WELCOME BACK

FROM THE PRINCIPAL
Welcome back everyone! It’s a new school year and a fresh start. I want to thank everyone for putting forward your best efforts in contributing to the realization of our school mission. Our staff has been working very hard behind the scenes to make incredible learning opportunities available to your children. We are undergoing an enormous overhaul with regard to curriculum and instruction, infusing character skills that research points to as critical to achieving aspirations of college and career, infusing cultural proficiency that reflects an increasingly diverse society, and infusing systemic rigor that takes the form of thematic Common Core units and year long plans.

Community outreach and partnerships continue to thrive. Parents are continuing to step forward with great generosity of time, skills and energy to support our cause of supporting our young learners. Students are discovering their inner strength. We revel in every breakthrough moment. Thank you for taking this journey with us.

— Juan Rodriguez, principal

Walk and Roll

In support of The Safe Routes to School Initiative, VV encourages all families to walk, bike or carpool to school every Wednesday this year! Biking and walking to school decreases school traffic congestion, creates healthy lifestyle habits, and helps protect our planet. And it’s fun!

If you live too far to bike or walk, drive part way and then walk! Some suggested park and walk areas are The Civic Center jury parking lot (on San Pablo) and Old Gallinas school parking lot (off of Schmidt Lane). Let’s fill up the bike racks and sidewalks every Walk and Roll Wednesday!

The National Park Service continues to support our mission to promote community and 21st century science. More on PG 4 and 6.

Mr. Rodriguez welcomes students and families while reminding everyone to observe safety guidelines.

Venetia Valley artistry took the prize in the Marin County Fair’s Junior Arts and Crafts competition, with over three dozen students winning first or second place ribbons.
ELECTING SUCCESS

Fall is midterm election season and our middle school students are learning all about it. Mrs. Bialik’s history classes are participating in the MyVote California Student Mock election. This learning opportunity will allow students to deepen their understanding of how our democracy functions and add perspective to their studies of how our nation was formed and founded.

Our community partners are also adding real-world perspective by partnering with our teachers in elective classes. This year Mr. Dillaway (music teacher) is working with the San Francisco Opera Guild to produce a school production of La Boheme to be performed in December. And Mr. Schmitz (English teacher) has his drama classes working with the Marin Theater Company. And, back by popular demand, a representative of Happiness is NOW, Isaac Wan, will teach our middle school students to tap into their joy while learning the latest hip hop moves. It’s called learning with flavor!

AVID

New to the middle school is AVID, which stands for Advancement Via Individual Determination. Through AVID, students are benefiting from strategic instruction in organization, note-taking, time-management, perseverance, and other important skills necessary for college and career readiness. These strategies and skills will be woven in throughout the day in all classes and supported through focused instruction during a school-wide advisory period.

ALL ABOUT UNIFORMS

Everywhere you look you see students proudly wearing their professional attire, and looking like they are on a mission – a mission to succeed. Just a reminder to students and parents, both shirts AND sweaters, sweatshirts and hoodies need to be solid blue or white. Winter jackets and raincoats may be any color/style, but anything that will be worn while in class must conform to the uniform color code. Students wearing sweaters and sweatshirts that are not uniform compliant will be asked to remove them while in class.

To donate outgrown uniform clothes and accessories, please drop them off in the main office to Pilar between 8am and 4pm. To obtain lightly used uniforms for your children, visit the Family Center anytime between 9am and 3pm Monday through Thursday. If no one is there, ask Pilar in the main office for assistance.

CASUAL DRESS DAYS

On the last Friday of each month, students may wear any school appropriate clothing and are not required to wear their uniforms.
KINDY SOFT-OPEN
The momentous first day of Kindergarten was once again preceded by our kindergarten “soft-open” on August 20th. This was an optional half-day for incoming kindergarten families to get a preview of the Kinder experience. Students and parents got to meet their teachers and walk through drop-off and classroom routines. Parents gave their seal of approval and the separation anxiety on the actual first day of school was greatly diminished. A big thanks to our PTA parents who helped host the day.

OUR GARDEN GROWS
This year our garden ecosystem has a new habitat- The pond! This newly created pond/bog has already been a big hit with students and includes fish, native plants, and a resident dragonfly. Garden lessons this year will cover the wonder and science of plant biology, insects, and cultivating food and herbs. Engineering will also be explored through the construction of large and small green houses. And mark your calendars for our annual Garden Party and Potluck on Saturday November 15th.

BI-LITERACY EXPANDS
Our new bi-literacy program was a huge success in kindergarten last year. And this year it is being expanded to 1st grade! One of our three 1st grade classes will be taught 70% of the day in Spanish. In the two remaining 1st grade classes, instruction is in English. Student placement in these classes is based on parent requests and assessment data analysis.

This program reflects our community’s ongoing interest and appreciation for what are widely accepted to be the first and second languages of the United States in general, and California in particular. Look for the program to expand into 2nd and 3rd grades over the next 2 years. Venetia Valley is proud to be the only public school in the county to offer bi-lingual education.

SPELLING BEE
On September 22, twenty-two 4th, 5th, and 6th grade students assembled in the multi-purpose room for the annual Venetia Valley Spelling Bee Championship. The champion, 5th grader Mia Cortez, and 3 runners-up, 5th grader Joshua Beckner, and 6th graders Lucas Garcia and Bodhi Hornick, earned the right to represent Venetia Valley in the Regional Spelling Bee Championship. We wish them luck at the Championship, which will be held on October 7 at the Marin County Office of Education.
WE ARE ENGAGED!
A record breaking 90+ parents attended our first school-wide parent meeting on 9/3. Parents heard a school update from Principal Rodriguez, as well as a presentation from the middle school teachers and an overview of ways to support the school, including volunteer opportunities for school-wide events such as our upcoming Fall Carnival.

We hope to see the same amount of support at monthly PTA meetings to come. All are welcome to join the conversation. Childcare is provided at no cost. Meetings are usually the first Wednesday of the month at 6:30pm in the school library. See dates and presentation outlines in the calendar on the last page of this newsletter.

GET READY FOR ... CARNIVAL!
The Venetia Valley Fall Carnival is an annual tradition, now in its seventh year! Thanks to the dedication of many energetic and well-connected parent volunteers, attendees enjoy a culturally diverse assortment of entertainment and activities, including child-friendly rides, games, face-painting, balloon animals, a cake-walk and much more! Admission and entertainment are free. Food, games and jumpy tickets will be sold on-site at family-friendly prices. This is a “not-to-be-missed” event that is fun for the whole community-- kids, adults, neighbors, everyone! Hope to see you there, Saturday, October 18th from 11am to 4pm on the Venetia Valley School soccer field.

If you would like to set-up and staff a booth of your own, or sponsor one of ours, please contact Kari Francisco kari@litras.org. This can be a wonderful opportunity to display, sell, or market your merchandise or services.

BACK TO SCHOOL NIGHT
Thank you to all the families who found the time to attend Back to School Night. Teachers reported excellent turn outs and were thrilled to connect with families and share overviews of our yearlong endeavors.

The next opportunity to inform yourself about your child’s learning goals and progress is at parent conferences. Flexible scheduling and a little persistence should help ensure that we reach our goal of 100% parent participation. In order to secure the meeting time that works best for you, please communicate your scheduling needs to your child’s teacher.

OUTDOOR EDUCATION
On Saturday Aug 13th, 90 VV family members joined Rangers Lou and Fatima, Family Center advocates Roxana and Karla, and Mr. Rodriguez on a three mile hike through Muir Woods that concluded with a picnic on Muir Beach. The National Park Service kindly provided our staff and families with three buses to transport them on this awe inspiring excursion.

The VIP tour that followed included discussion and demonstration of plant and animal adaptations. Thank you to the Park Service for donating another educational outdoor family event to VV. Stay tuned for future events like this one.
**IT TAKES A VILLAGE**

**CHA-CHING!**
Ventia Valley’s school enrichment programs are made possible by private donations by parents and community members like you. Please help us give our students the same enrichment opportunities that other schools in the district are able to provide by donating today. **If every family donated just $20 a month, we would raise all the money we need to keep our enrichment programs, teachers, and activities running!**

Please make checks payable to the VVPTA, or put cash in an envelope, and drop it off at the main office or mail it to the school at 177 N. San Pedro Rd, San Rafael CA 94903. You can also donate online at vvpta.org.

**EASY MONEY**
You can also help generate money for the school by doing any or all of the things listed here. Don't underestimate the power of collective purchase— together these generate a LOT of needed money for our school enrichment programs!


- **Target Red Card.** Choose Venetia Valley as your selected school and 1% of your purchase will be donated to our school.

- **Shop Amazon** through our school link. Login to Amazon by going to this link http://amzn.to/1alXKYE and then make your purchases as you always do. Amazon will donate a percentage of every purchase to our enrichment programs.

- **Eat out at Gaspare’s Restaurant.** Write “Venetia Valley” on your receipt/check, and they will donate 10% of your bill!

- **Box Tops** - We are still collecting Box Tops for Education and Labels for Education. The money we receive from collecting these labels helps support our field trips. You can give the labels to your teacher or turn them into the Box Tops chest in the office. Last year we raised over $700 from box tops.

**HELP TEACHERS TEACH**
Let your friends, family, and colleagues know that they can support Venetia Valley teachers by typing in our zip code “94903” or our school name “Venetia Valley” and donating to individual teachers’ classroom projects. There are over a dozen VV teachers with wish lists on DonorsChoose!

**HEADS UP!**
Want to be involved in a simple yet meaningful way in raising funds for our students and our school programs? Then consider volunteering to become VV’s school representative for Heads Up. Heads Up is a district organization that raises money for all San Rafael City Schools and VV benefits in many ways from funds donated by HeadsUp.

Being our school representative means attending 3-4 evening meetings during the school year and helping coordinate the Run for Reading fundraiser in the spring. And that’s it. Please contact Vice-Principal Mari Kernan mkernan@sros.org or PTA president Renee O’Hare renee.ohare@autodesk.com to志愿or for more information.
SWEET SUMMER SOUNDS

This summer, the Marin Jewish Community Center’s Kanbar Center for the Performing Arts donated 100 tickets to their Summer Concert Series to Venetia Valley. Participating families were treated to an evening of international music, food, friendship, and play at two of the five outdoor concerts held this summer. We are grateful to our partners for supporting our shared mission of fostering community.

MAKING A SPLASH

In deciding on her good will Bat Mitzvah project, 7th grade Rodef Sholom congregant Lori Gerstenfeld decided to share her love of swimming with the students of Venetia Valley. Her family and friends supported her vision by donating the funds for 30 Venetia Valley students to participate in two weeks of daily swimming lessons with instructors from the JCC’s Aquatic Program. One of our incoming first graders made such progress in the lessons that she actually swam on her last day! Other students managed the milestones of submerging their heads, blowing bubbles, and learning swim fundamentals like kicking and floating. Many thanks to Lori and our friends at Rodef Sholom for this amazing enrichment and fitness opportunity!

CLOSING THE GAP

We are proud to report that the 2014 Venetia Valley Summer School Program served over 60 students this summer! This summer school program helped acclimate our incoming kindergarteners to elementary school expectations and helped prepare our incoming first and second graders for academic success this year.

Students were not the only ones learning. Teachers at different grade levels had the opportunity to co-teach and co-plan for building content knowledge and skills from one grade level to the next. Parents were also on board for learning. They participated in bi-weekly classes to learn how to support literacy, math, and science skills at home and how to support their children in the long-term goal of becoming college and career ready. Thank you to all teachers and support staff who made this year’s summer school into another empowering experience.

THE GIVING TREE

At our third annual Welcome Back Ice Cream Social, Ranger Lou and her team from the National Park Service came by to give us one last taste of summer with a traditional campfire experience! In addition to roasting marshmallows with students and parents, the rangers enacted a play about the current drought’s impact on salmon, conducted a craft project to make whimsical salmon hats, and shared displays about the role of trees in our ecosystem. And, there’s “s’more” where that came from. Stay tuned for upcoming family field trips and other events sponsored by the Park Service.

OCTOBER CALENDAR

10/18 VV Fall CARNIVAL
11am-4pm, VV soccer field
10/31 Casual Dress Day
10/31 Halloween

NOV / DEC CALENDAR

11/5 Parent Meeting 6:30pm Library
Kindergarten presentation
11/15 Garden Work Party & Potluck
9am-12pm. VV Garden
11/21 Casual Dress Day
12/5 La Boheme. Opera. Middle school performance with SF Opera Guild

FALCON COMMUNICATOR

Issue: October 2014
Do you have questions or comments about this issue? Do you have something you’d like to contribute to the next issue? Contact newsletter editor Grace Dearborn gracedearborn@gmail.com