

Visiting Artist Showcase

Learning

Spaulding recently enjoyed a student art and music showcase focused on the history of art and music in the Middle East. Our students learned about art and instruments from all around the region that were created thousands of years ago! We worked with visiting artist, Randy Armstrong, to learn songs and rhythms authentic to the Middle East. The cumulative event was a great opportunity for staff and students to come together to perform and show pride in their work!



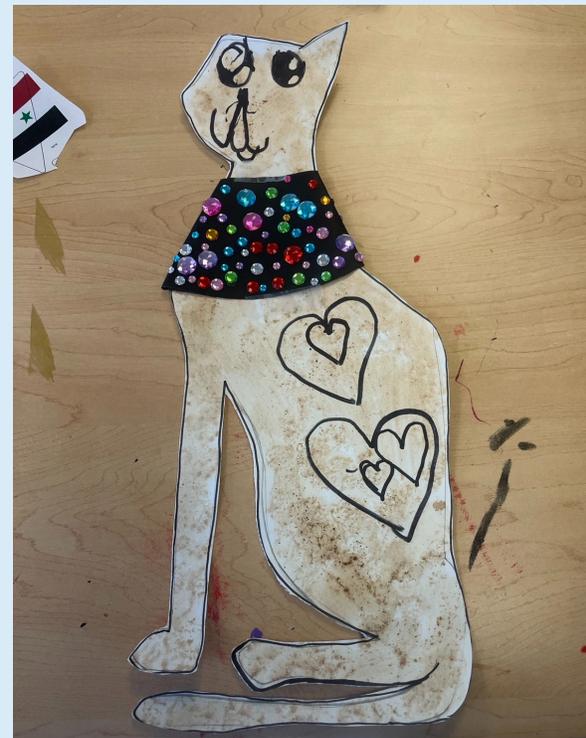
Robyn Allen
Art & Music Teacher

Middle East

Student Art

This month in the art room we have been learning all about the Middle East! We have looked at artwork from Turkey, Iran, Egypt and several other countries in anticipation of our visiting artist coming to play middle eastern music with the students! These photos are inspired by the cats of Egypt. Students used tea bags to create old looking paper and made detailed collars for their cats. The cat to the right was made by Izzy; great job Izzy!

Robyn Allen
Art & Music Teacher



Positive Body Image

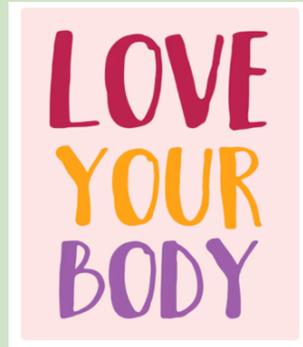
As trusted adults for our youth, we play a critical role to help them develop a healthy body image. It's important to talk to youth about food choices and body image in a way that isn't damaging to their mental health.

Here are some strategies to promote positive body image in our youth:

- Model Positive Body Language
 - Model positive self-talk and body acceptance
 - Avoid negative comments about others' bodies
 - Observe your own relationship with food and your body
 - Shift language to health rather than weight
- Encourage Open Dialogue
 - Create a safe space for discussion of body image
 - Encourage youth to share fears and insecurities
- Challenge Unrealistic Body Standards
 - Help youth assess media and social influences
 - Explain how images are edited and often not realistic
- Normalize Changes
 - Help youth understand that the body changes which happen normally as part of growing up happen for different people at different times
- Frame Health Holistically
 - Talk about food and movement in terms of strength, energy and mental well-being
 - Avoid using the term diet or enforcing food restrictions
 - Shift to making healthier choices or practicing moderation
 - Normalize listening to your body's hunger cues
 - Avoid use of foods as reinforcers
- Promote Body Function Over Appearance
 - Encourage youth to focus on what their bodies can do like physical activity for fun or health rather than appearance
- Listen and Validate
 - Acknowledge youth's feelings
 - Offer support with understanding and open communication

Lesley Robie, RDN, CNSC
Registered Dietitian

Nutrition



A Journey of Growth

At Spaulding, this student's journey has been marked by meaningful growth, connection, and confidence. Over time, she has embraced new opportunities and strengthened important relationships, both on and off campus.

She has enthusiastically participated in several school dances, stepping into social events with excitement and a growing sense of belonging. In the community, she attends the YMCA weekly, building healthy routines and engaging in positive recreational activities. Her progress extends home as well, with successful family visits and nearly daily video calls that help maintain strong, consistent connections. Most notably, she has reconnected with her brother, rebuilding a relationship that means so much to her.

On campus, she has developed and independently uses coping skills without prompting, a powerful reflection of her emotional growth and self awareness. She has formed many meaningful friendships and discovered a genuine love for reading, often choosing to spend time immersed in a good book.

Her time at Spaulding has been defined not just by milestones, but by steady, heartfelt progress. She continues to build the skills, relationships, and confidence that will support her long after she leaves campus and we are honored to watch her grow.

Nicole Desharnais, MA
Board Liaison & Communication Specialist

Happenings



Clinical

Connection is a Skill

It can sometimes look like certain families are simply “lucky”; their child opens up easily, conflict resolves smoothly, and closeness seems effortless. From a clinical mental health perspective, however, connection is rarely accidental. Strong parent-child relationships are built on consistent, teachable, and repeatable foundational skills. Connection is not about personality or perfect circumstances. It is built through emotional safety, attunement, predictability, and repair. Just as children develop academic or athletic skills through practice, relational security develops through intentional interactions over time.

- 1. Emotional Attunement:** Children feel connected when they feel understood. This means noticing their emotional state and responding to the feeling beneath the behavior. Reflect what you see before correcting behavior. For example, “it looks like you’re really frustrated right now”, before moving to problem solving.
- 2. Consistent Presence:** Predictability builds safety. Even brief, reliable moments of connection (5 to 10 minutes of uninterrupted time) strengthens attachment. For example, create a daily or weekly “non-negotiable” connection ritual such as a car ride check-in, bedtime conversation, or shared activity without phones.
- 3. Validation Over Fixing:** When children feel emotionally validated, their nervous system settles. Validation does not mean agreement; it communicates understanding. For example, use phrases like, “I can see why that felt embarrassing,” instead of immediately offering advice.
- 4. Regulated Responses:** Children borrow regulation from caregivers. A calm adult nervous system helps de-escalate conflict. For example, pause before responding during tense moments. Take a deep breath and lower your tone, this models emotional regulation in real time.
- 5. Repair After Rupture:** Disconnection happens in every family. What builds resilience is repair. For example, when conflict occurs, revisit it later: “I didn’t handle that the way I wanted to. Can we try that conversation again?” Repair teaches accountability and trust.

From a clinical lens, connection strengthens protective factors such as emotional regulation, self-worth, and resilience. It also reduces the intensity and frequency of challenging behaviors because children are more likely to cooperate with adults they feel securely connected to. Connection is not based on luck. It is built through intention, consistency, and skill. The good news? Skills can be practiced. And every small, repeated moment of attuned presence strengthens the foundation of your relationship.

Liz Lowrey, M.S. CMHC
Behavioral Health Clinician

Behavioral

Regulation Before Expectation

When a student is upset, overwhelmed, or dysregulated, their brain is in survival mode—not learning mode. In those moments, asking for compliance (“sit down,” “use your words,” “finish the task”) is like asking someone to solve a math problem during a fire drill. The brain just isn’t ready yet.

That’s where regulation before expectation comes in. Before we focus on directions, rules, or consequences, we first help the student feel safe and calm. This might look like offering a break, using visuals, lowering our voice, reducing demands, or simply sitting nearby and staying steady. These supports help bring the nervous system back online so learning can happen.

Once a student is regulated, expectations actually make sense again—and compliance becomes more likely, meaningful, and lasting. Calm first, then teach.

So the next time a moment feels hard, remember: connection and regulation aren’t “giving in.” They’re the bridge to success.

Nicole Hilliker
Behavior Specialist



Supporting Growth Together

Permanency

When a child enters residential placement, it can feel like treatment is happening “somewhere else.” In reality, caregiver involvement remains one of the strongest predictors of long-term success. Even while your child is receiving 24/7 therapeutic support, your role continues to be essential in reinforcing growth, strengthening motivation, and preparing for reunification or next steps. Here are ways caregivers can support treatment goals:

- 1. Stay Engaged in the Treatment Plan:** Attend family sessions, treatment meetings, and scheduled calls whenever possible. Ask questions about goals, interventions, and progress. When you understand what your child is working on (e.g., emotional regulation, accountability, communication skills), you can reinforce those same skills during visits and phone calls.
- 2. Mirror the Language of Treatment:** Using similar language at home strengthens consistency. If your child is practicing coping skills, conflict resolution steps, or emotional identification tools, ask about them directly: “What coping skill did you use today?” or “Would you like to teach me a coping skill you’ve learned?” Consistency between residential and home environments builds stability and confidence.
- 3. Celebrate Effort, Not Just Outcomes:** Progress in treatment is rarely linear. Recognize small steps such as attending groups, using coping skills, repairing peer conflicts, even if larger goals are still in progress. Affirming effort reinforces internal motivation and resilience.
- 4. Practice Skills During Visits:** Visits are opportunities to model and reinforce growth. If your child is working on communication skills, practice active listening. If they are focusing on independent living skills, encourage age-appropriate responsibility during home visits.
- 5. Participate in Your Own Growth:** Residential treatment often highlights family patterns, stressors, or communication dynamics. Engaging in recommended supports such as parent coaching, family therapy, or psychoeducation helps to demonstrate commitment and strengthens the foundation your child will return to.
- 6. Maintain Hope and Predictability:** Children in residential care benefit from knowing their caregivers remain steady and invested. Regular contact, consistent messaging, and clear expectations help reduce anxiety and reinforce a sense of belonging.

Residential placement is not a pause in parenting; it is a partnership in strengthening it. Your child’s growth does not happen in isolation. Treatment is most effective when children are able to engage in their goals for growth with those they care about most. Your child’s team is here to support collaboration in whatever way makes sense for you as a family. Don’t hesitate to reach out to your child’s team with ideas, thoughts, and everything in between.

Liz Lowrey, M.S. CMHC
Behavioral Health Clinician

Choose Love Talent Show

There was something extra special in the air at this year’s Choose Love Talent Show. It wasn’t just the music or the cheers, it was the courage, the pride, the joy of students stepping into the spotlight to show us who they are.

Our students showcased an incredible range of talents that had the audience smiling from start to finish. The stage came alive with powerful singing performances, energetic dance routines, and even a student spinning beats on DJ turntables like a seasoned pro. We even had a student who showed us an epic Beyblade battle that had everyone on the edge of their seats.

Each act was a reminder that talent comes in many forms. Some students shared gifts they’ve been practicing for years, while others bravely tried something new in front of their peers. No matter the act, every performer was met with encouragement, applause, and genuine celebration.

The Choose Love Talent Show wasn’t just about showcasing skills, it was about confidence, self-expression, and community. It was about honoring individuality and creating a space where every student felt seen, supported, and celebrated for exactly who they are.

And if the smiles and applause were any indication, it was a resounding success.

Nicole Desharnais, MA
Board Liaison & Communications Specialist

Residential

