

Montessori Pathways' News



Joy, feeling one's own value, being appreciated and loved by others, feeling useful and capable of production are all factors of enormous value for the human soul.

~ Maria Montessori



Thank you!

Thank you, parents and kids, for your thoughtful Christmas gifts to our Montessori Pathways Team and for the many beautiful Christmas cards with a lot of wonderful wishes and very warm words!

Your understanding, cooperation, help, support, and appreciation are priceless for us.

I hope that everybody had a wonderful time during this holiday season. May everyone's New Year be filled with happiness, love, and prosperity!



Notes from Ms. Alena (Head of School)

We call them "Montessori moments" – those moments that are so golden and precious that they are indelibly etched into our hearts forever.

Our siblings, **Elin** (4th grade) & **Audrey** (Kindergarten) **Heatwole** made a very interesting presentation to their friends about **St. Lucia Day**.

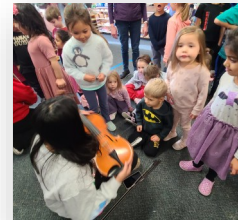


We had several guests at our school with their educational presentations—ranger **Athens Boyle** (former student of Ms. Bridget); scientist **Veronica Fitzparick** (Sophia's mom); **Dr. Ali** (Layla's dad). Thank you so much for the opportunity to learn.



Undoubtably there was **Christmas Spirit** present at school during the whole month of December. Listening to Christmas music, singing songs, decorating the school and classrooms, and working on Christmas gifts for parents were a major part of the learning process in December.

One of the magical moments was a visit from **Woodstock D200 Orchestra** at our school. **Thank you, Lyndra Bastian** (Maelyn's mom), for bringing the magic of music to our school.



The favorites of the month were **Spirit Week** at Pathways, **"Reading Under the Stars"** family night, **Winter Art** and **"Secret Santa"** Party for Elementary students, **Science Demo** by elementary students, **Gingerbread Cookies** baked by Pre-K / K group; **sledding in the park** (elementary); **Nocturnal Animals Puppet Show** for Pre-K/K group; **caroling** around the school (elementary), tons of Christmas work and projects for primary students, **visiting Crystal Pines** Rehab Center by Elementary students and sharing handmade Christmas Card with the residents... December was truly happy and festive for our children!





Parents' Corner



Transitions: The Benefits of Holiday Breaks

With the holidays swiftly approaching, you and your child are likely to find yourselves facing many changes in your daily routines. Trips to visit family, changes in eating habits, busy schedules with early mornings and late nights — all of these things may make your child's everyday activities change significantly.

And because a child is still learning to embrace life skills such as flexibility and resilience, having long periods of time off for the holidays may initially take your son or daughter by surprise. But with planning, you can make the most of the holiday break from school, have a lot of fun as a family, and watch your child bloom as they head back to school refreshed and ready to learn.

How a Break Benefits Your Child's Learning

We all need breaks! Short breaks during activities can greatly benefit your child's learning. After long periods of focus, the brain is depleted of neurotransmitters like dopamine and serotonin. A shift in focus to rest and replenish is necessary and healthy. A longer break, such as several days for holiday celebrations, can allow you and your family to get needed sleep and rejuvenation in the form of entertaining activities like shopping, cookie making, and visiting relatives and friends.

Routines Are Also Helpful to Young Children

Of course, as Montessori teachers well know, regular daily activities that children can count on help them develop a sense of confidence and exploration within understandable boundaries. But as parents know, holiday schedules can play havoc with regular activities. Here are some ways you can counteract the change of routine that happens during the holidays when your children are home from school:

Plan ahead!

Create a bucket of 10-, 20-, and 30-minute activities that you can invite your child to engage in — the more, the better. Then as you focus on your own tasks of cooking, card writing, online shopping or other activities, encourage your son or daughter to pick their own activities out of the bucket and do them. When your child grows restless, invite him or her to switch to a new activity. This mimics the schedule of a Montessori school day, which may help your child navigate their free time more smoothly.

Take breaks.

Your child needs break time from their activities. And so do you! Movement is not only good for your brain, but good for your body also. As your child winds down from an activity, use one or more of these methods to take a brain break with them:

- **Move** — Stretch, take a brief walk, do a yoga move or two, or shake and wiggle your body.
- **Use music** — Turn on a favorite song and dance to it. Or sing a song or two with your child, clapping to keep time.
- **Draw** — Pull out a notepad and doodle. Choose something in the house or yard to draw. Pull out the crayons and color a page or two in a coloring book.

- **Breathe deeply** — Mindful practices like deep breathing are relaxing. It's also a great way to teach children to be less reactive — a useful tool for later in life.
- **Play a quick game** — Charades, twenty questions, or a similar game that moves fast is a fun way to switch things up. And it keeps your child engaged in discovery — another way to bring in the Montessori approach at home.

Keep up the learning.

Just because your child is at home, you don't have to totally nix all opportunities to learn and discover. Consider incorporating these Montessori-style, learning-based, fun activities into your holiday plans:

- **Read a book with your child.** During the holidays, you get the bonus of having more time for reading. Pick a long book, like *Charlotte's Web*, and read a chapter or two nightly before bedtime. Or invite your child to pick a book they can read to visiting relatives, which is fun for everyone!
- **Listen to books in the car.** That long drive to Grandma's house doesn't have to be filled with mindless videos. Play a book your kids will enjoy instead. Take breaks between chapters to talk about it and speculate what might happen to the characters next.
- **Practice math skills in the kitchen.** While you're cooking holiday meals, invite children in to practice fractions, adding and subtracting. Have them count the cups of flour poured into the mixing bowl, or count equal numbers of cookies into gift bags.
- **Invite discovery while shopping.** If you do holiday shopping, engage your child in a game of discovery. Encourage them to closely examine artistic items at a craft fair, telling you about the colors and materials they notice. Let them describe objects that catch their attention.

All these activities are related to the holiday and can be fun, while also allowing your child to continue their Montessori learning. This way, they'll be ready to step back into school once the holiday is over.

Prepare Your Child to Go Back to School

One final thing to do before student holiday breaks end is to prepare your child to return to the routine of the classroom. By doing so, you make their transition easier and help them ease back into the learning process successfully.

- **Sleep** — Make sure your child gets plenty of sleep. Ideally, keep them on their regular sleep schedule so they won't be dragging on school mornings.
- **Eat breakfast** — With holidays, our eating habits may go out the window. But keep your children in the habit of eating a nutritious breakfast.
- **Get organized** — Before school starts back up, make sure your child's school items and clothes are clean, organized, and in place.



Enjoy your family time and see you in 2026!

COMING SCHOOL'S EVENTS

in January

- ♦ January 5 (M) - School resumes after Winter Break
- ♦ January 16 (F) - **ELEMENTARY** Parent / Teacher Conference Day (via Zoom)

The link to sign up for Parent/Teacher Conference will be sent on Friday, January 2nd.

No school for Elementary Students on Conference Day, January 16th.

- ♦ January 19 (M) - No School (Martin Luther King JR. Day)
- ♦ January 15—31 - Returning Families Preferred Re-Enrollment Period

The new year arrives with new problems and questions for us. In the beginning of every year, the parents of 5-6-year-old kids have to make a very important decision – what is the next step for my child? Where should he/she continue his/her education?

There are two common things we hear every year from the parents.

The first one is a question “Will my child be prepared for public kindergarten or elementary?”

It is very important to understand that if we would prepare our students for traditional kindergarten, then we would not be Montessori, but the same conventional school where kids of the same age (but still developmentally very different) learn the same material at the same time based on the teacher's plan.

While offering a versatile learning opportunity to our students, the major goal of the Montessori schools is preparing our students not for public kindergarten or elementary level, but for real life, which more and more requires great thinking and organization skills, independence, initiative, creativity, ability to work as a team, leadership skills and so on. We provide a child centered, multiage environment, where kids are learning at their own pace through a hands-on experience, exploring, discovering, making connections, and developing all necessary life skills without being stressed.

It is important to understand that the Montessori Kindergarten Year is the final and very crucial year in the primary 3-year cycle of the Montessori environment.

The second thing that we hear every year from many parents is that “being in a Montessori environment during one or few years was enough for our child's development. It is time for him/her to move to a public school like most of his/her friends. He /She will be fine there.”

There is no “enough” in education and no bounds in a child's development. And being “just fine”- is this what we are looking for for our kids?

So, if you are still open to exploring all of the options and possibilities for your child's education, check our coming January and February newsletters in for more information about what Montessori environment offers for the next level of your child's development.—Elementary students invite their parents to join.

- ♦ January 28 (W) at 5:30- 6:30 pm - “The Magic of Montessori Materials” - Students' Presentations for Parents (Elementary and Primary Classes)



NEWS FROM THE ELEMENTARY CLASS

Ms. Bridget, Ms. Carole



December is a month overflowing with activities and learning. If you asked an elementary student, she/he would say that December was their favorite month.

The month began with science demonstrations. The students were able to pick a demonstration that explains a scientific concept from many books that I brought in from the library. Each child creates the "magic" at home and then brings the materials in to show their classmates. Then the next day, they show their parents. Finally, they show the primary classes. The students enjoy this as each child becomes the expert of their demonstration. It is also big practice in the skill of presenting in front of an audience.



Elementary students love to decorate. They have many ideas and are happy to participate. Our holiday class tradition begins by putting up our Christmas tree. First is that all help put the tree together. Three groups of 7 fluff up the branches and then all get to add ornaments. We have class ornaments and ornaments that kids can bring in from home to add to our tree. We use tinsel and have other items to add around the room to create joyful spirits.

Spirit Week is always enjoyable. Students love to dress up and show their friends what they chose to wear. I love to see the creativity and the fun that they have.

This year, Spirit Week was packed with activities. On Wednesday, Ranger Athens, a former student of mine and recent ranger at The Great Sand Dunes in Colorado came for the afternoon. He presented information on the night sky and did a planet activity in which we compared planet sizes in a very visual way with dough.

On Thursday, we enjoyed listening to the Woodstock string musicians play. The high school students played some songs as we listened or sung along. After, the kids were able to strum their instruments.

Finally, that Friday, we had a birthday celebration for Surkhav. We ate a treat, sung Happy Birthday to him and listened to birthday music during lunch.

In the afternoon, we went sledding. For more on that, please read what Parker Bates and Zuzana Hubacek wrote:

"On Friday, the elementary class went to VA to go sledding at one of the big hills there. The hill that we went to was the

hill by the playground/splashpad. We all could bring our own sleds from home if we wanted to. The hill was super icy in some areas but we found an area that wasn't that icy. We all got in a line. Then we started sledding one at a time. It was super fun and fast." - Parker B.

"Parker was first to see if it was safe and fun. Then we went and it was really fun!" - Zuzana H.

The last week of school before break is when we went caroling. We first carol at school to all of the primary students. Because it was so cold this year, we stayed inside and went into their classes to sing. I love when we sing a song that they know and they join us. After, we drink hot chocolate and Ms Alena brings in cookies for all the kids.

The next day, we walked up the street to go caroling at Crystal Pines Senior Center. The students perform several songs in different locations around the facility. The residents are always smiling and happy to see us. They also will join in singing.

When we finished this year, we walked downtown to see our school Christmas tree. We then mailed our letters to Santa and then popped in Abalabix Book Store to see the store dog, George.

But their favorite tradition of all is the holiday party and Secret Santa exchange. Each student pulls a name out to decide who to buy a gift for. We have some discussions in class not only about how to know what to buy but what the price cap is. On the day of the gift exchange, we discuss gratitude and how to accept gifts. Then the fun begins. I pull the first gift. The person has to guess who they think it is. If correct, the student opens the gift. If they guessed incorrectly, the person reveals themselves. Then the student opens the gift. I LOVE watching ALL the faces of the kids when a person opens a gift. Everyone is excited for the person. Finally, the person thanks the gift giver, throws their wrappings away and picks the next gift.

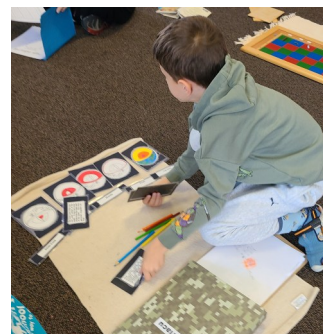
We finished the day with an appetizer party. We had Ladybugs, Grinches, smokeys, veggies, cheese, eclair dessert and Grinch punch. Kids could walk around and eat with their small plates and napkins. They love to eat and stand so I taught them how to do it with grace and courtesy.

It was a packed month. But as I heard Daniel Burlacu, first grader, say on several days, "This is the BEST day ever!", I would have to agree. It was a very special month for elementary.



DECEMBER PHOTO GALLERY

Elementary Class



NEWS FROM THE EAST ROOM

Ms. Masha, Ms. Laxmi



We definitely started the winter and snow season off strong with plenty of snow to get us into the wintry routine! By now, even the youngest children have become proficient in getting themselves fully dressed all the way from snowpants to their mittens, and everything in between – yes, even the zippers! The quick winter start got us right into the holiday spirit and our classroom Christmas tree needed to be set up right away. The children worked all together to fluff, assemble, and decorate our classroom Christmas tree. The kids took pride in making each branch fluffed just right and picking their favorite ornaments to adorn the tree.



We have had so many fun events to get us through the dark and cold days of December. We set up a "snowman" in time for "Reading under the Stars" Night, painted and wrapped the children's holiday presents, looked forward to all the fun outfits of Spirit Week, enjoyed the beautiful music from string orchestra from Woodstock SD 200, and the lovely caroling visit from our very own Elementary Class!



It may be hard to believe, but in the midst of all this, the children continued to explore new and complex academic concepts. That is the beauty of a normalized Montessori classroom – the independent study continues despite all of the situational distraction!

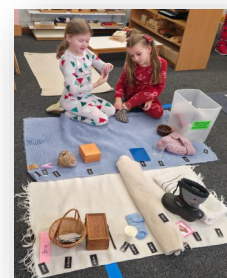
Our room has been absolutely filled with moveable alphabets galore. From simple sorting by beginning sounds to basic CVC word building and all the way to story writing with sight words, the children are exploring a wide variety of language concepts. For the onlookers, it becomes a wonderful exercise in controlling their bodies as it takes just a slight misstep from a friend to send a whole sentence of letters flying.



The care children have for each other is remarkable – when they see someone laying out sentence after sentence meticulously word by word, they are extra protective of the space, slowing down and walking extra slow around them, reminding younger children to do the same. The youngest children, in turn, become inspired to return to their own study of sounds and letters when they see the grand scale of work achieved by the children reading and writing in the room.

And though not many books have gone home to be read, there has been no shortage of reading in the room either. Children who have progressed in their reading journey have now switched to setting up 3-Part Cards the "Elementary" way – matching pictures to their written labels, using the "picture and word" control to check their work.

We are also going on scavenger hunts around the room to collect nouns, working with friends to read and act out verbs, working through more complex spelling rules to read labels for the room labeling work, and, a new favorite, reading more complex command cards and thinking of how to accomplish tasks like "drop a drop" or "dust a book." Much of this work takes most of the working period but has nothing physical to come home aside from the child's progress in their reading skills!



And while there was a definite exploration of winter history, fauna and flora with studies of penguins, reindeer, Christmas Trees, and world winter holidays, the most prominent draw has been to map making! Some children have progressed from mapping the room (a lesson in moving from reality to 3D representation to 2D representation) to their first World Map, while others have taken their map making skills to a new level by adding in a study of the people, places, animals, and plants of the region and then reading and writing about them. The sequencing of Math and the composing and reading work of Language comes back around even in the Geography area of the Montessori class!



We hope you have had a chance to read our recent note with additional ideas of activities to do with your children during break to keep their development progressing! Have an amazing and safe holiday season. We can't wait to see everyone rested and recharged in 2026!

DECEMBER PHOTO GALLERY

East Room



NEWS FROM THE SOUTH ROOM

Ms. Kathy, Ms. Ellen



December was a busy and eventful month as usual. We began our month with Spirit Week. It is fun and exciting to share our favorite teams, colors and wackiness with classmates. The children waited with anticipation, watching each morning to see what friends would be wearing. To find a friend who enjoys the same things. Spirit week is a great start to the month of December and enjoyed by all.



We all enjoyed "Reading under the Stars". The children love having parents at school to share their magical world and special time together. There were readings by families and as a whole group. As a group we read "The First Day of Winter" by Denise Fleming. The children then each had an item to decorate our classroom snowman with. This fun interactive story was re-enacted during the week by re-reading and drawing the items added to the snowman in the story. Enhancing literacy skills and repetition of words in the story.



December 11 brought us a spectacular and exciting Christmas concert by the Woodstock high school orchestra. The entire school was able to enjoy the concert and witness the spectacular string instruments as the orchestra played holiday songs. The children also participated in using jingle bells in rhythm with the songs. At the conclusion of the concert the children of MLP were able to pluck strings on the various string instruments used and hear each pitch and note. Thank you to Lyndra Tingley (Maelyn's mom) for organizing and sharing this holiday magic for the children.



The Pre-k and Kindergarten children were treated to a science demonstration by Veronica Fitzpatrick (Sophia Burney's mom). The group explored viscosity of various liquids and explored all

the steps of the scientific method. Things are not always as predictable as they seem. It was an information and educational afternoon.



Friday brought us another special guest, Dr Ather Ali (Layla's dad). He talked to the children about being a physician, vital signs and why they are important and brought each child a stethoscope to listen to their hearts.



The elementary children came and treated us to impromptu Christmas caroling.

Oh, in the classroom we assembled and decorated our classroom Christmas tree. Lit a candle for each day of Hannukah and played the dreidel game. On the shelves we learned about winter holidays around the world, parts of a Christmas tree, gingerbread man and reindeer.

Many children used the moveable alphabet to write Christmas lists. The moveable alphabet has been used a lot this month. The 4-5-year-old children are beginning to use it more each day as we have a burst of word building and writing everywhere. It is an intermediate step between composition and writing. The children can express themselves through symbols without writing by building words with the alphabet. Many do choose to write after they have built their words or stories. It is exciting to see this spontaneous burst of language skills. It should be a New Year full of growth and learning.

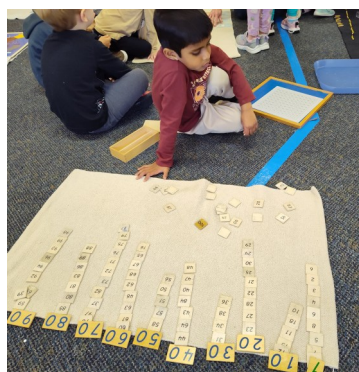


Enjoy the break and stay safe and healthy. See you all in the New Year.



DECEMBER PHOTO GALLERY

South Room

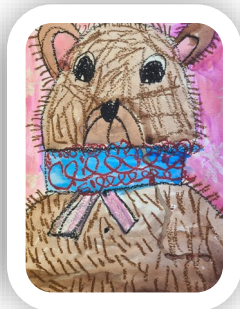


NEWS FROM THE PRE-K / KINDERGARTEN AFTERNOON GROUP



Ms. Masha, Ms. Kathy

Art Lessons: Elements of Art – Texture. After reading "Bear Can't Sleep" and "Bear Snores On", we made a mixed media oil pastel and watercolor bear portrait. We drew the outline of the bear in black oil pastel with a guided drawing- the children followed along as we broke down the different shapes needed for the bear (rectangle, circle, half circle). Confidence and acceptance of mistakes came into play - once we make a line in oil pastels, it cannot be erased. We also remembered our science experiments day when we tried to mix oil and water and they didn't mix. The same principle applied here- whatever we do with OIL pastels will remain when we go over it with WATERcolors! So we added fuzzy texture to our bear with stippling, a pattern of line designs to his scarf as a review of our first art lessons on lines, and a few unique snowflakes to the background. When all the oil pastel work was done, we reviewed warm and cool colors before setting in to filling the page with watercolors. It was a fun experience to see the watercolors slide right off the oil pastels and reveal the textures and patterns beneath!



Group Cooking: After reading "The Gingerbread Baby" by Jan Brett, we made the classic gingerbread cookies in a week long experience. After mixing together the stiff dough with a LOT of arm power from our group and smelling all the new spices as they added them into the gingerbread (ginger, nutmeg, cloves, etc), we had to chill the dough overnight. The children then worked in small groups to roll out the cold and stiff dough with lots of motor dexterity and patience, shape, and bake their cookies, before waiting for the cookies to cool down. A second round of waiting! The final step was adding royal icing (water and powdered sugar!) and some sprinkles for decorating and then, you guessed it, waiting for the icing to harden before the cookies could be bagged up to take home. A lot of patience and care went into this project but the children were so excited to be making them for their families, themselves, and, as many said, for Santa!



Zoology: McHenry County Conservation District performed a precious and engaging puppet show on Nocturnal Animals. They covered the different senses nocturnal animals use to navigate and keep themselves safe. At the end of the show, children worked together to find cards of the different nocturnal animals around the room and sort them back out based on the sense they rely on the most at night.



Science: Special visit from our local scientist, Ms. Veronica, Sophia's mom, who shared about her job as a scientist and taught us the 6 steps of the Scientific Method - Observation, Asking a Question, Hypothesis, Experiment, Results, and Communicate. The lesson was based around viscosity. Each group had a liquid of different viscosity- coconut water, oil, Italian dressing, honey, and Cascade dish detergent. The goal was to see which liquid would allow a Lego piece to sink the fastest. As we discussed the scientific method, we related each step to our goal. What do we observe about the liquids? (Their color, translucency, thickness, etc) What questions can we ask? (A lot of kids wondered about how air bubbles would play a role!) What liquid do we hypothesized will let Legos sink the fastest? Does the hypothesis change after we pour each liquid into a glass and see its thickness? We also touched on controlled variables! Keeping the glass size and shape identical, pouring the same amount of liquid in each glass, using the same type of Lego, counting at the same time, etc. As the groups went around dropping in their Legos, they recorded the results of how long their Lego took to sink (or never sink) to the bottom. They then drew a picture of what they saw to later share their findings with the group. The coconut water team surprised us with an additional discovery. When the hollow Lego piece was dropped horizontally, it remained floating during to the air pocket. But when we put it in vertically, it sank the fastest! Thank you, Ms. Veronica, for such an interactive and engaging introduction to the scientific method for our group!

Friday Hike: We went on our first wintery hike to Downtown Crystal Lake to see the lovely Christmas Tree Lane! Our main objective was to practice navigating colder and snowier roads and walking with partners while holding gloved hands. But once we arrived, we enjoyed guessing what business the tree was from based on the types of ornaments they used – many children thought the candy ornaments on a Dentist Christmas tree were hilarious. We then found the Montessori Pathways Christmas tree, which features ornaments with pictures of the children working. They carefully looked through the ornaments to discuss what each of their friends was doing!

DECEMBER PHOTO GALLERY

Pre-K and Kindergarten Extended Day Group



MORE WONDERFUL MOMENTS AT MONTESSORI PATHWAYS



"An interesting piece of work, freely chosen, which has the virtue of inducing concentration rather than fatigue, adds to the child's energies and mental capacities, and leads him to self-mastery."

~ Maria Montessori

