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## Superintendent's Message

Optimistic, guarded, excited, weary, energized – these are just a few words to describe how many of us may be feeling as we begin 2021. There is no question that the previous ten months have been fraught with many contradictory emotions. The next several months are likely to elicit these same feelings as we continue to work our way through the effects of the COVID pandemic on all aspects of life in our community and across the globe.

So often in the past year we have longed for the past, longed to return to normal. Feelings of nostalgia for the past elicit feelings of warmth, peace, and contentment. These emotions are calming and essential during times of uncertainty and disruption. Fortunately, we will be able to enjoy a return to many aspects of life pre-COVID, but there are others that will remain discarded. And that is good.

As I reflect on the mission of the VVS School District, to nurture and support students for success in life, preparing them to embrace challenges, learning opportunities, diversity, and civic responsibility, it is clear that this is an important mission for us all, students and adults alike. As we look toward the future, the title of Thomas Wolfe's 1940 novel *You Can't Go Home Again* comes to mind. VVS has a strong foundation, a strong foundation that has allowed us to not only survive but to thrive during these past ten months. This community has embraced the challenges of the pandemic. We have found ways to serve meals, deliver learning materials, and celebrate achievements and important milestones. We have learned and grown in how teachers teach and how students learn. Parents, school personnel, and community members have gained greater insights and appreciation for our role in educating our children and have forged stronger bonds. We have sought out ways to meet the individual needs of students and families, and the school and the community have come together in service to all. We have brought parts of our past 'home' into our present; others we have left behind for good reason. In short, we are forever changed and will continue to grow as we construct our future 'home'.

The pages of this issue of the Sheveron Communicator illustrate those aspects of VVS that have and will remain constant. Our commitment to service, taking the time to show gratitude and appreciation for the sacrifices made by members of the community, maintaining high expectations for student learning success, paying attention to the whole child, and serving as leaders are our anchors and will remain constant. These are combined with our newer experiences in how we make use of student and adult time, teacher collaboration, homeschool connections, and developing greater personal responsibility.

VVS alumnus Brennan Miller ('18) states, "One thing students learn from their teachers at VVS is that we are always up for a challenge, and whatever hurdle we face, we will find ways to get over it, under it, around it, or band together to knock it over and persevere." Brennan's words capture the proud VVS tradition of continuous improvement marked by innovation, growth and perseverance while remaining true to our core values.

Thank you for all you do as a part of this incredible community. We can and should look forward with great optimism to a successful 2021!

With appreciation,

Marthe K. Dray

Martha K. Group

VVS Superintendent of Schools

### **VVS** District

## "It's Important to Give Back:" Gratitude of a VVS Alumnus

Service projects and supporting the community are an important part of what makes the VVS Central School District so unique from other districts. Starting in elementary school, students learn the importance of giving back to the community that so readily gives to us. So in a year of such uncertainty, we have all thought of unique ideas to support one another through these challenging times. One thing students learn from their teachers at VVS is that we are always up for a challenge, and whatever hurdle we face, we will find ways to get over it, under it, around it, or band together to knock it over and persevere.



One of the challenges we faced this year was how to start athletics in the COVID environment. It was very clearly voiced by athletes that they wanted to play, coaches were ready and willing, and families of the athletes shouted, "Let them play!" In true VVS fashion, a committee was formed to discuss and generate ideas on how to do that in the safest possible environment. Led by our Athletic Director, Mr. Thomas, students, parents, community members, and VVS representatives met to develop a plan. After many meetings, suggestions, and recommendations by our league representatives, the decision was made - the contests could go on! However, there was a big hurdle: spectators would not be able to attend.

I followed the VVS sports talk closely as my major at Ithaca College is Sports Broadcasting, and my experience over the last three years includes commentating for Ithaca Football television, ESPN+ Cornell College Men's and Women's Soccer, Women's Volleyball, and the infamous Cortaca game (Ithaca vs. Cortland rivalry) at MetLife Stadium in New Jersey. But where did it all start for me? Right here at VVS, during my sophomore year when I couldn't play football due to a broken clavicle. The Athletic Director at the time, Mr. Weimer, suggested I call the games on a platform called MixIr, and with the help of Mrs. Laramie and Mrs. Miller, it all began. It took us some time to work out the kinks and get around some hurdles, but we did. This opened up access to the games to friends and family who might not have been able to be present, and I started to realize then how much those broadcasts meant.

The "no spectators" rule was a difficult one for our families and fans, however, everyone agreed that it was most important that the athletes would be able to play. But, having played sports all my life, and having my family and extended family get excited about attending contests, and knowing how much this plays a part in the athletic experience, that old mantra started to creep to the forefront of my mind: it's important to give back. It was clear that we needed to band together to "knock over this hurdle and persevere." The conversations with Mr. Thomas began about how we could bring the soccer, field hockey, tennis, and cross country experiences to the family and friends of the athletes and coaches. We determined that some sports would be easier to broadcast than others, but we could probably live-stream at least some, if not all. I reached out to Mrs. Laramie and we figured out the best way to do this with what we had. Before long, we were up and running and able to live-stream many contests with commentary, both play-by-play and some color. To say the least, families and fans were so appreciative! Even after the rule was amended to two spectators in attendance per athlete, I was asked to continue broadcasting as so many extended family members were still tuning in. For me, this was definitely a win-win; people could still "attend" a contest, and I could continue practicing my craft. But the most important part of this experience was realizing that VVS is a great place to learn, work and live, as is the motto. The lessons taught in this district are lifelong, and whether one is a current student or an alumnus, VVS is always home. Regardless of what happens this winter or spring, rest assured that Mrs. Group, Mr. Thomas, and the entire administrative team, along with teachers and staff, will do whatever it takes to take care of each other and our community.

With gratitude,

Brennan Miller Ithaca College Class of 2021, VVS Class of 2018

## **VVS Community**

# **Oneida County COVID-19 Testing Clinics**

New York State continues to increase testing capacity for COVID-19 on a daily basis. Individuals who have questions regarding eligibility or access for testing should call the New York State COVID-19 Hotline at 1-888-364-3065 or visit the NYSDOH website at https://covid19screening.health.ny.gov.

If you go to a test site run by New York State, there is never any charge for your test. If you go to a test site operated by local governments, private companies (including pharmacies and medical practices), or not-for-profit organizations, you are advised to check with the testing site and your insurer in advance of being tested to confirm you will not be responsible for any fees associated with your test. Please call the testing site or your health care provider before you go for testing.

For a list of current COVID testing sites, visit https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov/find-test-site-near-you. Community members can also find COVID vaccine information at covid19vaccine.health.ny.gov. \*

VVS High School

# VVS Students Gain Valuable Experience with Technology

Students at the high school have been able to expand their learning with two unique extra-curricular activities. The VVS Student Tech Team and Sheveron Production Team were created to give students the opportunity to gain skills with the Chromebooks and ScoreVision system implemented in the district a few years ago.

The VVS Student Tech Team is a group of students that volunteered to participate in training sessions so they would be able to fix Chromebooks. Since receiving their training, students work together to resolve common issues that arise with their classmates' Chromebooks. This gives students valuable experience and new skills with the technology. Delandrian Whitaker is one of the students who took the initiative to join. "I was interested in being part of the student tech team because it gave me a chance to learn about new technology, and I am excited to learn about the parts of the Chromebook and help with anything that the tech team needs."

The second student group is the Sheveron Production Team. This group, under the advisement of Mrs. Laramie and Mrs. Finnerty, runs the sound, lights, and entertainment part of the scoreboard at Sheveron Stadium. Students on the Sheveron Production Team are offered the unique opportunity to work with state-of-the-art equipment, including the scoreboard, sound system, and lighting system.

In terms of sound, the team makes sure the sound system is picking up the announcer and the refs and plays music before the game and during half-time/breaks. This involves careful coordination between the dedicated field microphones and the stadium speakers.

The team also runs the light system, which includes operating the lights when there is a goal or touchdown. Students can program the lights to do dynamic scenes which include swirls, twinkles, and flashes at various speeds. There are different settings depending on which team scores, but the lights are operated for both teams.





The last piece is the ScoreVision scoreboard, which includes settings for a static digital scoreboard, custom graphics, and live video. Students work to create graphics that can be displayed for a goal or touchdown, as well as video snippets and custom animations. Helenna Clanton and Gabrielle Miller are two of the students who play a large role on the Production Team. "I enjoy being a part of the Stadium Production Team because it allows me to watch games, but also learn more about the behind the scenes of sports games," said Gabby. "It can help me in the future by helping me multitask, working the lights, the scoreboard and watching the game at the same time." \*

## VVS High School

# **High School Clubs Work to Support the Community**

Due to challenges created by the pandemic, the Interact Club decided to help our community in several ways. One club member, Claudia Marsello, came up with an idea to give away Christmas trees to the less fortunate in our VVS community. During a meeting, the Interact Club voted to donate two Christmas trees to each of the five buildings in our school district. Vouchers designed by club member Alexandra Rentzis, were given to each building's social worker, who identified the recipients. The trees were picked up at Freedom Farms in Vernon.

During this holiday season, the Interact Club hoped to bring joy to both children and adults by providing Christmas trees, making a monetary donation to the Rome Rescue Mission in lieu of participating in the Shoebox Santa Project, and sending over 300 holiday greeting cards to veterans to express the club's appreciation for their service to our country.

The VVS National Honor Society is also committed to supporting our community, especially in times of need. Local businesses have always been a large part of the community, and during this pandemic they needed help. During this holiday season, the National Honor Society sold gift cards on behalf of local establishments to promote business. Members of the National Honor Society contacted local businesses to ask if they would like to participate in our service project, and many of these businesses were grateful for the help. In addition to helping these businesses financially by selling the gift cards, students hoped to encourage others to keep business local and support the VVS community as much as possible. \*











## **Trout in the Classroom**

Students in Mr. Domachowske's classroom have had an amazing handson experience this year as a part of the Science in the 21st Century class.

The top picture was taken on November 3rd. It shows about 200 "eyed" brook trout eggs four weeks after they were fertilized. They were transported from SUNY Morrisville's Aquaculture Center to VVS High School Room 103. The two dots that are visible are the eyes of the trout. If you look closely, you can even see the spinal cord on some.

The bottom picture shows the brook trout soon after they hatched around November 23rd. They fed off the yolk sac for approximately four weeks. When the yolk was used up, the trout began swimming to the top looking for food.

This is all part of VVS Trout in the Classroom. Students in Science in the 21st Century took turns observing and caring for the trout.

At this early stage, there are several important environmental factors that trout require. The water must be kept at 50 degrees F, the oxygen content must be 10-12 ppm, and they must be kept dark. A huge thank you to Xander Pelc, an 11th grader, for setting up the tank.

# Staying Inside with EI

How do you release a holiday album during a pandemic? A group of this year's Entertainment Industries (EI) students have accepted that challenge and created their own solution. The 2020 holiday album, titled *Staying Inside with EI*, will feature an original poem and student arrangements of "Silent Night," "Joy to the World," and other seasonal favorites. EI students decided to record vocals and instrumentals using their own electronic devices or schoolissued Chromebooks, and reached out to SubCat Studios to mix and master all of their music. Packaging and duplication were created and completed in the EI recording studio. "Staying Inside With EI" will be on sale for \$3 until March 2021, and all proceeds will be donated to charity. You can purchase a copy by emailing Mrs. Hubbard (EHubbard@ vvsschools.org) for more information. \*



Entertainment Industries (EI) students work to provide solutions to real world problems.

# VVS Librarians Present to the Regents Advisory Council

Superintendent Martha Group presented with Tina Laramie, Teacher Leader for Library Media and high school Librarian, to the Regents Advisory Council on Libraries. The focus was The Role of School Librarians in Remote & Hybrid Instruction. In collaboration with school libraries and School Library Systems from all over NY, a committee from the NYS Board of Regents listened to librarians from around the state share their impressive outreach during the spring and into the fall. Mrs. Group and Mrs. Laramie presented virtually on the topic of Digital Equity to over 300 attendees. Their presentation focused on VVS School Libraries, specifically, the work from the spring and this fall that the VVS librarians were and are doing with their staff, students, and parents in the realm of digital equity. The presentation included the incredible work librarians do in building and maintaining relationships with all school community members such as administrators, teachers, support staff, students, and parents. Their outreach in the spring included instructional videos and

tech tips along with library support and digital resources. The librarians' role in professional development and deepening student learning through access and engagement across the curriculum included, among other things, hosting a virtual book club, meeting special education needs, and reaching students via virtual field trips and book talks. All were well received! Thank you Mrs. Group and our amazing VVS community for being library supporters. Speaking to the Regents Advisory Council was an amazing opportunity to share the work of our fabulous librarians with the rest of New York State. \*



## **Middle School**

# STEAM Wing



#### 21<sup>st</sup> Century Classrooms Adaptable furniture, SMART boards, and flexible partitions allow for increased instructional opportunities.



#### **STEAM Commons**

Large spaces encourage team building, multidisciplinary activities, and project-based learning.





#### **Entryway**

A security foyer with double doors provides a safer single entry point for building visitors.

### **LED PA System**

Enhanced emergency notifications and multicolor visual alerts add an extra layer to student safety.



H.C



## **Small Group Spaces**

Varied seating spaces allow for small group collaboration.

# Middle/High Media Center





# **Learning Commons**

Short bookcases, natural light, and numerous learner-focused seating areas create the ideal study and work space.

## Makerspace & Technology Classroom

Adaptive furniture allows this space to be used as a classroom or large-scale project space. 3D printers, large-scale paper poster printers, and dedicated work spaces allow students to gain experience in a variety of 21st century mediums.



## **Breakout & Outdoor Spaces**

Small group rooms, individual seating, outdoor seating, and an audio-visual broadcasting studio give students the option to work in the space that is best suited to their needs.





## **Multi-Purpose Rooms**

Flexible furniture, magnetic white board dividers, and blue-tooth enabled technology allow for both large group and small-scale collaboration and presentations.

### VVS Middle School

## Mission Accomplished: 21st Century Learning is Ready for Take-off!



The highly anticipated 21st Century Learning Space (aka STEAM Wing) is finally a reality as the middle school transforms into a student-centered environment breaking the traditional classroom mold. Flexibility and adaptability are key components, encouraging collaborative learning and personalized instruction. The excitement is evident throughout the building as students explore the interactive tools and take ownership of their learning in new and creative ways.



With safety the number one priority, visitors entering the building follow a two-part process; first buzzed into a contained space and then cleared before the main doors are unlocked. The new PA system also addresses safety with an emergency notification feature that scrolls directives such as "hold in place." Once inside, it is obvious that the architecture blueprint blends the old with the new, skillfully removing physical barriers to allow for learning models and instructional delivery that optimize student achievement.



The aesthetically pleasing design and adaptive functionality of the Library Commons made its debut in the fall. The broadcasting room is a popular favorite, offering students a real-life opportunity to record assignments and video announcements using a Smartboard or green screen background. Multipurpose and small group rooms, learning labs and an open library offer space for research, training sessions and coteaching. Cafe' and soft seating along with charging stations, 3D and color printers as well as a laptop cart, are all available for students to explore learning in a versatile setting. Media Specialist Amy Austin is "excited to see this change in the space and the students' enthusiasm as they visit for reading, borrowing materials, group work, creating videos, studying and learning."

Close neighbor to the Learning Commons is the Technology Education Department's Makerspace, classroom, and hands-on working area which includes a poster printer, 3D printers, and vinyl cutters. Seventh graders start their preparation for 21st Century careers with Invention and Innovation, a foundation course that creates curiosity for a variety of high school electives. Middle school students are fascinated by the drones flying in the large space, designed and programmed by students in the MVCC Drones and Drones II classes.

Student-centered learning is promoted as instruction transitions to the large common STEAM area or the outdoor landscaped courtyard,

bringing students together and broadening opportunities to experiment with Project Based Learning. Digital wallpaper and interactive white and Smartboards help students to progress at their own pace and learning style. Teaching is creative as portable furniture including stackable chairs and nestable and foldable tables are reconfigured for specific lessons. Curriculum collaboration is simplified with accordion-style walls between two of the classrooms. Expansive windows offer natural lighting and the sound barriers between rooms help to minimize distractions, while rubber flooring in the common areas and carpeting in the classrooms reduce noise. As eighth grader Ella prepares for classes in the new space, she feels "so excited for the cool furniture and windows that open up to the outdoors. It's really going to help us to focus!"

Education in the 21st Century is designed for students to take responsibility for their learning. Our middle school teachers are facilitators in a process that supports teamwork and refines critical thinking and problem solving skills. The new learning space isn't just flexible in how it is educationally and physically adaptable, but also flexible in how it meets the social and emotional needs of all students.

## J.D. George Elementary

## Together Even When We're Apart

The theme for this year at J.D. George Elementary is "JDG Strong." JDG Strong means continuing to learn together, work together, and care about each other even if we need to do it apart due to social distancing or remote instruction.

Even when learning at home, we are connected to our students with technology and continue to participate in activities that allow us to share experiences.

Muscle Moving Monday came out of our Character Education committee. The idea was to take our theme and connect it with something we all could do "together, but apart," so we came up with a series of videos by our PE teacher Carly Piccola-Cooper. Mrs. Piccola-Cooper creates the videos, which feature a class or staff member doing the exercises together. We then share the videos out every Monday morning and the classroom teachers take a break sometime in their day to have the students do the exercises. It is a great way to get a brain break and have an opportunity to move. Recently featured guests included Mrs. Mack's class, Officer Avery, and Mr. Bissaillon. It is truly a JDG community effort!

Another community "together" initiative was our JDG Veterans project. This year, our outreach to veterans was shaped by the COVID pandemic. We have always had a strong event with 50 or more veterans in attendance, which has traditionally been led by JDG speech teacher Pam Donnelly. This year, the restrictions of COVID were challenging, but being that we are JDG Strong, we came up with another way to teach students about honoring our veterans, as well as showing our appreciation for the veterans connected to JDG Elementary. First, we asked students' families who had veterans living near and far for their addresses. We then had teachers lead students in a card-writing campaign to personally say thank you for their service and show our appreciation for them stepping up to serve our country. Those cards were sent out to Verona veterans during the month of November. To our great surprise and delight, we received more than our share of return letters and notes, letting us know the cards and the support for our veterans was appreciated. Our students were excited to see the positive impact they could have in the community, and look forward to more JDG Strong activities in the coming year! \*





## E.A. McAllister Elementary

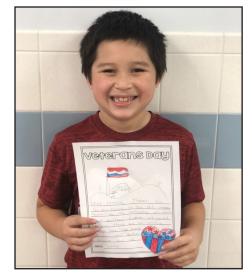
## **Reinventing Classroom Communities**

The past year has presented everyone with countless challenges. The district and each building were forced to reimagine how to provide a top-quality education in a less-than-perfect scenario. The faculty and staff at E.A. McAllister rose to the occasion to take the district plan and assimilate it into the daily lives of our students. We are incredibly proud of being able to offer students and families a four-day hybrid instructional model that allows us to interact on a more personal level while also offering a fully remote option.

The faculty and staff strive to provide our students with an engaging learning environment in which they can grow both academically and personally. When you walk around the building, you can see how creative the teachers have been in reinventing a positive school and classroom community. Mrs. Pryor's 2nd grade class wrote encouraging notes on the 1st grade students' artwork that is hanging in the hallway to express their appreciation. Other classes have remote students present in class on-screen while the hybrid students are in their seats. Although we were not able to gather to celebrate our veterans in person, we were able to find a creative way to honor these important members of our community by creating a video as well as sending letters/drawings to the local Legion and VFW. These examples demonstrate how we come together to support each other and persevere through difficult times.

The students at E.A. McAllister have brought tremendous joy back into the building! They have taken each new procedure with stride and have superseded all expectations with mask wearing and additional safety measures. We could not do this without the support of our amazing families and community members. The collaborative efforts of all have elevated the teaching and learning that occurs throughout the building. Thank you! \*







# Pre-K Gingerbread Freeze Dance

In the weeks before winter break, many teachers were looking to create fun remote experiences to share with their students. Our E.A. McAllister Pre-K team came up with the idea to do a Gingerbread Freeze Dance!

Ms. Diane baked gingerbread cookies that Pre-K families picked up, and then everyone joined on a Google Meet to decorate their cookies and do the Gingerbread Freeze Dance. In addition to the smiling faces of our Pre-K students, we also got to share the moment with lots of siblings, parents, and family members. Thank you to everyone who contributed to this event to help our teachers, students, and families create wonderful holiday memories. \*



## W.A. Wettel Elementary

# **Kids Learning Independently**

Every day we are with our students in-person is a small but important victory and blessing for our whole community. We are so fortunate to have thrived as a school serving our students for over a whole marking period, notwithstanding all the necessary and challenging steps taken to keep our students and staff safe. Even amid an unrelenting world-wide pandemic, it is imperative for educators to accentuate the positive and just as importantly, continue to learn and make adjustments to our practices and the programs we provide to our students and families. Given this, one specific goal at W.A. Wettel Elementary this school year is to nurture and develop greater independence in our students' learning.

The shift to remote learning has transformed education in ways that we've never experienced before. Specifically, the learning environment has transferred from the confines of a school and classroom to the home environment. This change has increased angst and frustration for teachers and families alike, and of course, our students. Specifically, as a result of remote learning, parents have taken on the additional challenge of providing even greater assistance and guidance to their children while learning from home. Teachers across the district and region have also struggled at home teaching their own children. One way to address this challenge is to encourage our students to become more independent in their learning.

Remote learning requires a lot of asynchronous learning, which is often completed by students at different paces, through different paths or resources and most importantly, largely on their own. To fully realize asynchronous learning, students must take charge of and exert greater ownership over their learning when possible. As a result, we ask that you continue to partner with us during this challenging time and encourage your children to be more independent in their learning. Greater independence in learning is imperative to improve the remote learning experience, and in the long-run, will assist our students in becoming lifelong learners. As a district of distinction, we will continue to seek ways to maximize learning and growth even during the most challenging of times. \*











#### **FYI**

We want to include all of our families and friends on our mailing list. If you know of someone who has not received this newsletter, or has never been included in our mailing, please call:

April Sobieraj (315) 829-7<u>412</u>



### Vernon Verona Sherrill Central School District

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### **VVS** District

# VVS Community Members Can Still Enroll in Peachjar Flyers!

In an effort to go paperless, VVS enrolled in Peachjar digital flyers a few years ago. Since then, we have had many community members sign up to receive information from the district and local organizations. This past year, community flyers have included information on the drive-thru flu shot clinic, food bank assistance, town and regional events, and much more. If you are interested in receiving flyers, please contact **swhalen@vvsschools.org** with your name and email address. We look forward to connecting with you!

