

FALL 2011

It's *Elementary*



VALLEY STREAM UFSD THIRTEEN NEWSLETTER

Welcome Back! *Students Return Ready to Learn*



A Special Note from Your New **SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS**

Dear Valley Stream Thirteen Community,

The summer has gone by so quickly and the children are busy learning. The teachers and children have settled into the routines of a brand new school year.

Our custodial and maintenance crew worked to prepare our buildings for the start of school and also worked to keep our buildings safe during Hurricane Irene. Yes, we did lose power in some schools at various times, but we worked closely with LIPA so that we were able to open school on time. "Lights on for Education" took on a whole new meaning.

It has been "Lights On" ever since. Our classrooms are busy with the sounds of teachers teaching and children learning. My goals have been shared with the staff and with the public at a Board of Education meeting. The goals are:

- *To get to know the Valley Stream Thirteen community*
- *To review the New York State*

Assessment Data to improve our students' achievement on both state and local assessments

- *To continue to strive for academic excellence for all children*
- *To promote the social-emotional development of children*
- *To continue to be fiscally accountable*

Our district theme for the year is "Dignity for All Students." We are fostering this theme by promoting Valley Stream Thirteen as a Community of Learners and Readers. Our students have been reading the book, *One*, by Kathryn Otoshi. This book is serving as a touchstone text for lessons about respect and standing up for others.

New federal and state regulations, new standards for teaching and learning and the tax cap will pose challenges for all of us this year. Therefore, it is important, that we continue to work together for what is best for our children. To help strengthen our lines of communication



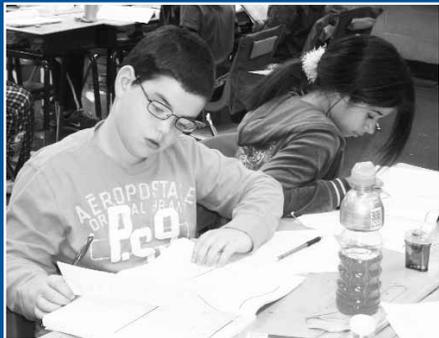
during these times, I continue to meet many Valley Stream Thirteen families and community members. As was said before, the lights are on in the office, so please call my office (568-6100) to set up an appointment or to invite me to a community meeting, neighborhood organization or event.

It does take a community to raise a child. I am honored to serve as your new superintendent and look forward to the year ahead. Valley Stream Thirteen is truly a school district "Where Children Come First."

Adrienne Robb-Fund

Adrienne Robb-Fund, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

Understanding the Common Core Learning Standards



The Common Core Learning Standards for English Language Arts and Mathematics, Pre K-12, are a set of shared goals and expectations for what knowledge and skills will help students succeed. They allow students to understand what is expected of them and to become progressively more proficient in understanding and using these standards. At the same time teachers will be better equipped to know

exactly what they need to do to help students learn and establish individualized benchmarks for them.

Administrators, math specialists, reading specialists and teacher leaders have been providing professional development sessions focused on the understanding of these standards. Faculty, grade level, and focus group meetings provide the time for in-depth discussion of the standards. During the 2011-12 school year, grades K-2 teachers will implement these standards. The remaining implementation of these standards (grades 3-6) will occur during the 2012-13 school year.

The New York State assessments in the school year 2012-13 will test students on their understanding of the Common Core Learning Standards.

The Professional Development Program in District Thirteen will focus on the Common Core Learning Standards. These new standards will help prepare students with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in college and careers.



DISTRICT TO PILOT NEW MATH ASSESSMENT

District Thirteen will join many Nassau County school districts as it pilots the new NWEA assessment in mathematics in grades 4-6 this December. The Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) is a testing program that is administered by the Northwest Evaluation Association.

The assessment will be valuable because it focuses on adaptive testing. Students take the assessment on the computer and the program continually adjusts, zeroing in on exactly what a student knows. If a student gets a question correct, the next question will be harder. If the student gets it wrong, the next question will be easier. Teachers receive results of the assessment along with strategies for teaching within a week of the administration. This will quickly determine what students know and what skills a student needs to learn next. Results will also be shared with parents.

FOCUS ON FIN

District Thirteen is moving into high gear as it begins work on the budget development process for 2012-2013 and beyond. This process is never an easy one, and this year is exceptionally difficult as it is shadowed by a troubling economic climate, decreasing state and federal aid, and the imposition of a tax levy cap that will limit the District's ability to fund its operations.

The three significant revenue areas that fund a district's budget – state aid, property taxes, and reserve funds – are all a point of concern during this year's process. State aid has decreased significantly in recent years and is now anticipated to support just over 20% of the budget versus almost 30% five years ago. Future increases in aid are tied to the growth of New York State's personal income tax revenue. As projected, this is anticipated to be lower than had been forecasted earlier in the year. It is likely that suburban districts, like ours, will see no increases in state aid in the coming year. Coupled with the prospect of flat, if not decreasing state aid, is the newly enacted tax cap. As reported, the tax cap limits any increase in the tax levy to 2% or CPI (whichever is lower), unless more than 60% of the voters approve a larger increase. In order for districts to maintain programs and facilities in the face of lower taxes, the cap was intended to be accompanied by mandate relief that would lead to reduced expenditures. However, to date, no significant mandate relief has occurred. As a means to help offset the financial burden put on

residents, District Thirteen is exploring ways to reduce costs during these economic times to help balance the budget. In addition to the 2011-2012 school year, the District will continue to explore revenue sources including state revenues, the District's own programs and facilities.

In order to meet the District's needs for additional funding and foundation support, the District is currently researching grant opportunities for additional funding for a number of District Thirteen Educational Programs. The District's support of district programs and facilities is a top priority.

As with each year, the District is continuing its ongoing effort to reduce costs through purchasing agreements, consortia for purchasing, and pre-purchase agreements. Additionally, the District is exploring Energy Performance contracts and other term energy savings

Ecology Lesson Comes to Life

Mr. Guy Jacob, a grade 5 teacher at Wheeler Avenue School, made a September sojourn to the Oceanside Marine Nature Study Area as a cornerstone to a salt marsh ecology unit of study. Much of the flora and fauna at the study area were observed by his students for the very first time in their lives and left an indelible mark that can last a lifetime. His classes seined the waters and discovered many fascinating sea creatures, such as a sea horse which they then were able to watch every day in their classroom aquarium.

They discovered and learned many details about horseshoe crabs and the salt marsh.



Promoting Positive Behaviors

Howell Road School kicked off its eighth year of implementing the schoolwide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program. This evidence-based program explicitly teaches and uses practices and routines that encourage positive learning and social behaviors. Howell began the year with a PBIS kick-off assembly, which presented the program to new students and reintroduced it to returning students. Throughout the year, the school's staff will use creative and collaborative approaches to teach, model and reinforce respectful, safe, responsible and caring behaviors throughout the school. In addition to receiving Howell Owls for following positive expectations, this year the school is initiating the use of **HOOT** cards to remind students to **Help Out Others Today**.



Geared Up to Read

To emphasize the importance of developing a lifelong love for reading, Willow Road School kicked off its Parents as Reading Partners program, known as BEAR (Be Excited About Reading), with the help of the school's PTA.

Volunteers from the Willow PTA visited each classroom to explain the BEAR program and present each student with a new book to take home, along with a school spirit bookmark in bright green with a paw print. The books were selected by school librarian, CaroleAnne Gravert, through a corporate initiative of Scholastic publishers known as the Scholastic Literacy Partnership. Book titles varied by grade and were chosen for their fabulous illustrations, great story lines, and classic authors.



FINANCE

District Thirteen created a reserve fund during better times to be used in periods of fiscal difficulty. Last budget year, more than \$700,000 of these funds were used to support 2012 school budget. Although additional reserve monies available, these funds will not be able to supplement other sources indefinitely. In light of such constraints on its budget, the District is faced with a tremendous challenge to maintain its schools and facilities in the face of significantly reduced funding. To meet this challenge, the District is working to identify alternative funding streams, including both public and private grants and foundation support. The Grants Committee continuously identifies grant opportunities and has been successful in securing a number of projects. In addition, the Valley Stream Educational Foundation, Inc. continues to grow and expand its support of district initiatives.

Each year, the District has and continues to make an effort to control costs through such things as cooperative purchasing agreements, shared municipal services, and participation in joint ventures for procuring services such as transportation and school maintenance. Additionally, the District is in the process of entering into an Performance Contract. Through effective energy saving measures and the upgrading of equipment, the District will see long-term savings of more than \$250,000 annually.

Taking a Stand Against Bullying



After reading the *Time for Kids* magazine article, "Law and Order," the sixth-grade students in Ms. Phillips' class at James A. Dever School discussed the nationally growing issue of bullying and ways to address bullying in and out of school. In an effort to bring their message to others, the students coordinated a peaceful march in early October. After creating protest signs and banners, the class marched on Corona and Franklin Avenues to demonstrate how they were taking a stand against bullying. Many passing motorists showed their support of the students' work with a wave or honk of their horns. The class hopes that through this

effort, and the continuing anti-bullying programs conducted schoolwide, others will realize that bullying and intolerance are two things that are not a part of the way of life in Valley Stream UFSD Thirteen.

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Supporting the School-Community Connection: Educational Foundation Encourages Residents to Become Involved

In today's climate of economic uncertainty, there is much talk about needing to think outside the box when it comes to school finance. This concept is one that the Valley Stream UFSD Thirteen Educational Foundation, Inc. has embraced for the past 15 years.

Through grants, contributions, and other activities, the Foundation has donated more than \$52,000 to District 13 since 1996. Some of these donations have come in the form of laptop computers, SMART Boards, scholarships, and band uniforms. The Foundation also established a fund with

donations from the Reliance Lodge No. 776, Free & Accepted Masons, that assists children in times of emergency situations.

The work of the Foundation continues year round and the organization is continually looking for ways to strengthen the home-school-community connection. If you are interested in learning more about the Foundation, please visit the organization's Facebook page, "Valley Stream District 13 Educational Foundation, Inc." You can also contact the organization via email at vs13educationalfoundation@yahoo.com.

Membership involvement is one of the

driving ways in which the Foundation is able to fulfill its mission. If you are interested in becoming an active member, annual membership dues are \$5 per person or \$10 per family. In lieu of annual dues, for a \$100 donation, a lifetime membership option is also available for interested individuals or organizations. Donations to the work of the organization are also greatly appreciated by the Foundation. Annual dues and donations should be sent to the Valley Stream UFSD Thirteen Educational Foundation, 585 N. Corona Avenue, Valley Stream, NY 11580.

Reflecting Back on 9/11

All students commemorated this year's tenth anniversary of September 11, with schoolwide ceremonies and special programs. Students and staff members dressed in patriotic colors and shared poetry, patriotic songs, and observed moments of silence.



NYS State Assessment Dates

In accordance with the New York State Education Department, District Thirteen will administer New York State Assessments on the following dates for the respective grade levels.

Grades 3-6 English Language Arts
Tuesday, April 17 and Wednesday, April 18

Grades 3-6 Mathematics
Monday, April 23 and Tuesday, April 24

Grade 4 Science Written Test
Monday, June 4

BOE Begins Utilizing Paperless Agendas

The District's Board of Education is leveraging the power of the Internet to save time, dollars, and paper. This new cost-savings initiative will also enable the District to maximize its communication opportunities with the community. The paperless meeting solution, BOARDDOCS, is a web-based program that will allow the public to review the agendas for meetings in advance of the scheduled Board of Education meeting date. Interested parties can access the BOARDDOCS agenda through the District's website www.valleystream13.com. This electronic agenda option will be available to the public beginning with the Board's November 22, 2011 meeting. BOARDDOCS was designed specifically to meet the unique needs and legal requirements of public school boards.



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