

- Encourage independence. Children will experience more success and feel more confident when they are willing to try to do things for themselves. For example, allow your child the time to independently dress and undress whenever possible.
- Have your child carry his or her own backpack and put it away in a designated spot every time they arrive home. We tell our children in class that we are all responsible for our neat classroom and we appreciate everyone’s help.
- Purchase a large backpack that can easily hold a lunchbox, a spare fleece and a school folder.
- Check the zippers on their jackets; if they are tight for an adult, a child will not be able to learn to zip with that article of clothing. Look for thick plastic zippers that glide.
- Belts, snaps and zippers can be obstacles to young children who have recently been potty-trained. Elastic waistbands are ideal.
- Sneakers are best for navigating the playground and practicing gross-motor skills.

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Elementary Play

by Lauren Lipman

On April 10th, the Albers Hall was filled with excited energy and joy, as the elementary students performed their annual musical theater production. This year's play, *Elephant and Piggie: We're in a Play Jr.* was the culmination of months of hard work. The children learned lines, songs, choreography, and staging during their drama classes and also spent time at home practicing. Parent and teacher volunteers helped to make beautiful scenery depicting the book covers of the *Elephant and Piggie* books by Mo Willems. The children enjoyed reading these very humorous books and relating them to the play. Everyone shone on stage and did their absolute best. It was a joy to see how they supported each other both on and off the stage. All in all, it was a wonderful community event enjoyed by children and adults alike.



Grace and Courtesy in the Monet Classroom

At the toddler level, grace and courtesy is taught in a practical, repetitive, gentle manner. At its core, it is teaching children to treat others, both their peers and adults, with kindness and respect. We do this by modeling the behaviors we wish the children to internalize and manifest and also by implementing gentle rituals into our daily routine.

We begin each morning by acknowledging each child with a verbal good morning and smile and encouraging each child to greet us back either verbally or with a wave. This is further practiced when visitors come into the room, at Circle time and when people greet us in the hallways.

Another daily ritual is practicing the social graces of using polite language such as 'please and thank you' when we request and receive something. This is most evident when the children ask us to write their name on their work or at snack time. We use the language of 'Please can you' rather than 'I want' and then once they receive it, we prompt them to say 'thank you.'

There are so many other social graces that we model and draw the child's awareness to and gently direct the children to do on a daily basis. Covering our mouth when we cough, covering our nose when we sneeze and saying excuse me when we want to pass or get someone's attention are to name just a few.

At Albrook, we strongly believe that practicing grace and courtesy as a school community helps all our students foster strong core values, greatly aids their social and emotional skills and succeed in life. In short, it makes us all better people!

An Evening Together

By Ms. MacNeill

Our annual Spring Gala, held on March 27, was a beautiful reflection of what makes our community so special. Each year, our APA Board and Event Committee partner with the school community to create an evening that brings us together in celebration, and this year's gathering carried an especially meaningful tone as we marked 46 years of learning, growth, dedication, and connection.

The Albrook School has always been more than a place where students come to learn. It is a place where families build lasting relationships, where children are nurtured with care and intention, and where a shared commitment to education creates a strong and enduring bond among us all. That spirit was felt throughout the evening, as familiar faces, alumni, current families, and friends came together in celebration.

One of the most touching moments of the night came from one of our Gala Co-Chairs, an alumna who has now returned as a parent. In her welcome speech, she shared memories of her own journey, alongside those of her siblings, from their earliest days as toddlers through their elementary years at Albrook. Her reflections were from her heart offering a living testament to the lasting impact of this community. It was especially





meaningful that she invited friends and fellow alumni to join the evening, adding another layer of connection and shared history to the celebration.

As we enjoyed the laughter, music, and time together, we also recognized the purpose behind the evening. As a nonprofit school, tuition supports our curriculum and daily operations, but rising costs continue to create a gap. Events like the Spring Gala play a vital role in helping us bridge that gap, ensuring we can continue to provide our students with the enriching environment, quality materials, and meaningful opportunities they deserve.

Every family's participation truly made a difference. When our community shows up in support, it sends a strong message that we believe in this school, in its mission, and in the children whose lives are shaped here every day.

An evening like this does not happen without tremendous effort. Our heartfelt thanks go to our Gala Co-Chairs, Urooj Rehman and Daina Raiffe and the entire Event Committee, whose creativity, dedication, and attention to detail brought this celebration to life. From the earliest planning stages to the final moments of the evening, their hard work made it all possible.

We also extend our deep appreciation to our Parent Association Jaslynn Vesuvio, Sarah Iosifescu, and Barak Shimon for their ongoing support and commitment. Your dedication strengthens our community and helps turn events like this into meaningful, memorable experiences.

The night was filled with connection, old friends reconnecting, new friendships forming, and a shared joy in celebrating 46 years of our school's history. We danced, we laughed, and we were reminded that people like you make this community so extraordinary. We could not be on this journey without you. Your presence was not just appreciated, it was part of what made the evening truly special.

Woman's History Month

By Karin Baird

In upper elementary for Women's History month, we read and discussed books highlighting famous women and their accomplishments. We talked about their early lives and how they managed to achieve great things despite obstacles that they may have faced.

Some famous women that we focused on included Maya Lin, the architect who designed the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Jennifer Keelan-Chaffins, an advocate for the Americans with Disabilities Act who participated in the Capital Crawl, Malala Yousafzai, activist for female education and the youngest recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, and Sharice Davids, one of the first Native American women to be elected to Congress.

We read these stories as a part of our Tournament of Books in March, where we read a different book each morning in a celebration of literature. We are continuing to research famous women and men as the children have selected biographies to read at home in preparation for a book report and project to be shared with the class next month.

AI in Action: Leveraging Artificial Intelligence to Enhance Student Learning

by Zambetoula Vazaios

On December 1, 2025, I had the pleasure of attending a workshop on leveraging Artificial Intelligence to Enhance Student Learning. This workshop was held at the Morris-Union Jointure Commission. During this workshop, I had a chance to explore how AI can personalize instruction, boost engagement, streamline planning, and support diverse learners. I was grateful for the chance to learn about and gain hands-on experience with tools such as ChatGPT, Diffit, Perplexity, Claude, Gamma, and MagicSchool.

The goals of this workshop included:

- transforming learning experiences by integrating AI tools into lessons to make instruction more engaging and effective
- utilizing practical tools and resources to confidently implement AI in the classroom;
- personalizing student learning by tailoring instruction to meet the unique needs, interests, and readiness levels of all learners
- exploring ethical and equitable AI use in a K–12 setting, with a focus on accessibility, digital citizenship, and student data privacy.

As educators, we are embracing aspects of AI that complement our hands-on learning. For example, we have helped improve the assessment of student learning and outcomes with rubrics, created choice boards for projects, and augmented lessons with digital slide decks to boost learning!

Water Safety Presentation

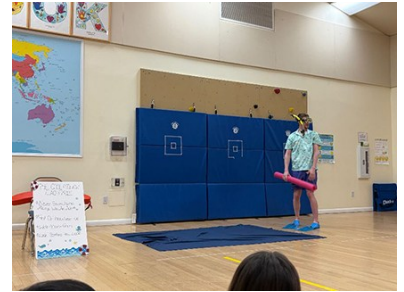
by Ania Virk

The Albrook School has a strong, ongoing relationship with the Little Dolphins Swim Academy, as the school has organized instructional swim lessons there for Albrook students. Building on this connection, the academy recently visited the school to present its LDSA Water Safety Show, creating a warm and joyful experience for everyone involved.

The presentation was filled with upbeat songs, interactive activities, and easy-to-follow safety lessons that kept the children smiling, moving, and fully engaged from start to finish. The students' enthusiasm and participation made the experience not only fun, but truly meaningful as they learned important skills to stay safe around water.

At the heart of the presentation was a shared commitment to keeping children safe, supporting efforts to reduce the average of 65 annual drowning deaths in New Jersey through early education and awareness. The instructors connected wonderfully with the students, encouraging confidence and curiosity throughout the show. To extend the learning beyond the classroom, each child received a postcard to share with their family, inviting them to consider swim lessons—an important step, as early instruction has been shown to reduce the risk of drowning in children by up to 88%.

Overall, it was a positive and memorable experience that left both students and staff feeling inspired and empowered.



Supporting Your Child on Their Handwriting Journey

by Karen Tarangul

“He does it with his hands, by experience, first in play and then through work. The hands are the instruments of man’s intelligence.” — Dr. Montessori

By nature, children are creative beings who love to explore and build. However, holding a pencil can feel very awkward at first. As parents, we can help our children develop the correct grip and hand strength needed to use a pencil, crayon, or marker comfortably.

This grip is called the **pincer grip**. Montessori encouraged its development through sensorial and practical life activities in the classroom. The good news is that there are many simple and fun ways to support this development at home.

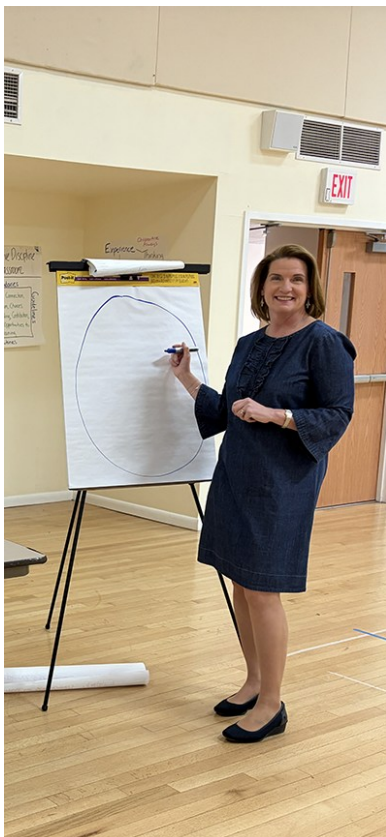
Easy Activities to Try at Home

1. **Rip old paper** Show your child how to pull paper in opposite directions to tear it.
2. **Thread macaroni onto string** Make necklaces together for family and friends.
3. **Lacing activities** Punch holes in old boxes and show your child how to weave yarn or string in and out of the holes.
4. **Scrunch paper into tiny balls** Use waste paper and see who can make the smallest balls using only their fingers.

5. **Paint with water outdoors** Use a paintbrush and water on the driveway or sidewalk. Hot days work best!
6. **Water play with sponges** Offer different-sized sponges in the bathtub or kitchen sink. Add bath gel for extra bubbles and fun.
7. **Playdough play** Create a special mat and designated area for playdough activities, away from carpets.
8. **Moon sand exploration** Keep moon sand in a special container with a lid. Outdoor play works especially well.
9. **Chalk art and clean-up** Draw with sidewalk chalk, then use soapy water and a scrubbing brush to wash it away.
10. **Chalkboards and watercolor painting** Encourage drawing and painting on different surfaces.
11. **Coloring and guided drawing books** Use books that provide step-by-step directions for drawing simple pictures.
12. **Use thick crayons and chunky markers** Cut paper into smaller pieces and praise your child's effort. They will love telling you about their artwork and ideas!
13. **Make time for creativity** Give your child regular opportunities to draw and color. There may be a future Picasso or Miró waiting to be discovered.

A Note to Parents

Remember that every child develops handwriting skills at their own pace. The goal in the early years is not perfect handwriting, but building confidence, coordination, and enjoyment through meaningful hands-on experiences. Offer encouragement, celebrate effort over results, and create opportunities for your child to explore, create, and strengthen their hands through play. When modeling writing, begin letters at the top and move downward, and use lowercase letters whenever possible. Most importantly, let your child see that mistakes are a normal part of learning—laugh together, stay patient, and enjoy this special stage of discovery and growth.



Positive Discipline

On March 20, 2026, the teaching team participated in a Positive Discipline workshop led by Kathleen McClay, a Certified Positive Discipline Trainer and Co-Founder of Positive Discipline New Jersey.

What is Positive Discipline?

Positive Discipline is a program designed to teach young people to become responsible, respectful, and resourceful members of their communities. Based on the best-selling Positive Discipline books by Jane Nelsen, Lynn Lott, Cheryl Erwin, Kate Ortolano, Mary Hughes, Mike Brock, Lisa Larson, and others, it teaches important social and life skills in a manner that is deeply respectful and encouraging for both children and adults, including parents, teachers, childcare providers, and youth workers.

Recent research tells us that children are “hardwired” from birth to connect with others, and that children who feel a sense of connection to their community, family, and school are less likely to misbehave. To be successful, contributing members of their community, children must learn necessary social and life skills.

Positive Discipline is based on the understanding that discipline must be taught and that discipline teaches.

Five Criteria for Effective Discipline

Jane Nelsen gives the following criteria for “effective discipline that teaches”:

Effective discipline:

1. Helps children feel a sense of connection (Belonging and significance)
2. Is mutually respectful and encouraging (Kind and firm at the same time)
3. Is effective long term (Considers what the child is thinking, feeling, learning, and deciding about themselves and their world, and what to do in the future to thrive)
4. Teaches important social and life skills (Respect, concern for others, problem solving, cooperation, and the skills to contribute to the home, school, and larger community)
5. Invites children to discover their sense of capability (Encourages the constructive use of personal power and independence)

The Positive Discipline Approach

The Positive Discipline parenting and classroom management models are aimed at developing mutually respectful relationships. Positive Discipline teaches adults to use kindness and firmness at the same time and is neither punitive nor permissive.

Core Tools and Concepts

The tools and concepts of Positive Discipline include:

- Mutual respect—Adults model firmness by respecting themselves and the needs of the situation, and kindness by respecting the needs of the child.
- Identifying the belief behind the behavior—Effective discipline recognizes the reasons children behave the way they do and works to guide those underlying beliefs, rather than simply correcting behavior.
- Effective communication and problem-solving skills
- Discipline that teaches (Neither permissive nor punitive)
- Focusing on solutions instead of punishment
- Encouragement instead of praise—Encouragement notices effort and improvement, not just success, and supports the development of confidence, independence, and intrinsic motivation.

Spreading the Joy of Reading

by Barak Shimon

In honor of Read Across America Week, our school was a vibrant celebration of literacy and community. The highlight of the week was the Albrook Book Swap, which proved to be a resounding success! Thanks to the incredible generosity of our Albrook families, students had the opportunity to browse a wonderful collection of donated books, with each child selecting 1–2 “new-to-them” stories to take home and enjoy.

To keep the festive spirit alive, each day featured a unique and quirky theme that brought smiles to



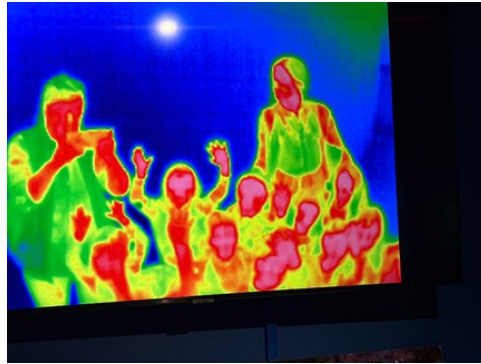


students and staff alike. From cozy Pajama Day and colorful Mismatched Socks Day to the wild creativity of Crazy Hairstyle Day, these daily celebrations reminded us all that reading is a gift worth celebrating.

The impact of your kindness extended well beyond our school walls. Because of your abundant contributions, we were also able to donate a significant collection of books to charity, sharing the love of reading with children in the wider community. Thank you, Albrook families, for making this week so meaningful!

Pre-K 2 Field Trip

by Cheryl Fritsch



The Pre-K 2 classes took a bus trip to Raritan Valley Community College to attend the "Rocket Ride" show at the planetarium. Prior to the trip, the children studied facts about each of the planets and created their own planets, which they glued onto poster boards to showcase their hard work and take home.

After the trip, the children were asked to share their favorite parts of the experience. Many mentioned the bus ride, talking to the sun during the show, and the different interactive elements. Some even said their favorite part was "everything!"



Around Albrook celebrating Black History Month



Science Night



Spring Break Expanded Care

