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

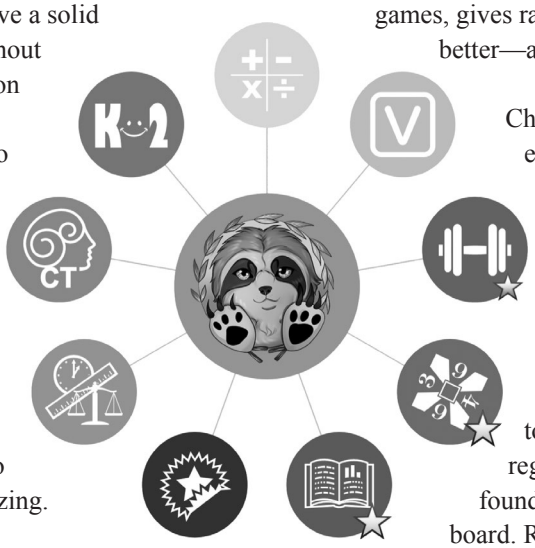
It's Elementary

VALLEY STREAM UFSD THIRTEEN

SPRING 2022

Students Embrace and Excel in Exciting New Math Program

Math is such an incredibly vital subject for all students, particularly at the elementary level. The principles and concepts of mathematics can be applied in all walks of life, so it's important that young math students have a solid math foundation on which to build throughout their academic careers. It is incumbent upon educators to find ways to make math accessible, understandable, and relatable to students. Enter the First in Math program.



Throughout the 2021-2022 school year, math teachers in Valley Stream UFSD Thirteen have engaged with First in Math to help teach core math principles. A free program provided by the New York State Education Department, First in Math is a tool to teach math fact fluency to young students. The results so far are amazing. To understand what makes the program so effective, we have to consider a topic not often discussed in a school newsletter: video games.

Why have video games had such a pull on young people for generations? One of the main reasons is video games' unique ability to provide instant feedback. Success in video games is calculated and quantified so quickly that it gives users instant goals to work toward. First in Math takes that feedback incentive and applies it to the learning of foundational math skills: addition and subtraction, multiplication tables, etc. All of the necessary math fact fluencies are addressed. First in Math, like video games, gives rankings, incentivizing students to do better—and learn more—in order to score better.

Children and educators in the District have embraced the program. The District's instructional coaches have gone into every classroom and made sure that each student in every class knows how to use it. So far, Valley Stream UFSD Thirteen ranks in the top 10 for usage of the program; but for the District, what matters is how First in Math is translating to improving students' math skills. In that regard, it's a success. Baseline data has found math fluency has increased across the board. Recently, the District began phase 2 of the program but is doing so carefully; we want students to welcome it and to set their own goals. Eventually, we want every student in each class to reach 70 percent across the board toward their math fluency goals.

First in Math is a great example of the District's and our students' willingness to accept new things. We look forward to updating you on our continued success with this exciting program.

CELEBRATING EARTH DAY

Fifth graders at Wheeler Avenue made incredible art projects out of recycled materials. Students at James A. Dever had a wonderful visit to Crossroads Farm in Malverne. They explored the herb garden, nursery, beehives and orchards—they even planted lettuce!

A Message from the Superintendent

With the passing of our 2022-2023 proposed school budget, our community has given us a tremendous vote of support. We are as committed as ever to providing an exceptional educational experience at Valley Stream UFSD Thirteen for all our students in Dever, Howell, Wheeler and Willow elementary schools. Our students deserve nothing less, and we will work tirelessly to make sure they receive it.

Spring is a time of reflection for those in public schools. The school year is winding down—indeed our moving-up ceremonies will be here before we know it. As I reflect on the 2021-2022 school year as we approach our final month of school, I remain impressed with the resolve of our students, staff and the Valley Stream community.

On a personal note, the end of the 2021-2022 school year marks the end of my first semester as Superintendent. I am very grateful for the opportunity to lead this wonderful group of students, families and educators, and I am excited for all the possibilities that lie ahead. It is my strong belief that we are all partners in public education—I hope to see you all at our end-of-year events and hear from you throughout the summer weeks. Please know that we remain available for your questions year-round, and you can look forward in the coming months to our summer newsletter and our 2022-2023 calendar, which will keep you updated on all District happenings while displaying some of our students' amazing artwork.

Sincerely,

Dr. Judith LaRocca, superintendent of schools

SEE HOW WE CELEBRATED WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

This past March, during Women's History Month, our students had the opportunity to learn about inspiring women who have shaped our country and the world.

James A. Dever Elementary School students read and listened to the biographies of legendary women. Utilizing Google Classroom, students were able to access the platform's digital library to expand their knowledge and understanding of these women, listen to read-aloud stories, quotes, and watch videos detailing their lives and legacies.

Willow Road Elementary School students researched historical women in both American and global history. Students discovered female trailblazers and innovators from all over the world who changed the fields of science, art, music, sports, politics, business, and literature. Through thoughtful discussions about these women and their accomplishments, students developed recognition and gratitude for these women who serve as a reminder that they, too, can grow up and change the world.

Howell Road Elementary School teachers read *She Persisted*, a children's book by Chelsea Clinton that details the perseverance of numerous women such as journalist Nellie Bly, astronaut Sally Ride, and Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor. Students discussed the traits of these women as well as their perseverance in a world that doubted them. Students were tasked with writing about prominent women and how their determination and persistence led to their success.

Wheeler Avenue Elementary School student council members worked with the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee to interview women that are positive role models to young girls and women. One sixth grade student was able to interview Kimberly Thomas, founder and director of the Sparkle Empowerment Program for Girls. Pictured here, the Valley Stream Thirteen superintendent is interviewed by Wheeler's student council president concerning Women's History Month.

Student Artwork Featured in 32nd Annual Legislative Student Art Exhibit

At the elementary level, children's growing curiosity and understanding of the world around them is reflected through the artwork they create. Art from all of our District schools was featured in the New York State Art Teachers Association (NYSATA) and New York State United Teachers' 32nd Annual Legislative Student Art Exhibit.

TO SEE MORE STUDENT ARTWORK FEATURED:

"Art is such an important part of a child's education. It develops creative and emotional thinking, problem-solving, motor skills, teamwork, and more," said Dr. Judith LaRocca, superintendent of Valley Stream UFSD Thirteen. "And Youth Art Month is a clear reminder of the vital role art plays—not to mention the incredible talent of our students. Thanks to our art teachers who foster our students' passion for art and encourage them to be creative and expressive through their work."

For the NYSATA art exhibition, artwork selections were displayed from two students from each of the District's four schools. Art teachers in each of the schools also created displays of their students' artwork in celebration of Youth Art Month.

Redesigned Classrooms: A Modern Learning Environment for a Modern Curriculum

Children learn best—and can achieve more—in comfortable, safe, and state-of-the-art learning environments. For the past few years, Valley Stream USFD Thirteen has strategically upgraded facilities and classrooms at all four schools. From embracing flexible classrooms—new classrooms that feature modern and ergonomic furniture and fixtures that allow for different learning experiences and strategies—to updating gymnasiums, increasing technology and more, Valley Stream UFSD Thirteen has created the ideal learning space for students.

JAMES A. DEVER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

HOWELL ROAD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

WHEELER AVENUE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

WILLOW ROAD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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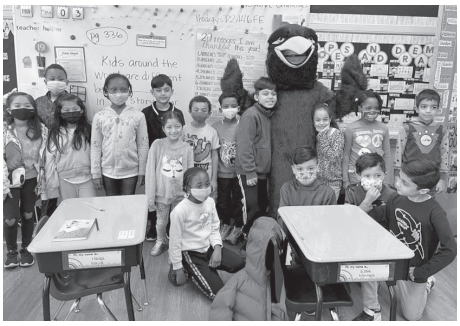
Checking in Around the District

JAMES A. DEVER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

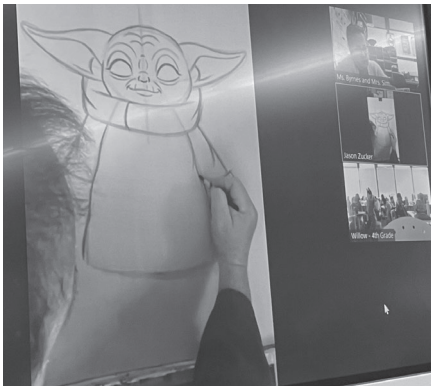
In mid April, students at James A. Dever Elementary School received a virtual visit from an incredible author! Deborah Hopkinson is an award-winning writer of fiction, nonfiction, and picture books for young readers. During her virtual visit to Dever, Ms. Hopkinson discussed her writing and encouraged students to develop their writing skills by offering writing prompts. The students were asked to write about something they cared deeply about and to think about how they would describe their personal story. The students and the author spoke about Earth Day and her book, *Only One*, which she co-authored with Chuck Groenink. The environmentally focused picture book highlights the beauty of the universe with its galaxies, stars, and planets—especially Earth with the precious life it contains. The book was a great way to explain to young readers the Big Bang, the Milky Way, the planets in the solar system, and Earth's atmosphere. Thanks to Dever's librarian, Tom Mullen, and the Dever PTA for helping organize this fun event.

WHEELER AVENUE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



This year, Wheeler Avenue Elementary School launched its One Book, One School initiative in partnership with the PTA's Pick A Reading Partner (PARP) to encourage students' love for reading. PARP is a PTA-sponsored literacy initiative that involves students reading for 20 minutes a night with their families for three weeks during the month of March (Monday, March 7 to Friday, March 25). This year's PARP theme was "Wild About Reading". To jump-start the One Book, One School initiative, students read *Dog Days* by Karen English in their classrooms. The book features a student named Gavin, who overcomes the obstacles and challenges of being a new student. After each book selected to be read during the One Book, One School initiative was finished, students participated in discussions about the books. Wheeler Avenue's mascot, Chirpy, went around to the classrooms with one of the reading teachers to explain PARP to the students. At the conclusion of the program, the students who logged the most minutes of reading earned Scholastic Bucks for the school's next book fair.

HOWELL ROAD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



The "fourth" was definitely with Howell Road Elementary School! Every fourth of May, fans of the iconic sci-fi series *Star Wars* celebrate May the Fourth Day (as it sounds like the franchise's famous saying, "may the force be with you"). Howell Road students had an especially fun May the Fourth day during a Zoom animation class with a Disney animator! The special guest taught students how to draw famous *Star Wars* characters, like Yoda, pictured here. Will some of our Howell Road Elementary School students go on to create the next great *Star Wars* characters in a galaxy far, far away? We'll have to wait and see.

WILLOW ROAD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

This year, Willow Road Elementary School embarked on The Great Kindness Challenge, featuring daily celebrations and countless acts of kindness! Organized through the efforts of staff members Michelle Lepe and Jamey Schecter, The Great Kindness Challenge featured a variety of activities, including the completion of kind acts; morning reflections on the meaning of kindness; and regular discussions on how showing kindness to everyone in school, at home and throughout the community makes the world more peaceful. In one touching activity, students spread kindness throughout the building by posting notes of thanks and appreciation on doors for others.