Spring 2024

It's Elementary

VALLEY STREAM UFSD THIRTEEN

Interactive Play Encouraged at Dever

At Valley Stream Union Free School District Thirteen, we work to foster an inclusive, accessible school environment for all of our students, and playtime is no exception. Hands-on play that engages the five senses supports young children's cognitive and physical development, enhancing their motor skills while providing important socialization opportunities.

For this reason, we are excited to announce that a new multisensory playground was built at James A. Dever Elementary School earlier this school year. An inclusive space that enables children of all abilities to play, learn, and grow together, the new Dever playground provides a safe, fun, and interactive recess environment for all students.

The Dever playground features interactive and sensory-friendly equipment, including tactile panels, musical instruments, and communication boards that encourage non-verbal communication and social interaction. It's a space where students can feel comfortable, express themselves, and develop their communication skills among friends.

Studies show that interactive play helps students develop creative problem-solving skills, assists emotional regulation, cultivates a sense of respect for the self and others, and builds self-esteem. It also relieves stress and gets students excited about fitness. The space offers a wide variety of play activities that students can enjoy together while enhancing their social and emotional development—something that we take seriously in the Valley Stream UFSD Thirteen. The new multisensory playground ties into our district's approach to holistic early childhood development.

Recognizing Our School's Culinary Heroes

Healthy, nutritious meals are foundational to a student's educational journey; everyone, after all, learns and performs best when they are well nourished. Research has shown that students who eat healthy meals tend to earn higher grades, exhibit better memory and alertness, and process information faster. Eating a nutritious breakfast, in particular, is associated with improved cognitive function, reduced absenteeism, and improved mood, all of which are critical to learning.

Of course, if a thriving school environment starts with fueling the brain, then our dedicated food service workers and cafeteria employees are true unsung heroes. These individuals play an invaluable role in ensuring that our students have access to nutritious meals every day. Beyond serving food, they create a welcoming and inclusive environment in which students feel supported and cared for.

They make sure that no child goes hungry, regardless of their circumstances. And their commitment to providing healthy meals helps feed and fuel our students' minds and bodies, enabling them to succeed both academically and personally. We proudly recognize the dedication and energy our culinary heroes bring to their roles each day, and their commitment to our students' well-being.

Now Offering Free Breakfast and Lunch

District administrators were very happy to announce earlier this school year that free breakfast and lunch is now available at all four of our schools. Every student in the district is eligible to receive one free breakfast and one free lunch daily. We are able to provide this serivce as a result of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) expanding access to the federal Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). CEP allows eligible schools participating in the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Program to offer school meals at no charge to all students.

This year, our new food service provider is Aramark, a company that prides itself on prioritizing student nutrition and making healthy, easy, and delicious school meals accessible for all. The team works to ensure that students are provided with a variety of fresh foods that are prepared with creative recipes. The program excludes à la carte items such as ice cream, cookies, chips, and pretzels. Visit this link to complete your application and to find more information about the program: **https://valleystream13.com/district/nutrition-program**.

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Cultivating a Love of Writing

All of our school buildings have been taking part in exciting writing celebrations, cultivating a love of literacy among our students. At Howell Road Elementary School, Ms. King's first grade class recently hosted an authors' debut at their celebration, which was dubbed the Rising Stars' Publishing Party. Students spent the morning sharing their narrative stories and accompanying illustrations with their classmates and families. Whether their stories described their experiences "building a snowman" or attending "beach day with mom," students enhanced their writing skills by practicing crafting their own personal stories.

At James A. Dever Elementary School, kindergarten classes had a wonderful time sharing their writings with their special guests. Students were excited to share all the fun they had learning during their author study of Todd Parr, an American author who has written many children's books. Each classmate generated ideas, selected a favorite idea to move forward with, and created their own book. They also practiced illustrating to become familiar with how pictures are used to tell a story. The students each read aloud their "published" stories, were crowned "young authors" with paper crowns, and proudly accepted their writing celebration certificates. We look forward to continuing to support a love of reading and writing!