Spring 2025

It's Elementary

VALLEY STREAM UFSD THIRTEEN

An Update on Our Strategic Plan: Shaping the Future of Our Schools

Valley Stream Union Free School District Thirteen is dedicated to fostering a dynamic and enriching educational experience for all students. Our schools are where students begin their academic journeys and learn fundamental skills that they will carry with them for the rest of their lives. To support this mission, administrators are crafting a Strategic Plan to guide the future of our schools. Designed as a guiding framework, the plan helps identify our district's priorities based on valuable input from community stakeholders. To ensure a well-rounded and inclusive approach, we invited all stakeholders to participate in a survey to gather feedback on key areas of our district's work. In addition, focus groups were conducted to dive deeper into survey results, allowing for more meaningful discussions that further shaped our understanding of community needs and expectations.

The data collected from the survey and the focus groups will be instrumental in establishing goals for the future. The results highlighted several key areas of focus, including curriculum and instruction, technology, preparing students for the secondary school experience, facilities improvements, and ensuring that priorities are aligned with the budget process. As we look ahead, the insights gained from this collaborative effort will guide our district in making informed decisions that strengthen our schools and support student success.

Connected, Engaged, Ready

Connected

Valley Stream Union Free School District Thirteen welcomed 2025 with a districtwide literacy celebration focused on the importance of kindness, connectedness, and goal-setting for the year ahead. Families joined as students took part in a read-aloud of *Share Some Kindness, Bring Some Light* by Apryl Stott, a book about friendship and kindness. The students crafted lanterns as a symbol of bringing light into the new year with kindness. They reflected on the ways in which they can spread kindness to their peers in the year ahead. The districtwide literacy event was a wonderful way to bring the community together and promote the development of essential reading and writing skills in our students.

The district remains committed to supporting our students' early childhood development in a nurturing environment so they can grow and thrive. With this in mind, teacher connectedness is a priority. Grade-level groups and department teams have been meeting throughout the year for professional development, curriculum planning, and discussions about ways to best support student learning.

Engaged

A quality education is truly a collaborative effort, and this is why we value parent and guardian engagement along the way. To this end, we launched a series of districtwide family engagement opportunities here in Valley Stream Union Free School District Thirteen.

In the fall, the district hosted an event called Fostering Your Child's Wellbeing: Practical Tools and Strategies to Help at Home. Parents and guardians were invited to attend workshops that provided practical tools and strategies to help foster their children's wellbeing at home. Workshops on topics such as Internet safety, healthy screen habits, social media use, the RULER program, emotional intelligence, yoga, and mindfulness were offered. Family engagement nights are integral in bringing members of our school community together to learn about important topics related to supporting students.

Also in the fall, a Cookies and Conversation with the Superintendent event was held to provide parents and guardians an opportunity to share discussions with Superintendent Dr. Judith LaRocca. Another way parents and guardians are invited into our schools is through our writing celebrations held throughout the school year, where they help cheer on our talented student authors.

In the winter, the week of December 16th was Family Week in Valley Stream Union Free School District Thirteen. We started Family Week with a Pajamas and Pages event, during which students and families were invited to wear their pajamas and bring a book to read together. The event kicked off with a whole-group reading "under the stars." Students and their families then had time to read their own books together in their pajamas. We also celebrated Family Week with a daily Gift of Reading celebration, featuring new book reveals and read-aloud videos from our principals and Dr. Lorraine Radice, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction. Families were welcomed to participate in the read-aloud via ParentSquare each evening to help celebrate Family Week.

To continue with this mission of being engaged, the district will welcome the parents and guardians of our youngest learners with an informational session in April called Prekindergarten Information Night. Similar to the Pre-K Meet and Greet that is held in August, families will have the opportunity to meet the leadership team and learn about our Pre-K program.

Ready

The educators here in the Valley Stream Union Free School District Thirteen recognize the importance of preparing students in grade 6 for the transition to junior high school. The District Unity Committee focuses on just that—readying students to attend the Valley Stream Central High School District after they move up. Another way the district supports this is through the Athletes Helping Athletes program. Sixth grade students are mentored by older students from Valley Stream Central High School so that they can learn about what to expect in middle school and high school. It is a great way to connect students across grade levels. Valley Stream Central High School District guidance counselors also provide frequent visits to our youngest students to support them as they progress through school.

Continuing with a focus on literacy, all sixth grade students will come together in May for a visit from New York Times bestselling author Gordon Korman. Additionally, this year, a pen pal program has been set up so that students can be matched with a pen pal from a different school in Valley Stream Union Free School District Thirteen so that they can get to know them throughout the year through letter writing. It is a wonderful way to promote literacy skills while having fun and getting to know each other before graduation.

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Thank You to Our Volunteers!

At Valley Stream Union Free School District Thirteen, we value and appreciate our volunteers who continue to make a difference in our schools. We are grateful for our dedicated volunteers who contribute their time and talents to create a positive school experience for students. They play an active role in supporting our students' learning, and their dedication does not go unnoticed.

Jessica Ramirez is a PTA volunteer at Wheeler Avenue Elementary School and values the community she has been a part of ever since volunteering. "Volunteering has been a great way for me to be part of my kids' education as well as build relationships with the teachers, staff, and other parents," she said. "It has been a truly rewarding and enlightening experience, allowing me to actively support my child's learning and contribute positively to the school community."

Our volunteers believe that building meaningful connections with the students is important, as it provides a consistent and positive presence in their lives. "I volunteer at Willow Road Elementary School because it is incredibly fulfilling being someone the students know they can trust and rely on," said Christine Legene, a PTA volunteer at Willow Road Elementary School. "I believe that trust is the foundation for learning and growth, and it is an honor to create a safe and supportive environment where they feel valued and encouraged."

The difference volunteering makes in our schools is significant. We appreciate our volunteers showing up and being there for the kids and building relationships with our teachers and staff. Working together, our staff, teachers, and volunteers help shape a brighter future for students. As Christine Legene said, "The smiles, excitement, and curiosity from the kids make it all so worth it," and we thank our volunteers for all they do!