



We are: Hooked

■ Page 2: Valley Elementary's new fishing club has been a huge success.



We are: Gold Medalists

■ Page 3: Valley students brought home the gold at this summer's Special Olympics Collaborative Game Day event, held at St. John's Prep in Danvers.



We are: Exploring

■ Page 6: Individuals in Valley's Adult Programs spent the summer exploring new places and areas of interest.

Welcome Back: Exciting Times Ahead!



FROM LEFT: HOLLY TIERNEY, DDS PROGRAM COORDINATOR; BRANDON MCHUGH, BILL-ERICA; DR. CHRIS SCOTT, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR; ASHLEY PALMER-ADAMS, WILMINGTON; AND MATT GENTILE, DIRECTOR OF DDS & MASS ABILITY.

Hello Valley families!

As you know very well, a new school year has begun at Valley! Welcome back to our returning students, families and staff and a very warm welcome to those joining the Valley family for the very first time. We hope you are enjoying this beautiful autumn weather. It has certainly added an extra nice touch to the wonderful beginning of our new school year. Our students and adults began September with smiles and enthusiasm and comfortably settled into their school routines. That would not have happened without all of the time and effort you spent at home preparing for the new year. We thank each of you for all that you did to contribute to such a successful beginning of the school year, but this is just the start! We look forward to your continuing, impactful partner-

ship with us in the months to come.

In the summer newsletter I proudly shared with you the very positive results of the surveys we conducted with Valley's Leadership Team and the Member District Special Education Directors. That data was combined with the 2024 surveys of students, staff and adult service participants to form the foundation of our work on Valley's new Five-Year District Improvement Plan. Even though we received excellent reports and ratings from the Massachusetts Department of Secondary and Elementary Education as a result of their audits, we know that maintaining that demonstrated excellence requires ongoing team effort and focus as well as adjusting our goals to meet the evolving needs of our students and families.

Elementary School: Off to a Running Start!

The 2025–2026 school year is off to a running start! Classrooms are active, curricula are in place, students are learning, therapy is underway, classes are heading out on field trips, and the vibrant exuberance that defines our Elementary School is in full swing. Returning students are looking forward to another fantastic year, and new students are excited for a fresh start!

Families returned to the school on September 24 for our annual Open House and can look forward to our community Trunk-or-Treat and Thanksgiving Brunch events later this fall. Our outdoor education experiences are also up and running, with another overnight camping trip scheduled for early October. Students are outdoors hiking, biking, participating in soccer club, and all classes will be returning to Parlee Farms for our annual pumpkin-picking trip.

A Message from Principal Heather Mackay:

Welcome back to a brand-new school year! I'm thrilled to see our students return, ready to dive into another exciting chapter of learning, growth, and discovery. The elementary school's theme for the start of this year is: "You Can Do Hard Things." This year brings countless opportunities to explore your interests, build new skills, and create meaningful memories with your classmates and teachers. Each of you is a vital part of our school community. I encourage you to face challenges with confidence, support one another with kindness, and share your ideas freely. Together, let's make this school year one to remember!

Here's what Valley Elementary students and staff are looking forward to this year:

Noah Perkins, 4th grade, "Having fun with friends and being happy!"

Matthew Tobin, 3rd grade, "Going on bike rides!"

Daxiel Pena, 2nd grade, "Field trips"

James Lino, 2nd grade, "Fun things we do in the class, gym class and iPads!"

Nassim Aguaouz, 2nd grade, "Going on field trips, and classroom parties."

Karen Blackburn, administrative assistant, "I love that the kids have all of these opportunities, like camping, field trips and assemblies."

Luke Shaw, paraprofessional, "I'm excited for Soccer Club, Basketball Club and Football Club!"

Pam McNulty, custodian, "Future adventures and the outstanding team we have this year. There is a lot of love and caring in this building."

Stephanie Davis, classroom Teacher, "Watching kids build friendships, grow and learn."



FIRST GRADER CHRISTIAN LAPOINT SHOWS OFF HIS CATCH

Valley Elementary School Fishing Club – A Hooked Success!

The Valley Elementary School Fishing Club was in full swing this summer. The club, started last year by Nicholas Cote, introduces students to the joys of fishing, often for the first time. "We focus on learning how to cast, identify local fish species, practice good sportsmanship, and develop patience," explains Cote. This summer, 60 students took part in fishing trips to local ponds, where all of them caught fish, and some staff members even caught their very first fish! The fishing club has quickly become a popular topic around the school, with students eagerly asking, "When's the next trip?" Whether it's the thrill of catching a big fish or the peaceful experience of spending time by the lake, the club has been a huge success, leaving everyone excited for the next outing. ■



THIRD GRADER GRACIE TAFF WORKS ON HER MATH SKILLS USING A FACT-FLUENCY PROGRAM CALLED REFLEX.

Bringing Home Gold: Valley Athletes Shine at Special Olympics Collaborative Game Day

Aiden Russell, a senior at Valley Collaborative, held his gold medal between two fingers, feeling the raised Special Olympics symbol. He gave his best on the field, and like his fellow student-athletes, beamed with pride in the bright late spring sunshine on June 11 at St. John's Preparatory School in Danvers.

Four special education collaboratives — Andover-based CREST Collaborative, Billerica-based Valley Collaborative, Stoneham-based SEEM Collaborative, and Beverly-based Northshore Educational Consortium — joined forces for a third year to host a heartwarming and inspiring Special Olympics Collaborative Game Day event, dedicated to students with special needs.

The annual event celebrates the athletic abilities, determination, and joyful spirit of students, fostering an inclusive community, and providing a memorable day of achievement and camaraderie.

Students from participating districts competed in a variety of athletic events designed to be inclusive and accessible for all ability levels, including track and field races, throwing events, and adaptive obstacle courses. The day emphasized participation, personal bests, and the joy of sportsmanship.

"We are incredibly excited to bring this Special Olympics event to our students," said Jae Handler, a CREST Speech Language Pathologist (SLP) and the event's Special Olympics Coordinator. "It's a testament to what can be achieved when organizations work together with a shared vision. This day is all about empowering our students, building their confidence, and giving them a platform to shine brightly."



VALLEY STUDENT AIDEN RUSSELL COMPETES IN THE SPECIAL OLYMPICS COLLABORATIVE GAME DAY, AN ANNUAL EVENT CELEBRATING THE ATHLETIC ABILITIES, DETERMINATION, AND JOYFUL SPIRIT OF STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS.

This collaborative effort highlights the commitment of CREST Collaborative, SEEM Collaborative, Northshore Education Consortium, and Valley Collaborative to enhance educational and extracurricular opportunities for students with special needs across their respective communities. By pooling resources and expertise, the collaboratives are able to create a high-quality, impactful event that would be challenging for any single organization to undertake alone.

After the public school Game Day Events grew too large, Bill Bryant, Director of Programs at CREST, spearheaded a new initiative: a collaborative Special Olympics Game Day. A small, dedicated group of collaborative staff members has worked tirelessly for the past three years to keep the event growing and improving each year. Volunteers from the community, school staff, and fami-

lies have been integral to the event's success, providing encouragement, assistance, and creating a vibrant, supportive atmosphere.

"What a wonderful experience it was for our students to participate in this Special Olympics event," said Francine H. Rosenberg, Executive Director of the Northshore Education Consortium. "Students with disabilities don't always have opportunities to be part of larger community activities. They had the opportunity to compete in fun sporting events, adapted to their skill levels, with students from other schools. They received medals, carried banners, had people cheering for them, and participated in a parade of athletes led by police officers carrying torches. The smiles on the faces of students and staff were priceless! This was a day that they will remember!"

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In the Transitional Programming at Valley Middle/High School, Success is Step by Step

Think like an occupational therapist. That's the message that the OTs who support students at Valley Transitional Middle and High School are bringing to their work with staff and job sites, both inside of the school building and out in the world. "We're always thinking about how we can give our students the most independence possible," explains OT Maggie Curran. "That comes down to figuring out what kind of supports and accommodations they need, whether they're in class or at work."

This year, the all-star OT team, which includes Maggie, Nicole Koles, Haley Lamattina, Joanna Bond, and Katie Brank, has been focused on expanding the accessibility of Valley's many vocational opportunities. In addition to jobs out in the community, Valley students also have opportunities to do jobs that have been brought in from the community, including repackaging keys for a local car dealership, packing tubing items for a nearby manufacturing company, even cleaning eye glasses that are then donated to local residents who need glasses.

Nicole says that these in-house jobs are helping to prepare students for eventual employment out in the world. "They're practicing job-related skills but we also get to work in a lot of the soft skills that will help them be able to access jobs out in the community in the future."

Haley has been at Valley for just over a year now. A vocational occupational therapist, she focuses on ways of making job training more accessible for students. Valley's in-house restaurant, the Bistro, has long provided students with an opportunity to gain marketable experience in culinary



FROM LEFT: OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS MAGGIE CURRAN, KATIE BRANK, HALEY LAMATTINA, NICOLE KOLES AND JOANNA BOND HELP STUDENTS IN THE TRANSITIONAL MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL REALIZE VOCATIONAL SUCCESS AT VALLEY AND BEYOND.

arts and customer service. But Haley saw a chance to provide support for a broader range of students by providing visuals and breaking down tasks into smaller, more manageable steps. "I've noticed that a lot of different types of students are now able to work there," says Haley.

Making in-house jobs more accessible is just one part of a larger focus at Valley these days. Katie describes the work that she and her colleagues are doing as helping everyone at the school think a little more therapeutically. "We're constantly reminding staff of the need to modify tasks, break them down and meet our students where they're at." Katie says that, at heart, the OT team is focused on helping everyone at the school get on the same page when it comes to supporting students. "So many of the goals our teachers and aides are working on with students are generalizable out into the community and the job site."

The OT team brings that same therapeutic lens to job sites out in the community. Haley describes a recent trip to TC's Training Center, a sports

facility in North Billerica owned by Valley teacher Tina Carrabba. Students were collecting hockey pucks from the facility's synthetic ice rink when they noticed that many needed to be cleaned. "This was a new task that the students hadn't done before. By breaking the cleaning process down into a bunch of different steps we were able to keep the students working and engaged."

The OTs stress that their success at getting colleagues to adopt an 'OT mindset' builds upon Valley's deep commitment to collaboration on behalf of students here. Katie credits the job coaches for building strong relationships with student workers and helping them establish consistent routines. "What we're doing is working with the job coaches, the teachers and the aides to make it even more of a team effort," says Katie. "There is just a lot of opportunity for different people to figure out how our students can get the most independence and the most success." ■

Transitional and Alternative Programs: Room to Grow

The Transitional High School, Alternative Programs had a challenge on its hands. How could the school make better use of its existing space in order to better support students? The answer to that question can now be seen in the form of a gleaming new space. Down came a wall, opening up a world of possibilities. Among the new spaces: a milieu with space for movement breaks; dedicated classroom spaces for electives including multimedia, art, and the library; and plenty of spaces where students can work in small groups or with Valley staff.

Principal Nick LeClair describes the process as more of a reshuffling than a rebuilding. “When the classrooms that used to be part of the Middle School Transitional Programs moved upstairs, we realized that we had a chance to reconfigure the space to serve our programs and grade levels.” Nick emphasizes that the overhaul didn’t end up closing existing rooms but rearranging them. The weight room, a popular destination for students, got an upgrade to make its offerings—free weights, a cable machine and a squat rack—more accessible. Students learning furniture restoration skills through the vocational program have a small woodshop. A multi-media room, which will house Valley’s popular news broadcast, reflects growing student interest in digital skills. The social aspect of the school is also better reflected in the design of the building, says Nick. “There’s a big arcade cabinet that’s part of a space where four kids can play games with one another. It’s an opportunity to let off some steam and have fun but it’s also an opportunity for students to learn how to win and lose gracefully



THANKS TO THE INGENUITY OF VALLEY’S MAINTENANCE TEAM AND SCHOOL LEADERS, VALLEY STUDENTS HAVE ACCESS TO LEARNING AREAS AND OTHER SPACES THAT BETTER SUPPORT THEIR NEEDS AND INTERESTS. SEEN HERE: A DESIGNATED ART SPACE, FEATURING TOOLS AND MEDIA FOR STUDENTS TO CREATE INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP PIECES.

and be a positive friend,” says Nick.

The space, which officially opened last month, has been receiving rave reviews from students and staff alike. Nicole Noska, Principal, Transitional Programs, says that the design of the classrooms and learning spaces better reflects the needs of the students. “The addition of areas for electives, hands-on learning, and support services helps make the school feel more complete and connected,” says Nicole.

Brian Mihalek, one of the Assistant Principals of the Transitional Programs, says that the redesign improves the programming that Valley offers its students. “Spaces like the woodshop, art room, and multimedia lab give students creative outlets and practical experiences that go beyond traditional academics.”

As for students, the reaction has been overwhelmingly positive. “I’m looking forward to using the tools in the workshop for projects,” commented one vocational student. “I

want to get better at building things.” Another praised the addition of quiet spaces where students can work with peers, social workers or just take a time out. “Sometimes my site can get noisy so I like having the choice to go somewhere a little more quiet.” The newly expanded games area has been especially well received. “We get to use the arcade cabinet more now that it’s not across the street,” said one student, adding that he’s looking forward to beating his teachers.

Seeing the redesign and the gleaming new facility, it’s almost impossible to believe that the site was a construction zone just months ago. Nick says that the speed with which the maintenance department, working with school leaders and Valley’s administrative team, completed the project in record time, while the facilities staff worked hard to get the space clean and sparkling. “We are lucky to have a crew that works so quickly,” says Nick. ■

Adult Services: Summer Fun and Lifelong Connections

While the summer months often act as a reprieve for most educational establishments, Valley Collaborative's Adult Program pushes straight through and continues in the mission to provide meaningful employment, volunteer, recreational, and social learning opportunities.

The summer provides us a great opportunity for Valley to focus on connecting individuals to their own specific interests through different recreational activities and social learning opportunities. The individuals are provided with activities that are both planned specifically for them based on their highlighted interests, as well as with opportunities to engage in activities they may not have ever experienced before. As we often say at the program, people don't know what they don't know, so our goal is to give them exposure to new interest areas with the hope of creating lifelong connections.



MELAINA CHAPUT, JACK SABA AND ELIZABETH BOCHAN AT SALEM WILLOWS.



(LEFT TO RIGHT) :ERIK REGO, MATT BOOTH, HANNAH COLLINS, LYNDSY HIR (STAFF), AND MIKAYLA LANDRY ON A VISIT TO SMOLAK FARMS IN NORTH ANDOVER.

Over the past several months we have visited a number of different establishments in the community to help individuals connect to new areas of interest.

At Smolak Farms in Andover the individuals picked peaches and then used the fruit they picked to bake and cook a number of different dishes including pie and cobbler.

At Strongwater Farm in Tewksbury the individuals help keep the grounds in order for the benefit of the animals, and they get to make some great connections as well!

At Salem Willows the individuals get to enjoy the coast while indulging in some much deserved fun and games in the arcade.

At Gillette stadium the individuals got the opportunity to watch the Patriots practice as they prepared for the upcoming season.

At Aloha mini golf the individuals had the opportunity to hone their golf game in a spirited but friendly mini golf competition.

At Monarch Butterfly Ranch in

Tewksbury the individuals were able to learn about the life cycle of the butterfly and how they affect the local ecosystem.

Ongoing trainings with Jean De Arc Credit Union continue to give the individuals the chance to learn about the many different aspects of personal finance and banking.

At the New England Aquarium in Boston the individuals got to see all the different marine life and learn about the seemingly infinite inhabitants of the Atlantic Ocean.

At the American Heritage Museum the individuals were able to tour the grounds and learn about the different machines and vehicles used by different branches of the Armed Forces.

When you see the joy exhibited by our individuals while they are exposed to these new activities, and as they learn about differing aspects of their local and overarching communities, it is difficult to argue they aren't enjoying their time in the program! ■

Welcome Back - Exciting Times Ahead!

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We also know that an essential contributing factor to Valley's exemplary performance is our commitment to continuous improvement. That is why Valley's District Improvement Plan will be such a valuable and guiding document this year and, in the years, to come.

As home family members, you play a vital role not only on your child's team, but also on their school/program team and Team Valley! Your communication with us, including your feedback, are essential not only to your child's success, but also the continuing excellence of our Valley programs and schools. Research tells us that an effective school-home partnership is the "secret sauce" that enhances both student and adult confidence and boosts achievement. We hope you will continue to communicate

with teachers, specialists, therapists and administrators, including members of our central office team. We sincerely invite you to share your feedback as well as suggestions for improvement and ideas for the future in order to help us grow, learn, and continue to meet your child's and family's needs. Together, we have the power to do that as we implement the action plan for our Improvement Plan.

Valley's Mission is *"To create a diverse, equitable, inclusive and responsive learning environment by working collaboratively to empower individuals to discover their strengths, navigate confidently with independence and foster lifelong learning, ultimately preparing them to become responsible contributors to society."*

With your participation, we know we will continue to see that in action

once again this year.

I recently came across a quote that likened the beginning of a new school year to starting to write a book. It says *"Today is the first page of a new book. Make it a good story!"* Here at Valley, we want much more than a good story; we want to write an award winning Best Seller! As school and home partners, we can do just that. Let's begin writing this year's book together and continue to add more exciting chapters throughout the year.

Please feel free to contact your child's teachers, therapists, specialists or administrators with any questions, concerns, feedback or ideas.

My door is always open.



Chris A. Scott, Ph. D.
Executive Director

Valley Special Olympians Shine

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Rosenberg joined the leaders of the other three collaboratives — CREST Collaborative Executive Director Bob Jokela, SEEM Collaborative Executive Director Cathy Lawson, and Valley Collaborative Executive Director Chris Scott — at the event, which is quickly becoming a tradition for all four special education providers.

Every student won a gold medal. Every student won a chance to stand on the three first-place medal pedestals.

CREST Teacher and event disc jockey Andres Jones worked the turntables as students took turns singing and dancing to Jock Jams like "Are you Ready for This?" and the Frozen theme song, "Let It Go." Athletes Isaac Wilson, JJ Tumbarello, and Freddy Abreu led the crowd

in singing the national anthem.

A unit of local law enforcement officers — Assistant Superintendent Moe Pratt, of the Essex County Sheriff's Department; Chief Jamie Lovell, Lt. Derek Colella, Sgt. Jeff Smith, Capt. Ashley Sanborn, and Officers Jason Skane, Mike Chase, and Jake Casucci, of the Danvers Police Department; and Officer Chris Liacos of the Gloucester Police Department — led a march of Special Olympians, along the track and onto the field.

To conclude the event's Welcome Ceremony, Valley student Keegan Graham led the participants in a recitation of the Special Olympics Athlete Oath: "Let me win. But if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt."

"We are incredibly proud to see four educational collaboratives join forces to provide a vibrant and inclusive Special Olympics program for

students across our communities," said Joanne Haley Sullivan, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Organization of Educational Collaboratives (MOEC). "This partnership reflects the deep commitment of collaboratives to ensure that students of all abilities have access to meaningful opportunities for growth, connection, and achievement. As the statewide organization supporting Massachusetts' educational collaboratives, MOEC celebrates this effort as a powerful example of how collaboration can expand opportunities for students on the full spectrum of disabilities. We commend these collaboratives for their leadership and heart — and for helping every student experience the joy of belonging."

Congratulations to all of the gold medal winners from Valley. We're so proud of you! ■

Valley Collaborative Leadership Team



Chris A. Scott, PhD

Executive Director,
Finance and Operations
cscott@valleycollaborative.org



Mazyar Moshtaghi

Chief Technology Officer
mmoshtaghi@valleycollaborative.org



Matthew Gentile

Director of DDS & Mass
Ability
mgentile@valleycollaborative.org



James George

Business Manager/Accountant
jgeorge@valleycollaborative.org



Heather Mackay

Principal, Valley
Elementary School
hmackay@valleycollaborative.org



Jessica Marcotte

Lead Nurse
jscalzi@valleycollaborative.org



Joia Mercurio

Deputy Director
jmercurio@valleycollaborative.org



Nick LeClair

Principal, Valley Middle School
& Transitional High School:
Alternative Programming
nleclair@valleycollaborative.org



Renato Silva

School Safety & Facilities
Manager
rsilva@valleycollaborative.org



Kari Morrin

Director of HR, Title IX and
504 Coordinator
kmorrin@valleycollaborative.org



Nicole Noska

Principal, Valley Middle School
& Transitional High School:
Transitional Programming
nnoska@valleycollaborative.org

Valley Collaborative Board



Dr. Jay Lang, chair

Superintendent, Chelmsford
Public Schools



Dr. Geoff Bruno

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Dunstable Regional School
District



**Ms. Brenda
Theriault-Regan**

Superintendent, Tewksbury
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Dr. Kerry Clery

Superintendent, Billerica Public
Schools



Dr. Denise Pigeon

Superintendent, Nashoba Valley
Technical School District



Dr. Michael Flanagan

Superintendent,
Tyngsborough Public Schools



Mr. Steven Stone

Superintendent, Dracut Public
Schools



Mr. Brad Morgan

Superintendent, North
Middlesex Regional School
District



**Dr. Christopher
Chew**

Superintendent, Westford Public
Schools

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