Valley Stream Union Free School District 13 · Where Children Come First

It's Elementary

Valley Stream UFSD Thirteen

WINTER 2021-2022

CONTINUITY AT THE TOP

District Bids Adieu to Dr. Constance Evelyn; Celebrates Dr. Judith LaRocca's Promotion as New Superintendent

It's a time of transition at Valley Stream UFSD 13. We are saying goodbye to a beloved, historic superintendent and celebrating as a member of the Valley Stream administration is elevated to the position of our new superintendent.

On January 14, Dr. Constance Evelyn retired, ending a tenure marked by historic firsts for the District; one that leaves our children and educators poised to meet the needs of the next generation.

After coming to Valley Stream UFSD 13 in late 2015, where she served as our first-ever Black superintendent, Dr. Evelyn quickly got to work. Within six months, she spearheaded a successful bond referendum—the first in District history—for $32 million. The funds generated through the bond allowed for a District-wide transformation, including roof replacements, solar panel installations, door replacements, classroom redesigns, expansion of school lunchroom kitchen facilities, bathroom refurbishments, air conditioning in every classroom, and a first-floor cafeteria at the Wheeler Avenue Elementary School, among many more.

For her success, Dr. Evelyn credits the connections she made with members of the school community, without whose support it would not have been possible. "I immediately set out to build relationships," she said. "Meaningful relationships with the school community; the Board; the people who work here; and, of course, students and their families."

During her tenure, Dr. Evelyn built a solid, hard-working team under her that ably guided the District through difficult times, such as the pandemic and resultant economic hardships. Some of her hires included Gerard Antoine as assistant superintendent for business and human resources and incoming superintendent Dr. Judith LaRocca as assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction.

Additionally, Dr. Evelyn sought to establish an updated core curriculum, and build its capacity to serve the ever-evolving needs of students. Part of that effort included hiring District 13's first-ever Director of Technology, Andrea DiMango. Ms. DiMango commented on Dr. Evelyn's leadership qualities, particularly her ability to build a team and delegate important tasks.

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"What I respect so much about Dr. Evelyn is that she understands that good leadership does not mean being involved on a granular level in each and every process," she said. "She understands that you can bring a team together of people who are talented in their own ways and they share a vision of excellence."

Dr. Evelyn's focus on creating a good team to lead Valley Stream UFSD 13 has led to a remarkably seamless transition process that ensures that the education students receive is in no way affected by the change in leadership.

"We've worked very closely over the past six years, and I think the community will benefit from having the continuity of leadership through this process," Dr. LaRocca said of the transition.

Incoming Superintendent Dr. Judith LaRocca (second from left) stands alongside outgoing Superintendent Dr. Constance Evelyn (second from right) and Valley Stream administrators Gerard Antoine (left) and Andrea DiMango (right).

As she prepares to take the reins of Valley Stream UFSD 13, Dr. LaRocca says she is eager to expand on the educational foundation they built together over the past six years.

Dr. LaRocca got her start in education as a middle school math teacher for the Massapequa School District in 1996. In 2003, she entered her first administrative role as a staff developer and shared data expert for Eastern Suffolk BOCES, during which time she earned her degree in school district administration from Stony Brook University. In 2007, she was brought on as Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Technology for the New Hyde Park-Garden City Park Union Free School District, where she oversaw the District's curriculum, testing, professional development, data management and technology infrastructure.

Finally, in 2016, Dr. Evelyn handpicked her to serve on her team as Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction for District 13.

"I was struck by her many years of experience, both teaching and in administrative roles," Dr. Evelyn said. "She was Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Technology at New Hyde Park Schools, and I noticed that over time she had been given more and more responsibility in that role. That made her a very attractive candidate, and I needed someone who could hit the ground running."

Together, Dr. Evelyn and Dr. LaRocca updated District 13's core curriculum, and established infrastructure to ensure the continued evolution of its programs. Additionally, they spearheaded the implementation of STEM into all subject areas through community partnerships with nonprofit organizations like Crossroads Farm in Malverne and the establishment of learning lab facilities in each of the District's school buildings.

Dr. LaRocca said she has also made a major push to diversify District staff, achieving an average 33 percent diversity faculty hiring rate from 2017 to 2021, with a 46 percent rate in 2019. In 2014, District 13 had five BIPOC faculty members. In 2021 there are 19.

Looking to the future, Dr. LaRocca said her priorities are to finish the capital improvements made possible through District 13's $35 million bond passed in 2015, including the construction of a new music wing at the James A. Dever Elementary School. Additionally, she said she hopes to continue the District's diversity, equity and inclusion efforts, as well as those to boost communication with the District community.

"We are thrilled to have Dr. LaRocca as our next Superintendent of Schools," said Dr. Frank Chiachiere, President of the Valley Stream 13 Board of Education. "We strongly believe Dr. LaRocca is the perfect person to help us build on the solid foundation that has been developed in our District over the past six years."

Looking to District 13's future after her departure, Dr. Evelyn said she hopes her successors continue preparing students for the ever-changing challenges of the professional world, and giving them opportunities to pursue their interests, whatever they may be.

"I hope that they continue the work around protecting the dignity of everyone in our building, and, generally speaking, making sure that our kids always feel valued and loved when they walk in the door and when they leave and get on the bus," she said. "Everyone should feel valued and loved."

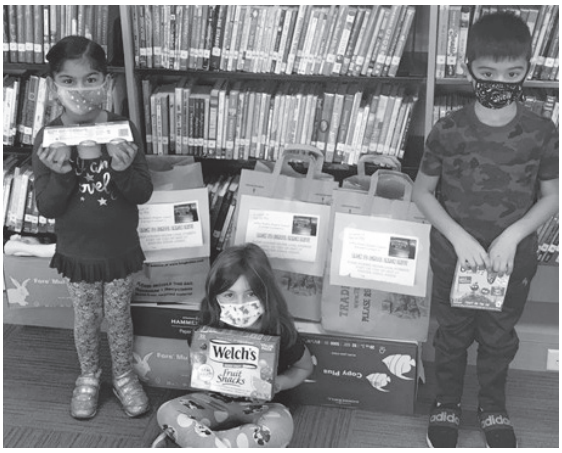
Family Day Highlights American Education Week

Throughout the month of November, Valley Stream UFSD 13 celebrated American Education Week. Classrooms in every school in our District participated in events that paid homage to educators and shone a spotlight on the need to ensure quality education for every student in the country.

One highlight of the event was Family Day, a virtual event at which parents were invited to virtually attend a day in the life of their children in school. In many of the classrooms, parents engaged with their children during STEAM—Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Mathematics—activities. In other classrooms, parents learned about their children's writing skills during writer's workshops. And in many of the kindergarten classes throughout the district, parents virtually participated in Thanksgiving-related activities

Parent and guardian involvement is a critical part of the education process. Multifaceted events such as American Education Week allow parents and guardians to experience what school is like for their children, which fosters appreciation and understanding of the intrinsic value of public education.

Willow Road Gives Back



At Willow Road Elementary School, giving back to the community is an important responsibility. As is tradition, students in the school generously donated healthy snacks this fall to help local families in need. Healthy food snack items such as juice boxes, single-serve cereal, granola bars, peanut butter snack cups, and chips were collected. The choice to donate snacks was a deliberate one; often food programs do not cover snack foods, but children still want to enjoy fun options in their lunches. Healthy snacks provide the perfect solution. Ultimately, over 20 boxes and bags of food were collected and donated to the Interfaith Nutrition Network (INN) in Hempstead. Thank you to the students of Willow for your efforts and compassion. Their spirit of generosity—the obligation they feel to help their community—serves as a lesson for us all.

Clean Air, Safer Schools

How State-of-the-Art Air Purifiers in Every Valley Stream UFSD 13 Classroom Keep Our Children Safe

We know definitively that air quality plays a large part in the spread of COVID-19—including existing and emerging variants—as well as many other seasonal viruses and allergies.

Therefore it was vital for every single classroom in Valley Stream UFSD 13 to be equipped with devices that ensure children learn and grow in the safest, cleanest air possible. Working with Mark Design Studios, the District's architect, we have implemented an initiative resulting in the installation of in-room, air purifier units in every classroom. Using a state-of-the-art, four-stage air filtration system (see below) these units remove particulates from a room's airflow, changing room air three to five times per hour. Ultimately, these units effectively kill 99.99 percent of coronavirus particulates in the air.

"We are thrilled to be able to provide this significant health safeguard in our schools," said Dr. Connie Evelyn, Superintendent of Valley Stream UFSD 13.

The new air filtration devices installed in every classroom use a four-stage air filtration system.

- **Stage 1:** A pre-filter captures large particles.
- **Stage 2:** Active carbon filter absorbs odors and VOCs.
- **Stage 3:** HEPA filter captures particles as small as 0.15 microns.
- **Stage 4:** A bipolar ionizer captures the efficiency of the particulate filter.

Valley Stream UFSD Thirteen
585 North Corona Avenue
Valley Stream, New York 11580-2099
516-568-6100 • www.valleystream13.com

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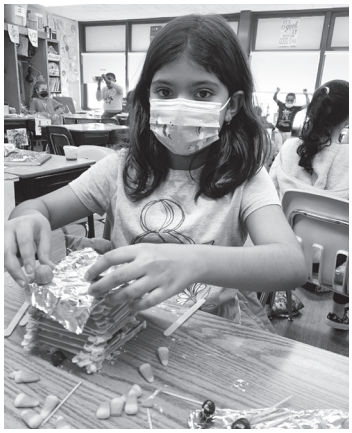
Checking in Around the District

DEVER RECREATES THE MACY'S DAY PARADE!

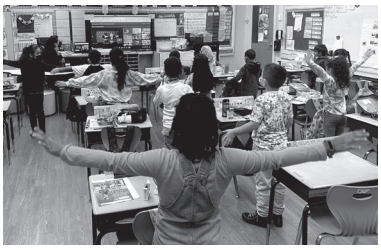
The iconic Macy's Day Parade is one of the true highlights of the holiday season, and second graders at Dever Elementary School recently got into the spirit by reading the book *Balloons Over Broadway*. The book tells the story of a man named Tony Sarg who was responsible for the floats in the original Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. After finishing the book, children each created their own personal "floats" to be in the parade. They wrote opinion letters to Macy's explaining why they thought their balloon should be in the parade. Then, they had their own parade in Dever's halls!

HOWELL ROAD SCHOOL CELEBRATES THANKSGIVING



The day before Thanksgiving, students in Howell Road Elementary School celebrated by engaging in activities that incorporated critical thinking and creative skills development. Preschoolers decorated classroom doors with large turkey graphics, adorning turkey feathers with their names. Fourth graders had a STEAM challenge where they made tables that held a turkey using toothpicks, straws, popsicle sticks, rulers, marshmallows, cranberries, candy corn, etc. Sixth graders were tasked with "saving" Thanksgiving by creating a device to transport corn to the turkey coop by using supplies such as popsicle sticks, tape, paper clips, and straws. Creating opportunities to engage students in critical thinking, incorporating STEAM-based activities in the daily curriculum, is at the heart of our educational experience.

WHEELER AVENUE ATTENDS NY ISLANDERS' VIRTUAL SCHOOL ASSEMBLY



In the fall, Wheeler Ave Elementary School students attended the New York Islanders' Virtual School Assembly. This program was designed to educate students on the importance of teamwork and healthy life choices. The assembly had interactive question and answer sessions, warm-up exercises, and students were able to watch short videos showcasing teamwork on and off the ice. One highlight saw the Islanders' mascot, Sparky, demonstrate why making smart decisions is important in school and life.

"This was a fantastic event for our students," said John Frias, principal of Wheeler Ave. "We aim to provide our students with exciting, new learning experiences—that are also a lot of fun!"

NOVEMBER MEANS KINDNESS AT WILLOW ROAD

At Willow Road Elementary School, positive character development is a major part of curriculum. Each month, the school focuses on one character trait to incorporate into lesson plans. Some of the traits that the school will be using throughout the course of the year are politeness, compassion, respect, perseverance, and thoughtfulness. In November, Willow Road focused on a trait that we could all use a bit more of: kindness. The goal was for everyone to put a special focus on practicing kindness in the classroom and in their everyday lives. For example, students were asked to let someone go ahead of them when standing in line, help a sibling learn something new, hold the door open for someone, or pay someone a genuine compliment.