



# It's Elementary

## VALLEY STREAM UFSD THIRTEEN

FALL 2019

### *James A. Dever Elementary School Observes Red Ribbon Week*

James A. Dever Elementary School kicked off its observation of Red Ribbon Week, an initiative of the Red Ribbon Campaign, in mid-October, which is designed to raise awareness for drug prevention programs and put an end to drug-related violence. The event began with a run and related events occurred throughout the week.



Sponsored by the National Family Partnership, the National Red Ribbon Campaign was established in 1985 following the homicide of Drug Enforcement Agency agent Enrique Camarena. In response to this tragedy, parents and children across the county began to wear red ribbons to raise awareness of the senseless violence and destruction wrought by drugs. The Red Ribbon Campaign mobilizes community groups, schools, and parents to participate in drug prevention activities. Since its inception, the Red Ribbon Campaign has reached millions of people all over the county, and Dever Elementary School is happy to be a part of this vital mission.



## VALLEY STREAM UFSD 13 SUPERINTENDENT PUBLISHES BOOK!

*Dr. Constance D. Evelyn, superintendent of schools, poses with her recently published book—Evaluating the Superintendent: the Process of Collaborative Compromises and Critical Considerations—which she co-wrote with Dr. Jarett Powers, superintendent of Union Springs Central School District in Union Springs, New York. Congratulations, Dr. Evelyn! You've made the entire Valley Stream UFSD 13 proud.*

# The Future of Education is Flexible

Any sci-fi movie or television show from the 20<sup>th</sup> century typically depicted futuristic worlds as very grey, uniform, and full of technology beyond our wildest imaginations. Fast forward to 2019, and fortunately, only the last of those three descriptions has materialized. We live in a world that contains remarkable technology, and the future is very colorful and imaginative. When it comes to education, the Valley Stream Union Free School District 13 strives to be a forward-thinking district by implementing modern technologies in the classroom. In addition to technology, the definition of a futuristic education includes having a flexible mindset in exploring methods of teaching.

Quite literally, the District has constructed flexible classrooms. Countless research has shown there are benefits to teaching in different ways other than rows of desks and a teacher lecturing. Our minds—especially those of children—respond well to a changing environment where brains are constantly stimulated. In the District, eight rooms—two in each school—have received major makeovers. New classroom equipment has been provided to teachers that submitted proposals, and the results are futuristic classrooms that make even an adult want to go back to school.

In developing the flexible classrooms, the District consulted those who would be using the classrooms—students and teachers. Together, these groups combed through catalogs and researched classroom ideas for inspiration. Children had a voice in the process, and specific plans were designed so that individual needs were met. The District’s goal has been to create “responsive classroom” environments.

What does a flexible, 21<sup>st</sup>-century classroom look like? The eight new classrooms feature chairs that have allowed for students of various heights to be comfortable, including wobble chairs (pictured in green), which allow students to improve their posture. The tables in the room are of various heights and sizes for different activities. There are tables that can be separated into individual desks or miniature tables. Students are able to have collaborative conversations to enrich their learning. Social and emotional growth is also enhanced through this type of instruction. As for technology, the rooms are well-lit, feature Smart Boards and are wired for scalability as the technology needs of the future continue to increase.





The Q-ball is a great tool for building confidence and increasing student participation in class. A microphone in the shape of a small ball, the Q-Ball is connected to the classroom's speaker system and is often passed around the classroom during instruction. Speaking into the Q-Ball allows students to have their voice more clearly heard.

The furniture and layout of the classrooms aren't the only flexible aspects of the classrooms. The spaces foster independence and strengthen decision making. Students are allowed to choose the types of seats they want, and manage the outcomes of their decisions. If for example, a student chooses to sit in one of the sofa-style seats, that's fine. But often the young student will soon learn that the sofa-seat is not conducive for writing assignments. The student then, independently, can decide on a better seat arrangement. This type of autonomy and trust can be empowering for a young child. Students discover what works for them. Another benefit of flexible classrooms is they allow for parallel teaching—multiple teachers working with separate groups simultaneously. This type of individualized, focused instruction is beneficial for all students.

This is the 21<sup>st</sup> century those sci-fi movies couldn't accurately predict. Flexible classrooms mean digital instruction—taking courses online utilizing Skype or even programs designed around virtual or augmented reality. Flexible classrooms also mean encouraging socialization among students—a forward-thinking concept even if it isn't necessarily futuristic in the traditional sense of the word. When administrators keep a flexible mindset in exploring opportunities for education and instruction, the learning experiences for students are boundless.



# VALLEY STREAM UFSD 13 WELCOMES NEW TEACHERS

At the start of this school year, the Valley Stream UFSD 13 held an orientation day to welcome nine new teachers to the District. The focus of the day was to familiarize new staff members with the District's student-focused programs and initiatives. During the orientation, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction Judith LaRocca and Director of Technology Andrea DiMango reviewed the District's policies, safety protocols, website resources, eSchooldata Parent Portal and the District's full complement of academic programs. The goal of new teacher orientation is to ensure that all new classroom faculty are fully prepped and ready for the first day of school and the important responsibility they have taken on in educating our children.



## The District's six new full-time teachers are:

- Brittany Bent, classroom teacher, Wheeler Avenue Elementary School
- Robert D'Agostino, classroom teacher, Wheeler Avenue Elementary School
- Stephani Eso, special education, Wheeler Avenue Elementary School/Dever Elementary School
- Afshan Nasir, psychologist, Howell Road Elementary School
- Kevin Mayer, math AIS, Wheeler Avenue Elementary School/Dever Elementary School
- Ryan Boyle, guidance counselor, Wheeler Avenue Elementary School/Districtwide

## The District's four new part-time teachers are:

- Gina Knecht, social worker, Willow Road Elementary School
- Soneya Bonetti, English as a new language, Dever Elementary School/Districtwide
- Yasmin Lopez, special education, Willow Road Elementary School
- Eli Gaston, physical education, Willow Road Elementary School

## WHEELER WELCOMES NEW PRINCIPAL



One of the most exciting parts of every fall is welcoming new educators and administrators to the Valley Stream UFSD 13 District. The new voices bring fresh perspectives and new experiences to our schools, helping our students to learn and grow. At the start of the school year, Wheeler Avenue Elementary School welcomed John Frias to serve as its new principal, succeeding Dr. Gayle Steele, who accepted a position in the South Huntington Union Free School District. "We are thrilled that Mr. Frias is returning to our District and we are certain that his leadership will continue to advance the exceptional educational experience offered at the Wheeler Avenue School," said Dr. Constance D. Evelyn, superintendent of Valley Stream UFSD 13. "We are committed to ensuring that Mr. Frias and the Wheeler Avenue School will have the resources to help all students and staff be successful."

Prior to his appointment as principal of Wheeler Avenue School, Mr. Frias worked in Valley Stream UFSD 13 as a fifth grade teacher and instructional math coach. Last year, he was the assistant principal at Hewlett Elementary School in the Hewlett-Woodmere School District. Mr. Frias' educational resume also includes twelve years in the New York City school system as a fifth grade teacher. "I am honored to be able to work with students, teachers and the community to create a safe and secure environment where all students feel welcome and have every opportunity available to them," said Mr. Frias. "I look forward to my new role and adding value to such a special school."

# Checking in Around the District

## VALLEY STREAM PAYS TRIBUTE TO 9/11 HEROES

This past September, the Valley Stream UFSD 13 paid respects to those who lost their lives on September 11, 2001. With the recently passed state law enacted by Governor Cuomo requiring New York schools to observe the 9/11 anniversary, the Valley Stream UFSD 13 showed its support by incorporating dialogue and education among a new generation of students who were not alive during the attacks. At Willow Road Elementary School, Mrs. Lepe's fourth grade class participated in a paired read of *Fireboat and Saved by the Boats*. The students discussed the heroic acts of many during a tragic time in our country's history. To honor the brave men and women who continue to serve our country, students crafted heart-felt thank you letters.



Howell Road Elementary School paid tribute by having a moment of silence outside along with a few words to remember and respect the national tragedy. Wheeler Avenue School and James A. Dever Elementary School both had touching words said by students, teachers and staff. Officers from the Nassau County Police Department also stopped by to help pay tribute.

## HOWELL ROAD ELEMENTARY STUDENTS HARVEST THEIR OWN VEGETABLES

Howell Road Elementary School had a plentiful harvest this year in their very own homegrown vegetable garden, located right on school grounds. This was the first year that the garden had been planted at Howell. With the help of 6<sup>th</sup> grade students, kindergarten through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade children planted, grew and harvested vegetables from their garden. Students chose to use the *square foot garden* approach, a method developed by Mel Bartholomew, to efficiently maximize the time and effort put into gardening an area. Through this method, the garden was accessible to students, required a lighter workload, and produced an optimal amount of vegetables to enjoy.

Centerplate—a hospitality provider to many of North America's leading venues, including locally Jones Beach State Park and Belmont Park—helped sponsor the garden and the materials necessary for the gardening.



## Valley Stream UFSD Thirteen

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# BACK-TO-SCHOOL BACKPACKS AT WHEELER

Students at Wheeler Avenue Elementary School received a special present at the beginning of the school year. The Nassau Police Benevolent Association (NPBA) generously donated brand new backpacks to each and every student in the school. The NPBA chose to implement this generous donation to the Wheeler Avenue School in an effort to provide a proper start to the school year and to strengthen the connection with the local community. Students lined up as trucks of new backpacks were lined up and distributed to students. “We are honored to have been chosen by the Nassau Police Benevolent Association to receive this generous gift,” said John Frias, principal of Wheeler Avenue Elementary School. “A strong relationship between students and law enforcement is extremely beneficial to our community.”



# WILLOW EMBRACES RESPONSIVE CLASSROOM APPROACH

Students in Nanci Brochhagen’s third grade class at Willow Road Elementary School started the year by building a positive classroom community through the Responsive Classroom Approach. Responsive Classrooms are built on the belief that integrating academic and social-emotional skills creates an environment where students can do their best work. A professional development workshop, offered over the summer, provided teaching practices and strategies to create a safe, joyful and inclusive class.



## VALLEY STREAM UFSD THIRTEEN 2019-2020 BOARD OF EDUCATION

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