

Staying Safe Today, Planning for the Future

Dear friends and families:

We hope this update finds you well and safe. These are certainly trying and challenging times - know we are with you every step of the way. Remote learning has been in full swing for months now. Thanks to all of our staff and families who work so hard to ensure these plans are successful.

The health and safety of our staff, students, individuals and families continue to be our top priority. Valley Collaborative, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH), the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and the Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services (DDS) are working closely together to design a re-entry plan. Until further notice, we are planning on holding a hybrid of remote and onsite Summer School and Adult Services. Our target date to offer onsite services is July 13th (the first day of Summer School) and July 6th for DDS Services. Our MRC services never went to a remote platform.

Valley Collaborative under the guidance of DPH/DESE/DDS is working on a re-entry plan to determine how our schools and Adult Services will operate when we return to our facilities.

We want you to know that Valley Collaborative is preparing our facilities so that students, staff, families and guests are kept safe. The list below - although is not an exhaustive list - provides a few examples of the precautions we are taking.



VALLEY COLLABORATIVE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR DR. CHRIS SCOTT AND LEAD NURSE JESSICA SCALZI DEMONSTRATE WHAT STAYING SAFE LOOKS LIKE.

- Touch free hand sanitizer stations at each entrance and throughout the buildings
- Masks will be available at the front entrances of every building. Cloth masks or coverings will be required by all staff and students, with the exception for those students or staff for whom it is not safe to do so due to age, medical condition or other consideration.
- Separate entrances and exits during the day time hours
- Adequate spacing of desks, tables and chairs to promote social distancing in accordance with DESE guidelines
- Hallway markings to distinguish one ways and social distancing marks in accordance with DESE guidelines
- Disinfecting frequently touched surfaces (door knobs, handles, etc.)
- Frequent cleaning and disinfecting all areas of the buildings
- Personal protective equipment (masks, face shields, goggles) for all staff when necessary
- Procedures in place to handle staff, students and individuals who test positive for or have symptoms of COVID-19
- No staff, individuals, or students will be permitted into Valley buildings who have tested positive or have been exposed within the past 14 days.

All of our re-entry plans will be updated based on the most current guidance by the DPH in compliance with the Center for Disease Control Considerations for Operating Schools and posted on Valley's website.

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Elementary School: “We’re All Learning”

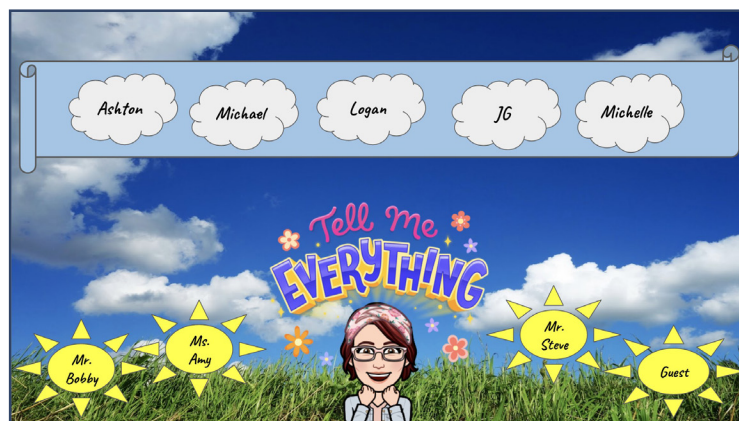
When Valley Elementary made the pivot to remote learning in March, teacher Amy Cassidy had no idea what to expect. Would the students in her fifth grade classroom still feel engaged? Would Amy be able to figure out all of the new technology involved? Turns out she need not have worried. These days, students in Amy’s class are more motivated than ever, and her ties to parents are stronger too. And once she got over her initial trepidation, Amy came to see Valley’s remote learning experiment as an opportunity to try things she’d never attempted before. “I came to Valley because I wanted to learn,” says Amy, who joined the staff of Valley Elementary after teaching in a public school district.

“We’re all learning”

When Amy admitted to the parents of her students that Zoom sessions were new to her too, they immediately felt more comfortable. “Instead of me being the expert, we were all learning together,” says Amy. Establishing trust and comfort off the bat has made it easier for everybody, and created an atmosphere in which parents could be partners.

Survey, survey, survey

Amy made a point of asking both parents and students what they hoped to get out of their remote



5TH GRADE TEACHER AMY CASSIDY MAY BE PHYSICALLY SEPARATED FROM HER STUDENTS BUT SHE'S FOUND LOTS OF CREATIVE WAYS TO CONNECT WITH THEM.

learning experiences. Also essential: establishing the kinds of technology students have access to. “Because I have a sense of what parents and kids want, I can offer more opportunities that kids can participate in.”

Offer options

Conquering the steep learning curve hasn’t been the only challenge. Amy has also made continual changes in response to the needs of her students. For example, she posts a pre-recorded teacher read-aloud, and also makes the same book available print-only, allowing students to decide if they want to listen or read independently. All students get the same comprehension quiz; as an accommodation Amy reads quizzes aloud. And Amy is available before and after “class” in live office hours. “The goal is to really pull together

as a community while acknowledging that the students have different needs.”

Center student interests

Student learning in Amy’s class proceeds according to Valley Elementary’s curriculum maps, but these days student interests are front and center. “Every day we explore a theme based on ideas that the kids have put forward,” says Amy. The themed sessions feature math, reading, even persuasive essays. Recent topics included an exploration of astronaut day, learning about Google, and emergency preparation—what would students do if trapped on a deserted island? The project-based learning has proven so successful, says Amy, that students have asked to continue the approach when Valley Elementary reopens. ■

Building Stronger Connections

What if Valley Elementary’s staff could emerge from the school shutdown more connected than they were before? That’s the goal that music therapist Bryan Thomas, physical education teacher Lucas Bolduc, and physical therapist Robert Piscitelli have spent the past three months working towards. “We wanted to hold the community together but we’ve also had a chance to

make it stronger,” says Bryan.

Take the new Para Classroom, a professional development space for the essential staff who work alongside teachers. The project combines a self-directed element in which the 28 paras investigate questions and topics of interest to them, and a weekly virtual meeting with guests. The project started by having the paras reflect on their roles - the sort of exercise that there’s rarely time for

during the typical school year. The extra time afforded by this anything-but-typical school year has allowed the paras to engage in hour-long discussions about the best way to support students.

Different guests, including speech and behavior therapists, recommend resources and then drop by the virtual Para Classroom to answer questions in a format that’s like a call-in show.

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Alternative Middle/High School: Up to the Challenge

Strong relationships between staff and students in Valley's alternative middle and high school is at the heart of the programs' success. So what happens when a pandemic intervenes and school shuts down? For Site 2 staff, the transition to remote learning has also involved figuring out how to keep the school community strong, even when physically separated.

"We placed a big emphasis on keeping that connection between students, staff, programming and communities as our foundation," says interim principal Glen Costello. All in all, Glen says that the transition to remote learning has gone better than he might have expected. "The kids' engagement level is higher, and the staff has really gone above and beyond."

Schools around the country have struggled with the question of how to keep students motivated at a distance. For Site 2 staff, that's meant coming up with creative ways to engage students and inspire self-motivation. "Remote learning has



TEACHER COREY SHEPHERD SHOWS OFF HIS MOVES IN THE SITE 2 FITNESS CHALLENGE IN WHICH TEACHERS AND STAFF FILM THEMSELVES DOING UNIQUE WORKOUT ROUTINES.

inspired a few new initiatives to push both students and staff to improve everyday," teacher Matt Conant. "What we're trying to develop is a community where we're accountable to each other."

One new initiative: a Fitness Challenge, in which staff and students develop and film themselves doing unique workout routines. The fun exercise also conveys a serious

lesson: that for every obstacle there is a creative solution. Don't have weights? Try other resistance materials, including soup cans, water jugs, a snowboard, even a dog. A Code Words challenge has teachers divulging certain words which combine to make a compliment as students complete classwork. If a student collects a full phrase in a day, they're eligible for a prize.

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Elementary School: Building Stronger Connections

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The sessions are fun and informative, and have presented a unique opportunity for Valley staff to work on solutions to challenges as a team. Typically, paras work in specific classrooms, but the remote experience has effectively broken down the walls between classes. "Now we've shown everything to everybody," says Bryan.

Paras who are experts on student needs in one classroom are getting insights into what's hap-

pening all across the school. In one recent session, a classroom teacher and a BCBA presented a schedule and behavior plans then answered questions from paras. Amarylis Carrasquillo, who has worked as a Valley para for three years, says that hearing from different BCBAs about their behavior support plans has made her feel more prepared for when school finally reopens. "It means that we're going to come back on the same page as a team."

When she first learned that Valley was going remote, Amarylis said her

main concern was whether she could be an effective support for her students from a distance. "As a para your job is to be there with the students. How could I do that through a screen?" These days that's exactly what she does. The lessons, resources, and conversations shared through the Para Classroom, meanwhile, have helped her feel more effective. "We're sharpening our skills and our minds," says Amarylis. ■

Transitional Middle/High School: Virtual Store, Real Community

It's a tradition for students at Valley's Transitional Middle and High School that good behavior and academic success mean a trip to the school store. So when Site 3 was forced to shut its doors in March, the store also went dark—temporarily. As the transitional programs shifted online, the store went virtual too, and is now bigger and better than ever.

Here's how it works: students can rack up points equivalent to 25 cents for all of the positive things they do throughout the school day, including attending virtual office hours or therapy, completing academic work, helping a peer, interacting positively with peers, and using coping skills.

As the transitional programs shifted online, the store went virtual too, and is now bigger and better than ever.

Teachers and staff formerly used paper tickets to represent points; since the closure the school has begun using Class Dojo. As students earn money they can go shopping in the store, which is now full of items that the students themselves have requested. More than 500 items had been uploaded to the Virtual School Store Inventory Catalog at last count. Students who earn enough points can make a purchase, and staff then drop the item off at the student's home—respecting health and safety protocols, of course.

The shop also offers bigger ticket virtual activities—a dance party, an open mic event, an art lesson with teacher Libby DeBoalt, and a cooking lesson with Joe Reilly, to name a few.

"These are all ideas that the students came up with themselves," explains Assistant Principal Brian Mihalek. That some of the most prized items in the store feature time with Val-

ley teachers and staff is

also telling. "It really demonstrates the sense of community we've developed and the relationships we've built with the kids."

In addition to items that students can earn and purchase individually, there are also rewards that classes can earn together. For example, students can decide that

SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKER JACLYN SQUEGLIA PREPARES TO DELIVER ITEMS THAT SITE 3 STUDENTS HAVE BEEN ABLE TO PURCHASE USING POINTS EARNED ON CLASS DOJO. NATE STEIGERWALD SHOWS OFF HIS DELIVERY.

they want to work together towards a pizza party, amassing Class Dojo points as a classroom.

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A HAUL OF PURCHASES READY FOR DELIVERY. NINETEEN STAFF DELIVERED SCHOOL STORE ITEMS TO 30 DIFFERENT STUDENTS ON MAY 29.

Virtual Store, Real Community

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Like any virtual shopping place this one allows customers to leave reviews and the Valley Virtual Store has been earning raves. Said one student: “Still being able to use the school store is amazing. I love the fact that we can get rewards, even when we can’t leave the house.”

“It’s like online shopping which is the next best thing! I’m glad the staff were able to do this for us, thank you!” said another student. “They are bringing school to us and making us filled with joy! I thank them a lot since it takes a lot of work to set things up like this!”

While Brian Mihalek says he’s thrilled that the store has done so well, its success is a sign of just how well Site 3 has fared in the shift to remote learning. “Student participation and engagement rates are sky-high. Everything is through the roof.” Of the 118 students in the Transitional programs, 115 are participating in digital learning in some capacity.

Nearly 90% of students are meeting participation expectations outlined in their remote learning plans. Regular communication between staff and students has been key to realizing these results. Since the closure, staff have logged more than 15,000 communications with students and families.

Says Brian: “The school may be closed but we’ve kept the community together and continued the sense of belonging and connection that make Site 3 such a special place.” ■

Alternative Middle/High School: Up to the Challenge



SITE 2 STAFF HAVE BEEN CREATING ‘HOW-TO’ COOKING VIDEOS THEN CHALLENGING STUDENTS AND STAFF MEMBERS TO RECREATE THE RESULTS AT HOME.

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“It’s just another way we’re trying to make things engaging and fun,” says Matt.

Staff members have also created their own ‘how to’ cooking videos, which students and staff members then attempt to replicate at home, posting their own pictures. Says Matt: “It was interesting to see everyone’s techniques, though truth

“The relationships are what makes us successful. We may be online now but our connections to one another are just as strong.”

be told, a few of mine belonged on ‘Pinterest fails.’”

Valley’s shift to remote learning has also presented a great opportunity for teachers to reflect on how they teach and expand their technical skills, says Glen. While Site 2 teachers were already using Google

Classroom, they’ve taken that knowledge and expanded it tenfold, aided by a consultant that Valley hired as the school was shutting down. “Nothing can replicate what happens in the building, but the kind of teacher growth we’re seeing is going to pay huge dividends down the road.”

While Zoom and Google Classroom may have replaced the Site 2 milieu for now, sustaining relationships and providing students with social and emotional support have remained the school’s top priorities. A recent Friday found thirty students and staff members logged into a Zoom room for a senior graduation event. The Site 2 tradition, known as Senior Good Bye Chair, gives staff and students the chance to say parting

words to graduating seniors. This year’s event featured webcams and Zoom frames but the spirit was classic Site 2. “The relationships are what makes us successful,” says Glen. “We may be online now but our connections to one another are just as strong.” ■

Adult Services: Keeping a Special Community Together

On a recent weekday, sixty individuals and Valley staff enjoyed lunch together. High-spirited, supportive and joyful, It could have been any lunch-time gathering at 25 Linnell Circle. But like all of Valley Collaborative, Adult Services closed its doors in mid-March in response to the pandemic. The daily lunches, along with classes and other activities are now held in Zoom rooms. While moving online has presented lots of challenges, the community spirit of the Adult Services programs has remained intact. Here are some highlights of the past few months.

An online assist

During planning for the shut-down, program staff began to think about how to creatively engage the adults in their care. One immediate challenge: uneven access to technology. “The first thing we did was identify the tech needs of the individuals and their families,” says job coach Joe Veniskus, who quickly emerged as the program tech expert. Joe distributed iPads to individuals who needed them, and held “help” sessions with individuals and parents to guide them through the log-in process and provide troubleshooting advice. “For the most part it’s gone very well,” says Joe.

Creative time

The shutdown also closed the job sites where individuals are employed. That’s meant a big change for job developers like Darren Goad, who provide support



TEACHER NIKKI GOUNARIS TAKES INDIVIDUALS ON A VIRTUAL TOUR OF A GROCERY STORE AS PART OF A “COOKING WITH NIKKI” VIDEO. NIKKI HAS USED VIDEO AND OTHER VISUALS TO MAKE HER TEACHING MORE INTERACTIVE AND ENGAGING.

to individuals at their workplaces and recruit new employers to partner with Valley. During the shut down,

Darren added a new role to his job description: art teacher. In a series of pre-recorded lessons, Darren has been teach-

ing individuals how to paint. “What I do is visually and verbally walk the individual through the entire process of painting a picture,” says Darren. Using photos he takes as inspiration, Darren creates a painting, offering instructions about preparation, brushes, colors and techniques along the way. The sessions have been a hit, says Darren, and several of the individuals have revealed a passion for painting. “They all seem to be very intrigued by the process of

creating a painting and have many questions along the way.”

An opportunity

Teacher Nikki Gounaris was brand new to Zoom, but she quickly got inspired by the opportunities to expand on the sorts of lessons that she’d been teaching individuals at 25 Linnell Circle. On one recent day as she taught her students about going to the hair salon, she invited a special guest into the Zoom class: her sister, who happens to be a stylist. “She was great about telling them what to expect when the salon reopens,” says Nikki. PowerPoint slides, visuals and videos she creates have also made the lessons more interactive and engaging. To accompany a cooking lesson, for example, Nikki made her first-ever video, including tips for individuals on what awaits them at the grocery store these days. “It was the first time I’d ever done anything like that,” says Nikki. “I had to teach myself the technology and the editing.”

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Keeping a Special Community Together

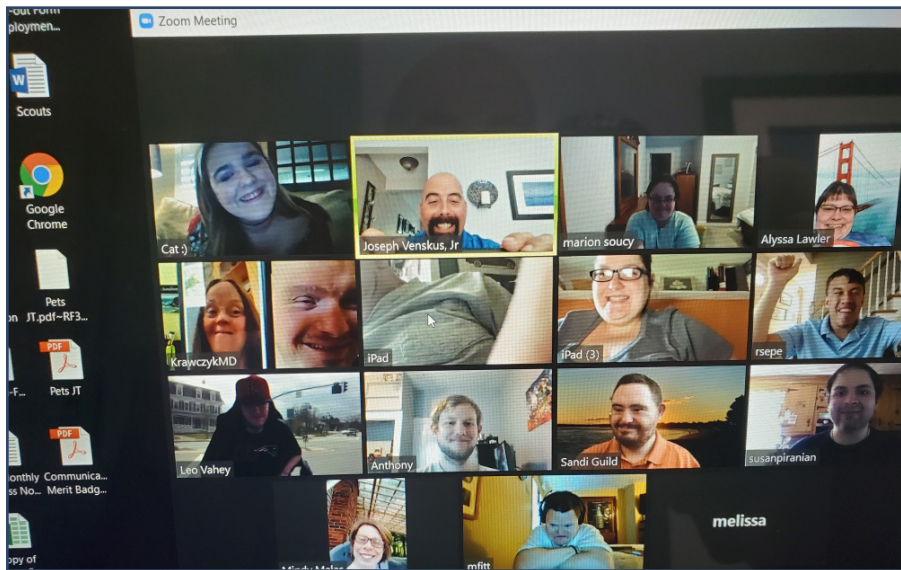
Saying Farewell to a Friend

We were deeply saddened by the loss of Paul Burke in May. Paul was a bright light in our community and never ceased to make us smile.

To all at Valley Collaborative: I want say thank you for making my son Paul the man he came to be. He loved working there and looked forward to going everyday. When we talked on the phone everyday, he always had such stories about so many of you, how he made you all laugh and the many adventures he enjoyed with all of you! You loved him, took care of him, and again helped make him the man he came to be. There are no words to truly express my feelings. You are truly improving the lives of so many. I know you have passion for what you do, never stop. Your work does so much for so many.

Sincerely and with love,

Joan Burke



INDIVIDUALS AND STAFF MEMBERS GATHER FOR A ZOOM LUNCH. THE DAILY EVENTS ARE ORGANIZED AROUND A THEME AND PROVIDE INDIVIDUALS THE OPPORTUNITY TO MEET WITH JOB COACHES IN VIRTUAL BREAKOUT ROOMS.

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Nikki says that she plans to use many of these new tools when Valley reopens. “Our discussions are great, and I’ve gotten really good feedback from the individuals. They’re really engaged with the material.”

Lunch with a theme

Nurse Melissa Alexa would never have been able to have lunch with 60 individuals and staff in the “old” days. As the host of Valley’s daily Zoom lunch, she now enjoys their company every day. Each lunch starts with a review of Zoom norms, then it’s time to discuss the theme of the day.

Recent themes have included music, the beach, sports, even ‘Hamburger Day.’ “The theme becomes a prompt for conversation and an opportunity for teachable moments,” says Melissa. The individuals, some of whom come in theme-related attire, love seeing their peers and Valley staff members, which is why the Zoom lunches have proven so popular.

After the main event, the individuals have a chance to meet with job coaches in virtual breakout rooms, almost like being back at their tables at 25 Linnell Circle. “I drop by every room just like I used to do,” says Melissa. Overall, she says, the transition to the remote experience has been a big success. Not only has the feedback from the individuals been positive but the Zoom lunches have been a safe and welcoming space to new members of the community.

“We have several individuals who transitioned into the program right as the shutdown was happening and they’re on every group meeting,” says Melissa. “It’s just a fun, welcoming environment.” ■

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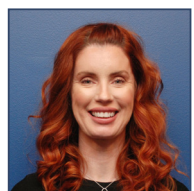
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Staying Safe

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Please continue to check our Health Resources for COVID-19 site for continuous updates from Valley's Health Department.

Please continue to social distance, wear a mask and wash your hands! As we go into the summer we are looking forward to people returning to our brick and mortar sites and continuing to fine-tune our high quality remote learning programs. ■

Be well,

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Lead Nurse