

FALL 2010

It's Elementary



VALLEY STREAM DISTRICT THIRTEEN NEWSLETTER

New School Year Off To A Great Start



District Thirteen students arrived at their respective school buildings on Wednesday, September 8th to enthusiastically start a new school year together. For the incoming kindergarten class that day marked the start of their educational journey, while for the District's sixth graders it symbolized their last "first day" as District Thirteen students. The transition from summer vacation to the new school year was seamless, and the District looks forward to another great year.



ENHANCING CURRICULUM & INSTRUCTION

The 2010-2011 school year is off to a great start and District students are already engaging in a wide range of meaningful learning opportunities. Below is a list of some of the new programs and initiatives that will be introduced this school year:

The District will implement the "**Being a Writer**" program in the K-4 classrooms. This program inspires students to love writing, increase personal writing stamina, and to become skilled writers. Students will grow as writers and thinkers as they pass through the grades and curriculum. The program has a clear scope and sequence and uses the workshop model to develop in students an appreciation and understanding of the craft and conventions of writing.

The "**Houghton Mifflin**" Science Program is being implemented in grades K-6. Students and teachers are excited about this program, as it is a hands-on program with an emphasis on reading skills to aid with comprehension of science concepts.

During this school year, the District will begin to phase-in its newly revised three-year **Technology Plan**. The technology plan fosters a student-centered, technology enhanced learning environment in which students and staff are able to effectively use technology with confidence and competence. Technology will continue to be integrated into all phases of the curriculum. Grade levels and departments will meet to review the changes and expectations and create a timeline for the phase-in.

Due to the changes in **NYS test expectations** in the areas of English Language Arts and Mathematics, District curriculum focus groups will be meeting regularly to review the changes and adjust curricular expectations where necessary. Higher level thinking skills will continue to be stressed in all grade levels and across departments. Students will have ongoing opportunities to respond to application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation questions. Speaking and listening standards will be emphasized throughout the year.

District Thirteen teachers will continue to receive high quality **professional development** opportunities. Educational experts Laura Robb, Erica Pecorale and Erin Ax will return to the District to continue their work in literacy and assessment. All classroom teachers will receive professional development in science to allow for a smooth implementation of the new science program, Houghton Mifflin.

BOARD WELCOMES NEW TRUSTEE

After a thorough review process, the Board of Education appointed Sean Douglas as the new trustee. Mr. Douglas was sworn in during the October 26th Board of Education meeting and will serve on the Board until the annual school election on Tuesday, May 17, 2011. A comprehensive biography on Mr. Douglas will be included in the District's winter newsletter.

A Special Note From Your

BOARD PRESIDENT & SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

Dear Residents,

Welcome back to another academic year in District Thirteen. As we embark on the 2010-2011 school year, we do so with confidence that our students will continue to grow academically, culturally, and socially.

The year ahead promises to be filled with many exciting and enriching learning opportunities for our students, and we look forward to the achievements they garner through teamwork – our theme for this school year. From instructional planning to the implementation of school and student activities, we are committed to working as a collaborative TEAM with the community to convey high expectations and confidence in our students' capabilities for success.

This year, as detailed on page one of this publication, we will be introducing several new instructional programs and will be working to address the changes made by NYS with regard to the state assessments. We believe that these new initiatives will not only further enhance our fine instructional program, but will also help to ensure that today's students have the tools needed to become tomorrow's leaders.

On a personal note, at its September meeting, the Board of Education accepted the retirement of Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Elizabeth Lison, effective July 1, 2011. Dr. Lison has been directly responsible for our District's success over the past eight years and we wish her well on her next journey in life. The Board is in the beginning steps of initiating the process for filling Dr. Lison's position and will communicate this plan to the community as soon as possible.

As a valuable member of the community, you are encouraged to become involved and take advantage of the various activities available to parents and residents. Please do not hesitate to contact the District Office or visit us on the web at www.valleystream13.com. Thank you for your continued support and dedication.

Sincerely,



Frank Chiachiere, Ph.D.
Board of Education President



Elizabeth Lison, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools



Focus on Finance

For the first time in recent memory, the state aid that District Thirteen is projected to receive has decreased from the prior year. During 2010-2011, the District expects an estimated \$9.3 million in revenue from New York State. This is a decrease of more than half a million dollars from 2009-2010 level. The decrease would have been even greater had the District not benefited from the second and final year of funding from the Federal stimulus program. At the same time, special grants that have averaged between \$50,000 and \$100,000 in the recent past are not forthcoming from Albany this year as a result of the State's budget difficulties. These grants have been used to purchase technology equipment, including computers and SMART Boards.

In the absence of a dramatic upturn in the economy, the District does not expect the current restricted flow of state and federal aid to improve in the near future. With this in mind, the District wishes to assure residents that it will continue to make every effort to seek alternative funding sources, including private grants and foundation support. In addition, the District will continue to maximize the impact of available funds by pursuing the many avenues available to control expenditures, including cooperative purchasing agreements, energy efficiency projects, and other cost-saving measures.

Despite difficult financial conditions, the District will continue to assure that taxpayer funds will be used in the most effective way to support the children of Valley Stream Thirteen and prepare them for the challenges they will face in the 21st century.

Leadership Training for Administrators

Working with educational consultant Albert Miller, the District's Leadership Team participated in a two-day training session this summer. During the workshops, members of the Leadership Team focused on ways to improve the teacher evaluation process. Throughout the workshop, Mr. Miller shared his expertise on working with teachers during observations and encouraged the administrators to gather evidence of student learning during these times and to share that data with the teacher afterwards. Furthermore, Mr. Miller explained the difference between a proficient teacher and a distinguished teacher, noting that the latter was the preferred educator and an improved evaluation system would challenge teachers to strive to be such a professional.

It is the District's belief that the improvements made to the teacher evaluation process will help teachers to grow as educators and ensure that students continue to receive a quality education. Principals shared what they learned during the workshops with their teachers at their first faculty meeting of the year.

CHANGES TO STATE A

Each year, students in grades 3-8 take part in the New York State Testing Program in English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics, as required under the No Child Left Behind Act. Following testing, which last year was moved to May, parents receive a parent report, which explains their child's scores and outlines the resources available to support that child's educational needs.

This summer, after the assessments were given, the State Education Department elected to raise the bar for the "Basic" and "Proficient" performance levels. A student

scoring at or above the new Basic standard (Level 2) is on track to pass the English Math Regents exam required for high school graduation. A student scoring above the new Proficiency standard (Level 3) is on track to earn a college-ready score on the English or Math Regents Examination.

The New York State Education Department has redesigned the graduation English Language Arts and Mathematics tests to cover a broader range of performance indicators. Additionally, the Department has made changes to the

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Returning to the Classroom

Parents throughout the District went back to school this September and participated in the schools' Open House programs. At James A. Dever School's Open House, parents were invited to meet their child's teacher, learn about the curriculum, grade-level and classroom expectations, as well as experience what "a day in the life" was like in each class. The teachers also spoke with parents about the NYS assessments, and activities and educational experiences that will take place throughout the year.



Willow Students Are Excited About Reading

Willow Road School kicked off its Be Excited About Reading (BEAR) program in late September with a PTA sponsored book fair. During the event, each student selected a book of his/her choice and perused some new titles. The students were eager to receive their new books and to participate in the BEAR program.

A Collaborative Approach to Teaching

A co-teaching/coaching model for mathematics was introduced last year in first grade at the Wheeler Avenue School and in kindergarten at the James A. Dever, Howell Road, and Willow Road Schools. This year, the model has been implemented in first grade at Dever, Howell, and Willow and in second grade at Wheeler.

At Howell Road, math coach Corinne Cortes met with first-grade teachers during a common preparation period to discuss the model. Ms. Cortes shared with teachers an excerpt from the book *Good Questions for Math Teaching*, highlighted the difference between open and closed questions, and discussed how open questions develop a higher level of thinking skills. Once a week students visit the math room (lab) for supplemental lessons that support classroom learning and focus on the Math in the City philosophy. During the lab, students explore SMART Board lessons, work in partners or groups, and participate in a math congress. Teachers observe students and probe the students' thinking using open questions. The model is being implemented in the same fashion at the Dever School.

At Willow, math coach Lauren Sposito works with classes on a rotating schedule. She meets with a class in their classroom three times a week for approximately three weeks.

Each week, Wheeler Avenue's math specialist Kristen Lees is available to meet with teachers during the common preparation period, and each class visits the math room or is visited by the math teacher. There are weekly communications via e-mail between the teachers and the math specialist. Visitations focus on whole-group lessons taught cooperatively by the teacher and the specialist.

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format of the testing program and lengthened the amount of time each test will take. The District has already begun discussing these changes and will continue to address them throughout the year during faculty, grade-level, and curriculum-focus meetings. Where necessary, the District will make curricula changes to ensure that students are sufficiently prepared for these assessments.



Kristin Lees and Corinne Cortes, Math Specialists at Howell Road and Wheeler Avenue Schools, are pictured here discussing the latest New York State Assessment information and possible changes and needs for the math curriculum with classroom teachers.

iPods as Instructional Tools Within the ESL Program

Research shows that technology is a successful and motivating tool for teaching and learning. The use of iPods as an instructional tool was piloted last year by Howell Road School English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher Paula Barnick. During her lessons, she used the iPods to help English Language Learners practice and master the English language and as a tool within her classroom to facilitate improved listening, reading, writing, and speaking skills.

Through the use of iPods, students were able to use applications or apps for different purposes, such as strengthening their grammar skills, which directly transferred into their writing. They recorded books that they read aloud and shared them with one another. In the area of mathematics, they practiced addition, subtraction, and multiplication problems, as well as, time telling. They were also able to "travel" the world and compare weather patterns from various locations.

Teachers are able to monitor student progress by utilizing various programs and be creative in presenting lessons that are tailored to their students' needs. Teachers and students can create podcasts, which allow them to individualize instruction while incorporating content from the curriculum. The variety of apps available allows teachers to customize their instruction when implementing the iPods in a very user-friendly, cost-efficient manner.

The ESL department plans on expanding the use of iPods within the ESL program and other departments within District Thirteen plan on implementing the use of iPods as instructional tools in the near future. To date, this year, iPods will be used with kindergarten and first-grade students, as well as periodically in the upper grades.

ECRWSS

Postal Customer

PROVIDING A SAFE AND SECURE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

As part of the District's ongoing efforts to assure the health and safety of students, staff, and community, Valley Stream Thirteen conducts frequent safety inspections of its facilities.

Working with representatives of the District's insurance provider, the New York Schools Insurance Reciprocal (NYSIR), annual inspections are conducted of all buildings and grounds and recommended improvements are made. In addition, upon request, risk management personnel from NYSIR evaluate the safety and security of new and existing playgrounds, present workshops on topics including student management and playground safety, and provide information on potential hazards.

In accordance with New York State Education Department requirements, a licensed

engineer inspects district systems and facilities annually and an architect conducts an additional and more comprehensive review every five years. Reports on these inspections are submitted to the State. The inspections are intended to identify developing issues so they can be corrected before becoming major problems. In addition to the above, buildings are inspected for asbestos containing material to assure that it is properly encapsulated and does not constitute a health threat. A licensed asbestos inspector files a comprehensive report every three years and conducts interim inspections twice a year.

The District's SAVE Committee meets regularly to evaluate district and building-level emergency preparedness plans. Building level safety committees also meet throughout the

year. Current security measures in place in the District include the following:

- Doors are locked unless monitored by a staff member.
- Visitors must sign in, leave a picture ID at the security desk and wear a visitor's badge.
- Periodic emergency preparedness drills, including lockdowns and lockouts, are conducted.
- Aides and other supervisory personnel wear easily identifiable red district jackets when monitoring children on school grounds.
- A central alarm system is activated when buildings are unoccupied.
- Outside areas are lighted to discourage vandalism.

Students Make a Splash During Summer Reading Program

During the summer vacation, many Wheeler Avenue School students were found enjoying a good book. More than eighty students in first through sixth grade participated in the New York State Summer Reading Program.

The theme of the program was "*Make a Splash: Read!*" and was a part of the New York State Summer Reading Program. For their participation, students in first and second grade read twelve books, and students in third through sixth grade read six books and completed a review card summarizing the story and whether they liked or disliked the book.

New Teachers Welcomed During Orientation Program

District Thirteen welcomed seven new professionals to the District and conducted a new teacher orientation program on August 31 and September 1, 2010.

During the orientation, the new staff members were provided with an overview of the District's policies, procedures, and educational philosophy. They were given access to email accounts and received a tutorial on how to utilize the variety of technological resources available in the District.

The District proudly welcomes (l-r, back) Lauren Sposito, Willow Road math teacher; Danielle Vitulli, Howell Road sixth-grade teacher; Adrienne Hennawi, Howell Road librarian; Jennifer Ferreiro, Wheeler Avenue sixth-grade teacher; (front) Lindsay Basso, Willow Road/Howell Road speech teacher; Kristan Lotito, Willow Road music teacher; Christy Taveira, James A. Dever speech teacher.



Emergency Closing Procedure

Should it be necessary to close school due to emergencies, announcements can be heard on local radio stations and Channel 12 News. Information will be on the District's website www.valleystream13.com and parents/guardians will receive an automated phone call. For more information about this procedure, please review page 3 of the District calendar.



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