



### We are: Making our Mark

■ Page 2: Valley Elementary recently participated in International Dot Day, a celebration of creativity and courage.



### We are: Leading

■ Page 3: Valley Alternative High School welcomes a new principal: Valley veteran Nicholas LeClair.



### We are: Staying Safe

■ Page 5: Valley's School Resource Officers are keeping students safe and becoming an integral part of the Valley community.

# VALLEY COLLABORATIVE

Volume 11, Issue 1 News for the extended Valley Collaborative community Fall 2022

## Welcome Back

Dear Valley Community:

Valley has had a smooth opening to the school year. On opening day, we were inspired by the messages of two Keynote speakers – Deputy Commissioner Regina Robinson of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and the Facilitator for Valley's "Leadership at Every Level" professional development series - Dr. Anthony Bent. Dr. Bent discussed the Ten Principles embedded in *Leading with Dignity* by Donna Hicks. These elements represent the values at the heart of Valley's culture. These values are at the core of our work to ensure Valley continues to be a diverse, equitable, and inclusive organization where all students and staff feel like they belong. Maintaining a culture where all people feel they belong is hard work but some of the most important work we do. I share with you Donna Hicks' Ten Essential Elements (*Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, Harvard University*) are below:

### Acceptance of Identity

Approach people as neither inferior nor superior to you; give others the freedom to express their authentic selves without fear of being negatively judged; interact without prejudice or bias, accepting how race, religion, gender, class, sexual orientation, age, disability, etc. are at the core of their identities. Assume they have integrity.

### Recognition

Validate others for their talents, hard



VALLEY COLLABORATIVE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, DR. CHRIS A. SCOTT

work, thoughtfulness, and help; be generous with praise; give credit to others for their contributions, ideas and experience.

### Acknowledgment

Give people your full attention by listening, hearing, validating and responding to their concerns and what they have been through.

### Inclusion

Make others feel that they belong at all levels of relationship (family, community, organization, nation).

### Safety

Put people at ease at two levels: physically, where they feel free of bodily harm; and psychologically, where they feel free of concern about being shamed or humiliated, that they feel free to speak without fear of retribution.

### Fairness

Treat people justly, with equality, and in an evenhanded way, according to agreed upon laws and rules.

\*continued on back page

# At Valley Elementary, Making Our Mark

On September 15, 22 million schools around the globe participated in International Dot Day. This year, for the first time, Valley Elementary joined in the fun, participating in what has become a unique celebration of creativity and courage. . The special day is actually based on Peter H. Reynolds's best-selling children's book called *The Dot*, about a little girl who doesn't believe that she can draw, until her teacher encourages her to 'make her mark.'

Valley Elementary BCBA, Erin Frazier, knows the book well—her daughter has it—and led the effort to bring Dot Day to Valley. "It's a day about celebrating kids' uniqueness and letting them flourish, and that's exactly what we do at Valley," says Erin. What followed was a school-wide celebration and lots of dots.

On the big day, all Valley students and staff wore dots. Each student was given a blank circle on which to 'make their mark.' How they chose to design their dot was up to them, says Erin. "So many of the dots stood out. We had one student who used her own paper and came up with a design that was completely different than everyone else's," says Erin. "She took the idea and ran with it, and that's really the whole point of the day."

All Valley classrooms read the book, while other classes did further activities. One class did a STEM activity that featured candy dots, while younger students used toilet paper rolls dipped in paint to create another masterpiece.

Erin says that as soon as she learned of the world-wide event, she wanted Valley to join. "Seeing our students be so creative and knowing that they were part of something bigger was really special," says Erin. ■



VALLEY ELEMENTARY STAFF AND STUDENTS CELEBRATE INTERNATIONAL DOT DAY.

## A Great Year, Now Underway



SAVANNAH BARNOSKI, IVY LEFEBVRE AND ELI SANCHEZ, FIFTH GRADERS IN MR. JAKE'S CLASS, PICTURED DOING A READING GROUP WITH READING SPECIALIST MEGHAN WATERS.

The school year is off to a great start at Valley Elementary! Thanks to the work of a strong community of dedicated educators, the school's themes of kindness, courage and creativity are evident everywhere these days. And Valley's students have lots to look forward to in the months ahead. We recently surveyed some of them to find out what they're excited about. Here's what they said:

**Andrew Hirst, 3rd grade:** "Our trip to the USS Constitution!"

**Evan Ciaccio, 3rd grade:** "Recess! because it's fun to play 'lava monster' with Ms. Melissa and my friends on the playground."

**Louis Lorino, 4th grade:** "Using iPads in class!"

**Quentin May, 4th grade:** "Going on field trips!"

**Savannah Barnoski, 5th grade:** "Starting an art club!"

**Ivy Lefebvre, 5th grade:** "I'm most excited about going pumpkin picking and the Halloween party."

**Eli Sanchez, 5th grade:** "Drawing and hanging out with friends." ■



# For Alternative High School, a New Year and a New Leader

**Valley News** Congratulations on becoming the new principal of the Alternative High School! This is one of many roles you've had at Valley. Take us back to the start.

**Nicholas LeClair** I have a degree in creative writing and wanted to write for television. I was making a living delivering pizzas and I realized that writing wasn't going to do it for me. And so I started thinking about becoming a teacher. When I floated the idea to a friend of mine, he said 'I would have loved it if you were my teacher in high school.' That did it and I started looking for jobs. Valley was looking for a job coach at the time, and they said they also had a position at the front desk. I worked there while I was studying to take the MTEL. Three months later I passed the test and took a teaching job in Valley's vocational program.

**Valley News** You went on to lead a literacy initiative at Valley. How did that come about?

**Nicholas** Dr. Scott approached me about starting a Middle/High School literacy initiative. I already had my master's degree in curriculum and instruction from UMass Lowell, so I went back to become a reading specialist. The driving force behind the project was that I realized that many of my students struggled with reading. Some were reading at a 3rd or 4th grade level. At the time, there was room for improvement in how we packaged reading instruction, set goals and monitor for growth. So over the next three years I built that. When the opening for a Principal of the Alternative High School Programming became available this summer, I spoke with Dr. Scott about my consideration for the role.



PICTURED, FROM LEFT: LILYANA KIMBALL-HILL (SENIOR, CURRENTLY DUAL ENROLLED AT MCC, PLANS TO GO INTO SOCIAL WORK); NICK LECLAIR (PRINCIPAL); DAVE ILLG (ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL); KEVIN SURETTE (SENIOR, PLANS TO ENTER THE MILITARY.)

**Valley News** The last few years have been challenging for everyone. What is your major focus going to be during this school year?

**Nicholas** We're trying to get back to where we were pre-COVID. That means that we want our community outings program to be as strong and robust as it was prior to the pandemic. All of our high school programs are out of the building twice a week. Whether students are out in the community or touring a college, these are experiences they can use as they transition to adulthood. We like to focus on trips that are academic—like a visit to the USS Constitution or the Charlestown Navy Yard that includes history lessons. But at the same time, students have to have a reason to be excited about being there. We're also looking for more ways to give the kids some kind of vocational experience. Everyone is interested in getting some hands-on volunteer opportunities.

**Valley News** This has been a time of transition for the Alternative High School, but what won't change?

**Nicholas** The centrality of relationships to everything we do remains key. Whether we are in the building or out in the community, the goal here is to build relationships. Students have to trust you and feel like they can talk to you at a human level. In an attempt to connect with the students, we go by first names. Our goal is to figure out what kids want out of life. Yes, we teach to the DESE standards like all K-12 school districts, and we also have a strong focus on the students as individuals. The focus on quality relationships is what has kept me coming back all these years. ■

# The 'Valley Way': Transitional High School Student Puts Skills and Passion to Work

Valley Transitional High School student Evan Olson was working at Tyngsborough High School this summer when he spotted a weed-strewn flower bed next to the handicapped ramp at the school's entrance. "It was out of control, messy and overgrown," recalls Evan. "This is what people see when they drive by or come up to the building so I decided to make it look nicer."

Drawing on his landscaping background—Evan has done yard work and gardening projects around his neighborhood for several years—he got straight to work.

First up: removing the weeds, an effort that took a full day. Then it was time to select some flowers to plant in the now pristine bed. Fortunately, school-to-work teacher David Callaghan was able to assist. "I was able to get some flowers donated from Bruckman's Garden Center in Lawrence," says David, who also notified the custodial crew at Tyngsborough High about Evan's proposed project. Readying the garden for planting took another day. Once the holes were dug, the soil prepared, Evan filled the area with perennials. "It looks immaculate now," says Evan. "A lot better than it did before."

Evan says he first realized his passion for landscaping when he was 14. Mowing the lawn and planting flowers around his house was work he enjoyed and left him with a sense of accomplishment. David says that finding a similar project for Evan to work on this summer was one of his missions. "Evan was looking for a project and he already had a strong sense of what he was interested in," says David. "He's got the basic knowledge and the drive



ABOVE: EVAN OLSON REMOVES WEEDS FROM AN OVERGROWN GARDEN IN FRONT OF TYNGSBOROUGH HIGH SCHOOL. RIGHT: EVAN SURVEYS THE RESULTS OF HIS HARD WORK.

and he's the type of student who not only can work on his own but enjoys working on his own."

Karen Rowe, Valley Team Chairperson, says that she wasn't at all surprised by Evan's contribution. Says Karen: "Since coming to Valley six years ago, Evan has emerged as a leader in the school community with many students looking up to him." And landscaping is far from his only passion, she notes. "He is also well known for his wide range of interests; among them music, which we have been fortunate to have him share with our school community. Evan has played guitar for numerous holiday performances and talent shows here at Valley and he abso-



lutely shreds!"

Today, a colorful display greets visitors to Tyngsborough High School, a vivid reminder of one Valley's student's drive and hard work. The pristine perennial bed also demonstrates Valley's unique approach to job training and student development. "Finding opportunities that fit the interests and skills of our students is definitely the Valley way," says Karen.

As for Evan, while he isn't sure what his next big project will be, he couldn't be happier with the outcome of his summer flower bed renovation. "It was such a mess and now it looks great. Now when someone drives by or walks up to the building they see these nice flowers, not just messy weeds." ■

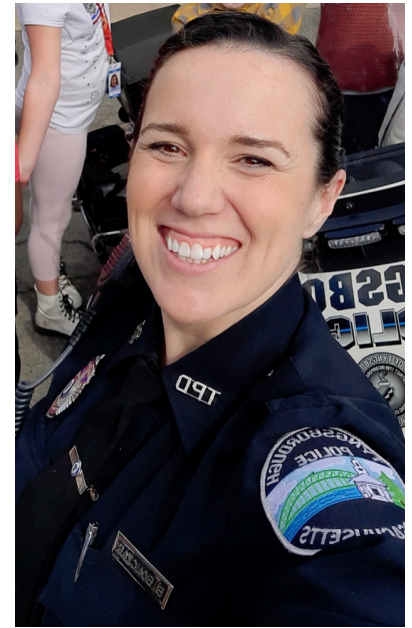


# Safety and Security is Our Job: Meet Valley's New School Resource Officers

Valley Collaborative is pleased to introduce our two new School Resource Officers: Sean Dougherty (Billerica) and Bethany Bonczar (Tyngsborough). School Resource Officers or SROs are carefully selected, specifically trained law enforcement officers that have been specially trained in school-based law enforcement and crisis response using community-oriented policing concepts. We recently had the opportunity to talk to Sean and Bethany about their work at Valley, how they see their roles at their respective schools, and what they enjoy most about being part of the extended Valley family.

When the Billerica Chief of Police learned that there was an opening for an SRO at Valley, Sean Dougherty was a natural candidate. Prior to joining the Billerica Police Department in 2018, he worked for a juvenile facility and a state psychiatric facility. "The chief knew my background and suggested that I apply," says Sean. "The transition so far has been pretty smooth. Having experience in this field has definitely made it easier."

Bethany Bonczar is part of a team of officers who are assigned to the SRO division of the Tyngsborough Police Department. The officers cover seven local schools, going where they are needed. For Bethany, a typical day starts at the high school and elementary school in Tyngsborough, managing traffic. Then she's usually joined by the department's comfort and therapy dog, a four-year-old mutt named George whom the officers refer to as the Community Resource Dog. "I usually track with him in the mornings and then visit the other schools depending on where I'm needed," says Bethany.



FROM LEFT: JJ JASILEWICZ WITH OFFICER SEAN DOUGHERTY; OFFICER BETHANY BONCZAR.

Like Sean, Bethany's interest in criminal justice has a heavy emphasis on 'justice.' She comes from a family of attorneys and judges, and when she started college, she was eager to go a different route. "I felt like I'd grown up seeing what the system looks like after people get into trouble. I wanted to find the most effective way to help people," says Bethany. "That's how I got into police work."

While the SROs are trained police officers, Sean stresses that the role they play in their school-based work is different. "The biggest adjustment is that you kind of take your police hat off. You're not law enforcement, you're a friendly face," says Sean. That's because SROs utilize the principles of community-based policing, a strategy of policing that focuses on developing relationships with community members to collaboratively identify and solve problems. Explains Sean: "The goal is to make kids more comfortable around police in the long term."

For Bethany, that community-based approach means making connections with kids at Valley Elementary. In addition to visiting classrooms to provide education on issues of safety and security, Bethany has participated in Valley's running group. Last year, she and her colleague Matt Koziol, an SRO at Greater Lowell Tech, would drop by to join in Football Fridays. "We try to integrate in the community," explains Bethany.

Asked what he likes best about his new job as Valley SRO in Billerica, Sean doesn't hesitate. "The kids I get to see on a daily basis. They can really brighten up your day," says Sean. That's an opinion that Bethany shares. While Valley is just one stop on her SRO route, she says that her visits to the elementary school are her favorite part of the job. "It's so refreshing to get to hang out with the kids. And I can't speak highly enough of the staff. They really do amazing work." ■

# Valley Collaborative Leadership Team



**Chris A. Scott, PhD**

Executive Director,  
Finance and Operations  
cscott@valleycollaborative.org



**Heather Mackay**

Principal, Valley  
Elementary School  
hmackay@valleycollaborative.org



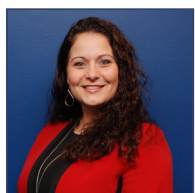
**James George**

Business Manager/Accountant  
jgeorge@valleycollaborative.org



**Nicole Noska**

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



**Joia Mercurio**

Deputy Director  
jmercurio@valleycollaborative.org



**Nicholas LeClair**

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



**Kari Morrin**

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



**Matthew Gentile**

Director of DDS Services  
mgentile@valleycollaborative.org



**Jessica Scalzi**

Lead Nurse  
jscalzi@valleycollaborative.org

## Valley Collaborative Board

**Chair: Mr. Timothy Piwowar**

Superintendent, Billerica Public Schools

**Dr. Jay Lang**

Superintendent, Chelmsford Public Schools

**Mr. Steven Stone**

Superintendent, Dracut Public Schools

**Dr. Laura Chesson**

Superintendent, Groton-Dunstable Regional School District

**Dr. Denise Pigeon**

Superintendent, Nashoba Valley Technical School District

**Mr. Brad Morgan**

Superintendent, North Middlesex Regional School District

**Ms. Brenda Theriault-Regan**

Superintendent, Tewksbury Public Schools

**Dr. Michael Flanagan**

Superintendent, Tyngsborough Public Schools

**Dr. Christopher Chew**

Superintendent, Westford Public Schools

## Letter from the Executive Director

*\*continued from front page*

### Independence

Empower people to act on their own behalf so that they feel in control of their lives and experience a sense of hope and possibility.

### Understanding

Believe that what others think matters; give them the chance to explain their perspectives, express their points of view; actively listen in order to understand them.

### Benefit of the Doubt

Treat people as trustworthy; start with the premise that others have good motives and are acting with integrity.

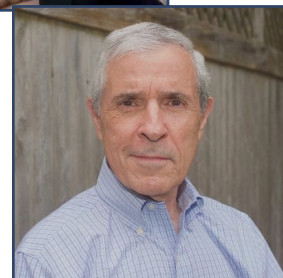
### Accountability

Take responsibility for your actions; if you have violated the dignity of another, apologize; make a commitment to change hurtful behaviors.

My best to you always,

*Chris*

Chris A. Scott, Ph.D.  
Executive Director



THIS YEAR'S VALLEY ORIENTATION FEATURED TWO KEYNOTE SPEAKERS: MASS. DESE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER REGINA ROBINSON AND DR. ANTHONY BENT.