Valley COLLABORATIVE

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Volume 12, Issue 4 News for the extended Valley Collaborative community Summer 2024



We are: On a Roll

■ Page 2:The Elementary School is wrapping up a great year, featuring lots of learning and a ton of fun.



We are: Over the moon

■ Page 4:A trip to the McAuliffe-Shepard Discovery Center in Concord, NH was a highlight for the Middle School.



We are: Out and About

■ Page 7: Individuals in Valley's Adult Programs have been enjoying more activities and learning opportunities than ever before.

Celebrating Our Successes, Planning for the Future



LEFT TO RIGHT: MAZYAR MOSHTAGHI, CHIEF TECHNOLOGY OFFICER; PATRICIA SICARD, ACCOUNTS MANAGER; DR. CHRIS A. SCOTT, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR; RENATO SILVA, SCHOOL SAFETY & FACILITIES MANAGER

Dear members of the Valley Collaborative Community:

As we wind down the 2023 - 2024 school year, we are proud of all that has been accomplished at Valley due to the dedicated work, collaboration and communication of our families, our staff and our administration.

Planning forward is an important ingredient in our recipe for success at Valley. The professional learning opportunities provided this school year came about as a result of our assessments of the needs of everyone at the Collaborative and thoughtful planning to meet those needs. Additionally, we have already started to work on our next Five Year District Improvement Plan. By applying the concept of collaboration, this process includes gathering input from a wide audience and a variety of sources to create a plan which will improve and enhance all we do in our programs. The plan will be completed within the next few months and will provide us with a basic roadmap for our continuing journey and quest for excellence.

As you may be aware, Valley Collaborative is a special education public entity which bills sending public school districts and other public entities for tuition and services provided to our amazing students and adults.

»continued on back page

Showing Our Colors at the Elementary School



The Elementary School is wrapping up a truly outstanding year, one filled with activities aimed at helping our students be stronger readers, healthier kids, and better stewards of the environment. There were also plenty of field trips and other fun-filled events–so many that students can't agree on their favorites.

"The holiday gift exchange was my favorite. It was fun to give and shop for people," said fourth grader Madeleine Clark. "My favorite was the Halloween Party and Trunk-or-Treat because I liked to see what other people were wearing," said fourth grader Olivia Lane. Another favorite event of the year was a fall African Drumming performance. "The African Drumming was fun!" said sixth grader Khloe Walsh. Fourth grader Lindsey Lavanga added: "The drumming and dancing were fun. Caroling was awesome too!"

On a Roll

We kicked off the spring half of the school year with a field trip to Roller Kingdom in Tyngsboro. Students had a chance to exercise perseverance as they learned and practiced skating. "Roller Kingdom is the best place on earth!" said third grader Nate Skuse. "Roller Kingdom is fun!" agreed sixth grader Javian Pettengill. And while dancing on skates isn't easy, that's exactly what second grader Lucas Harrington enjoyed, adding. "I like to dance at Roller Kingdom!"

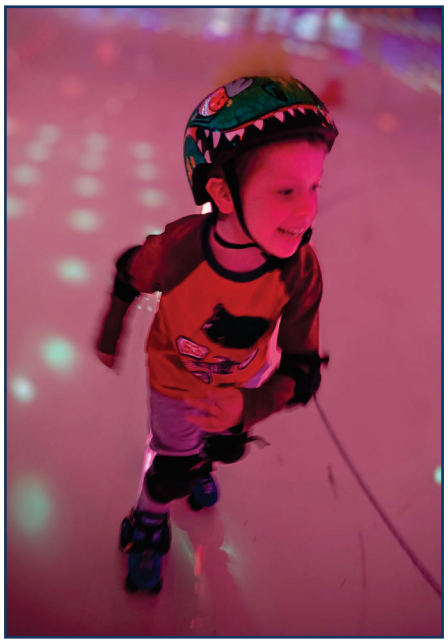
A Month of Love and Kindness

February was a month filled with the spirit of love and kindness a the Elementary School, starting with spirit week from February 12th-16th: Love & Kindness Spirit Week, a "caught-being-kind" incentive program, and numerous kindness themed activities. A Valentine's Day celebration featured a dance, a photo booth, and crafts. Finally, we wrapped up the month with a special assembly on February 28th at which students learned about the life, work, and lasting influence of Doctor Martin Luther King Jr.

Read Across America

Students celebrated this annual tribute to all things literacy with a reading themed spirit week, buddy-reading, as well as visits from guest readers.

TOP: ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STAFF SHOW THEIR COLORS IN THE AUTISM AWARENESS "RAINBOW OF COLOR" THEMED WALK; BELOW SECOND GRADER ETHAN BARRY ON A VISIT TO ROLLER KINGDOM.



Hands-on Science

The Acton Discovery Center Traveling Science Program returned in March to lead hands-on "Force & Magnetism" science workshops. April featured a visit from Eyes on Owls, teaching our students about these fascinating creatures.

Autism Awareness

To celebrate Autism Awareness Month, we held a spirit week in early April, featuring themed spirit days, art projects, and other activities that focus on Autism Awareness. To cap off the spirit week, we held our annual Autism Awareness Walk on Friday, April 12th. This year we showed our support of the spectrum with a "rainbow of color" themed walk and activities.

Earth Days

We celebrated Earth Day on April 22 with earth and environment themed activities. On May 10, percussion ensemble Bash The Trash returned to Valley for a performance that combined music, science and creativity

Mental Health Awareness

May is Mental Health Awareness Month, and we marked the occasion with a coping skills spirit week. We celebrated our current coping skills, and explored new skills that encourage self-care and emotional regulation.

Still ahead: our annual field day, graduation, and graduate talent show, capping off the year in June! ■

Top Honors to an Outstanding Staff Member

When Eli Goumbakis was recognized as the top Division 1 assistant football coach in Massachusetts, Nick LeClair, principal of the Alternative Programs at the Transitional High School where Eli works, says he wasn't surprised at all. "Eli to his core is a coach on and off the field," says Nick. "He brings the best out of our kids."

Eli, whose official title at Valley is Consumer Science Vocational Coordinator, was recognized by the Massachusetts High School Football Coaches Association (MHSFCA) for his coaching success at Westford Academy. The head coach at Westford, Bruce Rich, nominated Eli in recognition of his hard work over the past three years, during which the football team, known as the Grey Ghosts, has emerged as a powerhouse, including winning the league last year.

For Eli, who has been coaching across a variety of sports for nearly twenty years, the award was a validation of his work with kids, whether on a high school team or at Valley. "The work I do here at Valley is all about building relationships with the kids," says Eli. "That's how coaching works too. If kids believe in you they'll respond well. Then the possibilities are endless."

Eli dates the start of his coaching career to his college days when an injury kept him off of the football field. Eager to remain part of the football community, Eli took a coaching job at Chelmsford High when he was just 22. Over the years, he has coached multiple sports, including rugby and lacrosse, at a variety of schools. In addition to twelve years at Chelmsford High, Eli also spent four years at Groton-Dunstable High School before moving to Westford Academy.



ELI GOUMBAKIS, CONSUMER SCIENCE VOCATIONAL COORDINATOR AT THE TRANSITIONAL HIGH SCHOOL, HAS BEEN NAMED DIVISION 1 ASSISTANT FOOTBALL COACH OF THE YEAR.

On the football field, Eli is known for intense pre-game speeches that inspire and motivate his players. He brings that same spirit to his work with students at Valley. Whether the setting is a football game in front of a sell-out crowd of 5,000 or the local gym that is home to Valley's brand new Jiu Jitsu Club, says Eli. "How do we motivate each individual? How do we feed the fire?"



ELI GIVING ENCOURAGEMENT TO MEMBERS OF THE WESTFORD ACADEMY FOOTBALL TEAM.

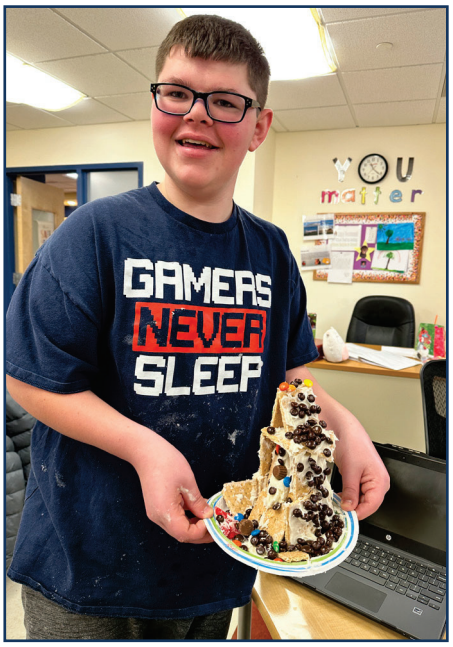
While Eli says that while his decades of coaching has influenced his work at the Transitional High School, five years working at Valley have also made him a better coach. "At Valley, we're super focused on each individual kid," says Eli, whose job includes setting up internships for students based on their interests. "You need to get to know them and how they're motivated, and then adjust accordingly."

When Eli accepted the coaching honor at an MHSFCA banquet in early May he was quick to turn the attention to the various 'teammates' who've assisted him over the years. "I've been fortunate to have had some incredible mentors," he says. On the list: coach Bruce Rich Sr. who gave him his first coaching job at Chelmsford High School, as well as coaches Jason Fletcher and Tom Caito. He also gave thanks to his personal 'team,' namely his parents, and especially his wife and son. "They've had to miss a lot of family time in order for me to get here today." ■

At Valley Middle School, a Year to Remember

The 2023-2024 school year in the Alternative Program of the Middle School was one to remember! Students worked extremely hard in their core classes engaging in various writing, reading and hands-on activities. In ELA, the students read *Camp Sunshine* by local author, Jarret J. Krosocza, and *Thank You, Ma'am* by Langston Hughes, then showed off their writing skills by completing an essay for each book. In science, students created rockets, plant and animal cells out of candy, and root beer floats to understand the states of matter. In history, students participated in a biography project that required them to research a famous person and create a visual representation of their work. In math, students utilized manipulatives to increase their skills and researched travel expenses for a dream vacation.

When core classes weren't in session, students enjoyed electives such as Football Club (with a special trip to Patriots Hall of Fame), Culinary Arts, and Dungeons and Dragons Club. Learning skills outside of the classroom in the community setting plays a large role in programming, and student incentive trips to Altitude, Franklin Park Zoo, Bolton Animal Adventures, Metro Rock, and Honeypot Hill Orchards were among some of the favorite attractions.



TRANSITIONAL MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENT KAYDEN BOVARDI WITH HIS GINGERBREAD HOUSE.



SPECIAL EDUCATION ASSISTANT ZACH GRUNDY AND STUDENTS ZACHARY HAMMOUMI AND LOGAN COUGHLIN ENJOY A SCHOOL EVENT.

The Transitional Program of the Middle School also enjoyed activities outside of the classroom this year. Among the favorites were the Pirate Museum in Salem, MA, Enchanted Village, rock climbing at Metro Rock, and hiking Mt. Watatik. In culinary arts, students loved cooking food from different countries each month. Students had a blast showcasing their talents at the school talent show and their athleticism at the Special Olympics.

Students in the Valley Middle School, transitional and alternative programming, shared many similar sentiments of what made their year at Valley outstanding. Many students credited the staff and programming to their success, as well as the sensory spaces, behavioral support, and accommodations. Middle School staff credit a successful year to the students and all of their accomplishments and growth. Here's what students and staff had to say when asked, "What made it an outstanding year for you at Valley?"

Ryder Raines, student, Transitional Middle School: "All the staff being supportive and patient."

Jude Galbraith, student, Transitional Middle School: "It's been helpful having the staff and resources that I need."

Kayden Bovardi, student, Transitional Middle School:"Being able to take sensory breaks."

»continued on page 6

An Outstanding Year at Valley Transitional High School

The Transitional High Schoolers continued to gain valuable academic, vocational, and functional living skills in preparation for adulthood during this school year. With a steady mix of community-based, real-word experiences, they've also had lots of fun! In December, students in the transitional programs dressed to impress for the annual trip to the North Shore Music Theater to see a production of A Christmas Carol. Other favorite field trips this year included the Museum of Science, the Madagascar play, Stone Zoo, Fenway Park, and the Patriots Hall of Fame. An epic time was also had by the students who hiked Mt. Monadnock to watch the solar eclipse. Students had fun celebrating each of the seasons with friends at the Halloween, Holiday, and Winter dances.

The school store is a favorite memory of many in the Transitional High School. Students enjoyed cashing in their Dojo points for everything from Pokemon cards to headphones and fidgets. A favorite item was a new gumball machine that lets students win a variety of prizes, including a chance to pick a prize from the treasure chest.

The destination for this year's school trip was Chicago, Illinois where the Valley Travelers enjoyed all the sights and sounds Chicago has to offer including Michigan Avenue's Magnificent Mile, Millennium Park, Wrigley Field, and Lincoln Park Zoo. The Valley travelers watched a Chicago Cubs game, took the Seadog River and Lake Architecture Cruise, and participated in a deep dish pizza making class.

Graduation and end of year preparations are in full swing at the Valley Transitional High School. During a recent student council meeting the room was buzzing with ideas for the upcoming prom.

*continued on page 6



TRANSITIONAL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS JADEN QUINONES, GAVIN WARGO, AIDEN MITCHELL, COREY ERICKSON ON THE JOB AT CHELMSFORD DPW



TRANSITIONAL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS ELLIOT URBAN, MICHAEL MCANDREWS, AND RILEY LADUKE WITH ADVISORS DURING A STUDENT COUNCIL MEETING.

At Valley Transitional High School, an Outstanding Year

»continued from page 5

Students ultimately voted on an 80's theme to close out a successful school year.

This year was a year of learning, fun, and making lots of memories with friends.

We asked students and staff to reflect on this past year. Work sites tailored to individual student interests, academic successes, and extracurricular activities are just a few of the responses. Here's what students and staff had to say when asked, "What made it an outstanding year for you at Valley?"

Vanessa Sebastian, student: "Going to work. I started two new jobs this year at the Service Dog Project and the Guinea Pig Sanctuary."

Anthony Normand, student: "Meeting new people and taking field trips."

Aiden Russell, student: "Starting a new job in the bistro."

Nicholas Porcaro, student:"Passing my final MCAS."

Michael McAndrews, student: "Being involved in school leadership, helping everyone, motivating students."

Riley LaDuke, student: "I've been here since I was 13, it's all about gaining experience so you can learn, grow, thrive, and adapt."

Lori Escolas, teacher: "I get to work with an amazing staff and administration. These students never cease to amaze me with their resilience, perseverance, and ability to overcome challenges. I am very proud of all of their accomplishments, and it will be bittersweet to watch some of them graduate. This was a fantastic year, I am so lucky to work at the Collaborative."

Mitchell Doherty, special education assistant: "Seeing the progress of the students who I work with along with the connections I've made with the Valley team." ■

Special thanks to the generous donors who support our Student/Adult Services Activity Fund:

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A Year to Remember



TEACHER HANNAH MORIARTY LEADS THE ALTERNATIVE MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS IN A HOLIDAY CELEBRATION.

»continued from page 4

Andres Diaz, student, Transitional Middle School: "The staff. They help me be a better person."

Hailey Hamilton, student, Alternative Middle School: "The staff and all the available resources and earning Dojo points to buy things from the school store."

Hannah Moriarty, Teacher, Alternative Middle School: "It's been super rewarding to see the gains the students have made in ELA, specifically with writing and their willingness to engage with reading."

Zach Grundy, Special Education Assistant, Transitional Middle School: "Seeing how our students have come over the year, both academically and in terms of thier maturity."

Jaclyn Squeglia, M.Ed, SAC, LMHC: "Seeing our transitional support staff reach their goals and become Special Education teachers. It inspires me to watch them grow into mature, professional educators who love our students and love coming to work each and every day." ■

Adult Services: More Space and a Big Year

This year has been a big one for the Adult Services program as we've settled into our larger space. More space has enabled us to offer improved and expanded learning opportunities to the adults in the Today and Tomorrow program. The space, which we share with Mass Rehab, is located right off the highway, which means less time on the road for individuals, whether they're headed from home or to the job site. What do our individuals have to say about the past year?

Mike Koczan – "I like working at BMS all year and doing the packages and mail. I like being able to see and talk to all the other staff that work at BMS. It makes me happy and it's one of my favorite job sites that I go to. I also love going to the Food Bank in Lowell and helping to deliver meals to people that need them."

Billy Haberlin – "I really like working with all the job coaches here and all the new job coaches. When I need help they are there for me and they help me with the work tasks that we have and they help keep me on track. I like that I get to be out in the community every day and go to all the different sites."



Melaina Chaput – "I work independently at TJ Maxx three days a week and I've been there for almost 18 years. I like how my Job Developers come and check in with me to make sure I have everything I need and to help me if I'm having any issues at work. I've also had a great year being with all my friends and getting to try different activities with CBDS like going to the Tyngsboro Sports Center and helping with our community gardening."

Crystal Dwyer – "I like all my friends and getting to see them every day. We have so much fun together everyday with all the different activities we do. I also work at Wegmans three days a week on my own. Job Developers come to check on me every week and help me and make sure everything is going good for me. I've been at Wegmans for nine years!"

Scott Noftle – "I really like working at 3M and Chelmsford High School. I really enjoy that I get to see everyone when I come to the program. I've made some good connections with other people in the program and now I can always talk to them even when I'm not at Valley. I also really like Career Planning and talking about all the different job sites I could work at one day."

Jacob Bettencourt – "I really enjoyed all the stuff we do. I like going to different parks and seeing different parts of the community. I really like getting to work and earn money too. My favorite work site is the Chelmsford High School Kitchen and I also really like volunteering with Meals on Wheels."



TOP: BILLY MCCLURE GREETS PEOPLE AT OUR FRONT DESK; BELOW: SHARIFAH NAMIGADDE AND JOE SEPE AT A LOCAL MUSEUM ON A CBDS FIELD TRIP.

Billy McClure – I like this building. I like being in our new building because it's fun. There is a lot of space! I love my jobs. I like working at CrossPoint and talking with all the different people that work there. I like Community Catering and serving people meals. People need food so I like to be able to help them and give them food."

Sharifah Namigadde – "I enjoy going to work, I enjoy working with all my friends. I always feel happy when the job coaches are nice to me and we get to talk to each other about the things going on in our life. I get to work independently sometimes and I really like that. I've come a long way and I am becoming a better and better worker with all my opportunities. I like how many choices I get every day and getting to choose where I want to go." ■

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Celebrating Our Success, Planning for the Future

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This financial structure is far different than a typical public school district which receives monies from the state based on enrollment. As such, the competent fiscal management of Valley is crucial for us to be able to continue to provide state-of-the-art programming to the individuals we serve.

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) is in the process of creating and implementing financial protocols for review of educational collaboratives across the Commonwealth. Given Valley's strong financial position and its robust compliance with state laws and regulations, Valley was asked to provide feedback to the State on the draft financial protocols and has also been chosen to be the beta test site for this financial review. Valley is proud of its role in helping DESE to finalize these protocols of best practice as they will enhance the financial operations of Collaboratives statewide.

I thank each of you for the contributions you have made to such a wonderful school year of achievement and joy in learning, both in our programs and at home. It takes a village and our Valley village is strong!

As you can see, we are looking forward with anticipation to an even better year ahead. With a year of great accomplishment coming to a close, we feel we have only just begun. Have a wonderful summer!

My door is always open,



Chris A. Scott,
Executive Director