



### We are: On the Move

■ Page 2: Every inch of Valley Elementary School is being put to use for learning, creativity, and relaxation.



### We are: Champions

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# VALLEY COLLABORATIVE

Volume 11, Issue 3 News for the extended Valley Collaborative community Spring 2023

## Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI)

Dear Valley Community:

Valley Collaborative continues to be committed to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) work. Our work continues this year under the framework of Valley's District Improvement Plan. Through this framework, we focused on curriculum, professional development, and human resources and revised our mission statement, vision, and strategic objectives to reflect our commitment to DEI.

Valley's Leadership Team began the broader work of applying a DEI lens to the collaborative, reviewing Valley's foundational elements-mission, vision, and current strategic objectives. The Leadership Team used some DEI definitions provided by the DEI Committee to guide its work. The team revised these foundational elements as shown below.

**Revised Valley Mission:**  
To work collaboratively in order to create a diverse, equitable, inclusive, and responsive learning environment that recognizes individuals and empowers them to navigate confidently with optimal independence in their community and fosters lifelong learning.

**Revised Valley Vision:**  
Valley Collaborative partners with families, districts, and the community to provide innovative programming that empowers all students and adults to discover their diverse individual strengths,



VALLEY COLLABORATIVE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, DR. CHRIS A. SCOTT

interests, and abilities. In doing so, those we serve become self-actualized members of society who contribute in a responsible manner.

**Revised Strategic Objectives:**

1. All students and adults will be empowered to discover their individual strengths, interests and abilities to be best prepared for successful adult living.
2. Valley Collaborative will provide professional development to build capacity and retain high quality staff while fostering and promoting a diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment.
3. Valley Collaborative will foster diversity, equity and inclusivity to promote a sense of belonging and engagement for all stakeholders (students, adults, families, staff, districts, community partners).

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# Valley Elementary School: Making Space to Recharge, Create, and Innovate

**A**t Valley Elementary School, innovative spaces are everywhere! In an effort to meet the needs of our individual students, Valley Elementary School puts every inch of school space to use. This year, the school has introduced a variety of new spaces that students can use to calm down, chill out or get moving, including:

## Gross Motor Room

This indoor playground/ movement space includes a slide, climbing wall, monkey-bars and a cargo-net. Students use the room for 3-5 minute movement breaks when they need to let out energy or build it up. The room can also be used for physical therapy sessions if necessary. "It's a great space for students to move and be creative," says Assistant Principal Bryan Thomas.

## Chillville

A calming sensory room, Chillville has been designed as a place where students can relax for a few minutes before returning to class. On offer here: cushions, large bean-bag chairs, calming music and images on a TV screen, tactile sensory items, coloring pages, a light/water decoration, positive magnet poetry, and a glow-in-the-dark drawing board.

## Athletic Spaces

Many Valley students are interested in sports and use athletics as a motivation or as a way to work out excess energy. When it's not being used for lunch or PE, the gym has a climbing wall and basketball hoop set up for students at access during the day. The stage has also been set up with sports equipment that students can use for soccer, hockey or lacrosse.

Students also use our outdoor spaces to enjoy basketball, a

game of catch, walks/runs, ride bikes and/or play Four Square.

## The Beat Cave

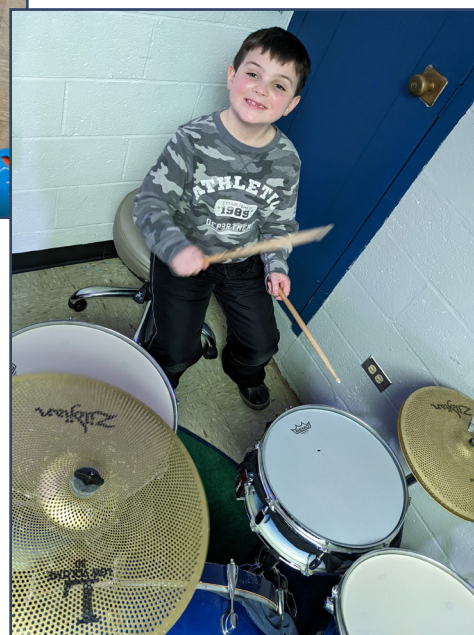
Just off of the stage is a small room filled with musical instruments. Aspiring Valley musicians will find



a drum set with low-volume drums and cymbals, a piano, guitars, bass, ukuleles, xylophones, and other percussion instruments. Music therapist Meghan Pope uses the room for small groups and individual music sessions. Students can also access the room individually, accompanied by a staff member, to take a regulation or earned break.

## STEM Lab/Library

Valley Elementary's STEM lab/library is chock full of books, science kits, robotics equipment, as well as a 3D printer. Therapists and teachers use the space for small groups and individual work. Students looking for a quiet supportive place to work outside of the classroom can also use the space when needed. ■



FROM TOP: KINDERGARTENER CARTER BREWSTER IN CHILLVILLE; THIRD GRADER ANDREW HIRST IN THE BEAT CAVE; FIFTH GRADER CHRISTIAN LAPIERRE TRIES OUT SOME ROBOTIC EQUIPMENT IN THE LIBRARY/STEM LAB.



## For Valley Middle School, A Championship Season

The scoreboard told the tale. When the clock ran out, the Valley Middle School basketball squad was ahead 30-25, enough to claim the league championship.

Coach Lewis Bailey says that he was thrilled by the success of the team. For months, the players had been practicing their skills and working together as a team. “They were dedicated and were all about practice,”

says Lewis, who joined Valley in October and brings with him a wealth of coaching experience.

The season didn’t always look so promising. Lewis says that after an early win, the team lost badly, an experience that inspired them to want to do better. “I told them that if they really wanted to improve they’d need to work harder in practice.” And that’s exactly what his players did. The team’s 90 minute practice sessions at Game Time in Lowell took on a new level of seriousness as the squad worked on passing, shooting and competing against each other. They also worked hard to ‘handle their business,’ as Lewis puts it—meeting the academic and behavioral requirements needed to play on the team.

Before long, the team showed marked signs of improvement. “We started winning because the team was hitting it on all cylinders,” says Lewis.

Then came the playoffs. Lewis says that the team went into the competition, held at the Mill Works in Westford, wanting to win. “You could see it in their play and how



TOP ROW, FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: LEWIS BAILEY, JAMES STRAFFIN, AUSTIN MCHUGH-BEALIEU, TYLER NELSON, SCOTT HYNES; FRONT ROW: MATTHEW COLON, MICHAEL SANTIAGO, RICHARD MARQUEZ, HARLEY JEAN, RYDER GALVIN.

they interacted with one another. If someone missed a free throw, their teammates would encourage them.”

Kathleen Berry is a BCBA for the Middle School and a former college basketball player at Worcester State. She coached the Valley squad last year and says she was thrilled by the way the team came together this season. “They took more ownership of being on the team. They picked their own uniform numbers and took real pride in wearing the Valley colors.”

Kathleen says that she was particularly proud of the sportsmanship that the Valley players demonstrated throughout the championship, something she and Lewis had worked on with the squad throughout the season. “All of the stuff we teach them—being a good teammate, being respectful, keeping your head even when the going gets tough—they made us really proud.”

The coaches also note that the victory was genuinely a team effort. While the team had a designated leader, he made sure that everyone

on the squad got a shot, including a student who made his very first bucket during the championship game.

“We helped each other and challenged each other,” says one student. “It was a team effort! That team included more than just the players,” says Ryder Galvin. “Thanks to all of my teammates and coaches for helping us get to the game and the opportunity. We wouldn’t have won this without you!”

In addition to the satisfaction of knowing that they are the best players in the league, the Valley basketball stars also have a tangible symbol of their success: championship rings to mark their victory.

The players say they’re already looking forward to next season. “It was fun playing with all of you guys,” says Michael Santiago. “I can’t wait for next year!” ■

# Multimedia Lab: Kickstarting Creativity at Valley Middle and Transitional High Schools

The new multimedia lab is a scene of bustling creativity these days, with students editing photos, shooting video, and recording music. And that's just the start. Under the guidance of music teacher Vlad Stoicescu and multimedia teacher Warren Smith, Valley students are kick-starting their creativity and preparing for life after Valley.

The lab features an array of industry standard technology including iMac computers preloaded with the complete Adobe Suite, a 3D printer, and a large format photo printer. Meanwhile lights and recording equipment have transformed a former classroom into a studio where students can shoot video and record podcasts.

But the most innovative thing happening in the expanded multimedia program may be the collaboration between Vlad and Warren. "That's when the magic happens," says Warren, who joined the Valley staff three years ago.

Vlad describes their partnership as a unique effort that combines his and Warren's different interests and skill sets. "Our goal is to create an all-encompassing media program that sparks student creativity," says Vlad. Students learn about sound design, sound effects, the science of sound, and how to tell stories through sound and music.

Student curiosity fuels the entire enterprise, says Warren. "We teach the students the technology and show them what's available, then they determine what interests them individually. That's been the key."

Take the student with an interest in illustration who had been 'sketching' on her phone. "Now she's working on a tablet and it has taken her art to the next level," says Warren.



MULTIMEDIA TEACHER WARREN SMITH AND MUSIC TEACHER VLAD STOICESCU OVERSEE VALLEY'S NEW MULTIMEDIA LAB, WHERE STUDENTS ARE ENCOURAGED TO CREATE.

Both Vlad and Warren credit Valley leadership with allowing them to experiment and innovate. "The support and trust we got from the administration to take an idea from its infancy to reality has been just amazing," says Vlad. He cites the freedom to work with students across all of Valley's middle and high school programs as especially important. "Starting this year, we've been able to work with the entire building and all of the students."

The result is a multimedia program that gives the students the opportunity to learn-by-doing, an approach that both Warren and Vlad say reflects their own favored approaches to learning. Their hope, says Vlad, is that by introducing students to new programs and technology, their curiosity will be sparked. Take, for example, photo editing, a once time-consuming process that now provides a near instant result. Vlad and Warren say that they hope that editing is just the first step in a creative journey. "We want them to ask 'how does it work' and 'what else can

I do with this?'" says Vlad.

The learn-by-doing approach is very different from having students listen to a lecture. Instead, students jump right into the creative process. Warren says he's been thrilled to see students take that enthusiasm home with them and continue working on their projects. One student became fascinated by motion graphic software and is now thinking that he might like to pursue his interest as a career. "We're helping students figure out what they're going to do outside of Valley. Today, with the landscape of tech, it's more possible than ever to make a living," says Warren.

For Vlad, having students take their interest home, then return to the multimedia lab with new ideas has been deeply gratifying. "They come back and say 'I was thinking I could use this sound here, or this instrument there. I just need help,'" says Vlad. "To me it shows that this is a learning model that really works. If the interest is there, then the rest comes easily." ■



# Adult Services and 3M:A Special Bond

**S**top by the 3M manufacturing facility in Billerica, MA and you'll notice a new addition to the parking lot: a designated spot just for Valley Collaborative. The space, big enough to accommodate a van full of Valley workers, is a visible symbol of a relationship between Valley and 3M that dates back more than two decades.

The connection has its origins with a 3M employee named Edward Hayes who had a child with a disability. Hayes approached Valley about a potential partnership and the rest is history. Joe Venskus says that the relationship has only deepened since then. "It's a very good partnership," says Joe.

On a typical day, a team of eight to nine Valley adults heads to 3M, overseen by Lead Vocational Coach Cristen Tryder-Carbone. This particular 3M site manufactures the tubing that goes over electrical wiring. The Valley workers are an indispensable part of 3M's assembly operation. From their location in what's known as the finishing room, the workers count tubes, bag and label them, then seal the bags. "They crank out 10 plus orders a day," says Cristen.

3M is one of the more popular spots on the Valley work circuit, in part because of the other workers at the facility. "The people who work here are very friendly and have a great rapport with our guys," says Cristen. "They always make a point of saying hi."

The work itself is also a draw. Jenna Masota says that she likes to work here because of the variety. "There are different tubes: long tubes, different colors." She says that her favorite are the rainbow tubes.

In keeping with Valley's mission, workers get the support they need in order to flourish on



VALLEY'S 3M WORK CREW, FROM LEFT: NATE STEIGERWALD, DONALD BUGDEN, JASON DOYLE, EILEEN MIKSENAS, HEIDI PACHECO, JOE PIRANIAN, CHRIS MCNULTY AND LUCAS CONSTAIN. IN FRONT: LONG-TIME 3M EMPLOYEE JACK STANULONIS.

the job. For example, Cristen and job coach Terina Richards came up with an ingenious cardboard "grid" aimed at helping members of the work crew with their counting. That's because while some workers can count up to 100, others need a bit of assistance.

Cristen says that in addition to sorting, counting and packaging, the individuals who work at 3M are also learning work skills: community team building, mentorship, leadership skills, advocacy.

For Erin Flynn, that means advocating to do more work on her own. "I want to get more independent," says Erin.

Other Valley workers are already working independently at the facility. Nick Totton is one of them. With the help of Valley aides, Nick learned to use his phone in order to communicate verbally. He assembles boxes and performs other routine tasks, and worked at 3M throughout the pandemic.

After twenty years, the relationship between Valley and 3M is strong and getting stronger. Joe Venskus says that that bond was especially important during the pandemic. "3M continued to pay its Valley workers through COVID, then worked with Valley to institute safety protocols so that the workers could come back safely," says Joe.

Jack Stanulonis has worked at 3M since 1972 and says that he's the only original employee left. He says he's always happy to see the Valley workers. "They make my day. They're great people," says Jack. "I mean it from my heart. I'm always happy to see them." ■

# Valley Collaborative Leadership Team



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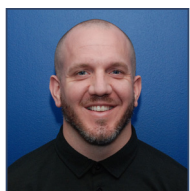
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**Chair: Mr. Timothy Piowar**

Superintendent, Billerica Public Schools

**Dr. Jay Lang**

Superintendent, Chelmsford Public Schools

**Mr. Steven Stone**

Superintendent, Dracut Public Schools

**Dr. Laura Chesson**

Superintendent, Groton-Dunstable Regional School District

**Dr. Denise Pigeon**

Superintendent, Nashoba Valley Technical School District

**Mr. Brad Morgan**

Superintendent, North Middlesex Regional School District

**Ms. Brenda Theriault-Regan**

Superintendent, Tewksbury Public Schools

**Dr. Michael Flanagan**

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**Dr. Christopher Chew**

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## Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

*\*continued from cover*

Valley Collaborative currently serves an underrepresented and vulnerable population, for whom what is generally provided for in a public school is not appropriate, accessible, or adequate, and can be overwhelming for our students. It requires highly trained staff to provide a diverse, equitable, and inclusive learning environment and community. This is a priority for Valley because of the roadblocks our students face in meeting their needs in these areas.

Our mission is to provide opportunities for our students and allow them to learn and grow without creating further roadblocks. Focus on the

individual, what makes them special, and how they can contribute to the larger group helps them foster a sense of belonging and supports their education and success.

Please know, we are committed to maintaining the highest quality, diverse, equitable, and inclusive programming for your/our students and to always be deserving of your support.

If you ever have a suggestion or need assistance, my door is always open.

*Chris*

Chris A. Scott, Ph.D.  
Executive Director