



# THE HAWKS NEST

December 2019

VALLEY RIDGE ACADEMY

## Letter from our Principal

**P**arents, Guardians and Hawks,

The first semester is in the books and it was certainly eventful and successful. Midterms and End of Course exams for our middle school students have been completed and we are eagerly awaiting the data from the district to continue planning our instruction for second semester. Our elementary students will continue with the i-Ready diagnostic in January. This information is critical as we continually work to target our instruction to the needs of each student in each class.

**Report cards** will be released on January 17, 2020 and I encourage you to reach out to your child's teacher at that time to set up a conference to review progress and discuss plans for the second half of the school year. Keeping the lines of communication open is critical to the success of each child and helps students to see that both the home and the school are working together to support them.

Please note **Friday, December 20<sup>th</sup> is an early release day**, with dismissal occurring at 1:50 pm. The Valley Ridge office will be shut down beginning at 4:00 pm on Friday, December 20<sup>th</sup> for winter break. The office will reopen on January 3<sup>rd</sup> (teacher planning day) at 8:00 am and we will look forward to welcoming students back on Monday, January 6<sup>th</sup>!



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December 2019

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## Letter from our Principal (cont.)

**A**s we come to the end of the decade, I wanted to reflect on the changes that have occurred over the last 10 years. Most importantly, the opening of Valley Ridge Academy in 2014. It has been a remarkable six years due to our amazing teachers, staff, parents, and students! Without the efforts and continued support of each one of you, we would not be where we are today. Thank you again, and I wish you all a safe and relaxing winter break!

Go Hawks!

*Sandra McMandon*

# Character Counts! Celebrations

**A**s part of VRA's Character Counts! Program one pillar of character is featured every month. During the month of November VRA highlighted the pillar of **CITIZENSHIP**



**CITIZENSHIP**



TRUSTWORTHINESS



FAIRNESS



RESPONSIBILITY



RESPECT



CARING

Teachers and students discussed the meaning of this important value:

**Do your share to make your home, school, community and greater world better • Cooperate • Get involved in community affairs • Stay informed; vote • Be a good neighbor • Obey laws and rules • Respect authority • Protect the environment • Volunteer**

On November 21<sup>st</sup>, VRA was proud to celebrate elementary students nominated by their teachers for exemplifying the virtue of **CITIZENSHIP**

*Thank you Hawks for your contribution in making the world a better place!*



**Kindergarten** - Hanae Nagata, Ava Maddox, Jack Hancock, Adrian Bushi, Palak Baria, Benedetto Valerio, Dylan Noboa, Kash Bonner



**First Grade** – Oliver Valmont, James Dubocq, Caden Thompson, Lizzy Gorelik, Kaleb Warren, Brooklyn Bydlik, Lola Rice, Landon Muir, Addison Reiner, Akil Kannan



**Second Grade** – Emma Blumberg, Lucas Klabacka, Leah Noren, Addyson Knight, Nolan Meunier, Adelyn Mumford, Amalia Lopez-Esteban, Olivia Bishop



# Character Counts! Celebrations



**Third Grade** - Tenley Gammon, Ella Rae Weeks, Sarah Dresback, Brianne Easterly, Ellie Ostrander, Charlie Schmutz, Jocelyn Hohner, Hudson Gunning, Erienne Scales



**Fourth Grade** - Leo Halman, Ethan Merritt, Jayden Rocha, Sierra Whitlow, Troy Lewis, Carly Young, Nate Bass



**Fifth Grade** - Alison Lechtrecker, Keira Davidson, Thiago Lopez, Samantha Iloa, Karis Comeau, Spencer Krum, Alaina Modansky

The Middle School celebration for Character Counts! **CITIZENSHIP** took place at VRA on December 3<sup>rd</sup>.

*Well done, Middle Schoolers!  
You are an amazing example  
to all your peers!*



**Sixth Grade** – Andrew Lagos, Armando Pepaj, Lauren Higgins, Eric Herbst, Piper Crecco, Charlotte Garcia, Slater Roemhild, Samantha Ingenito, Hayleigh Yeoman

**Seventh Grade** – Harmony Anderson, Gabriela Aristiguieta-Salcedo, Brianna Niles, Julia Procacci, Ana Myers, Franziska Kasten, Taylor Willis, Aidan Biscardi

**Eighth Grade** - McKenna Scrivener, Ty'Asha Hart, Aiden Hancock, Trinity Hale, James Syme, Lily Mosser, Keeley Williams, Ellie Mirgeaux



# Character Counts! Run/Walk

8TH ANNUAL

# CHARACTER COUNTS!

In St. Johns  
County

# 6K3K

## RUN • WALK

Saturday, February 1, 2020  
9 A.M.

Palencia Elementary School



Register by January 10, 2020, to receive a race t-shirt and other goodies from sponsoring businesses and community organizations!



PRESENTING  
SPONSOR

REGISTER AT  
[RACESMITH.COM](http://RACESMITH.COM)



The first 500 finishers will receive a collectible dog tag.



# VRA STEM Fair

**VRA** held its annual STEM Fair on December 5<sup>th</sup>. The purpose of this event is to encourage and celebrate student interest in STEM, with the primary goal being to promote student use of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics to solve real world problems.

Fourth and fifth graders carefully designed and conducted their science experiments over the past few weeks, and presented their results to the community during the STEM Fair.

Throughout the event students had the opportunity to explore peer projects and participate in fun science activities and interactive exhibitions.

A panel of teachers evaluated each project and selected the top 5 to represent VRA in the upcoming St Johns County STEM Fair to take place on January 11<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

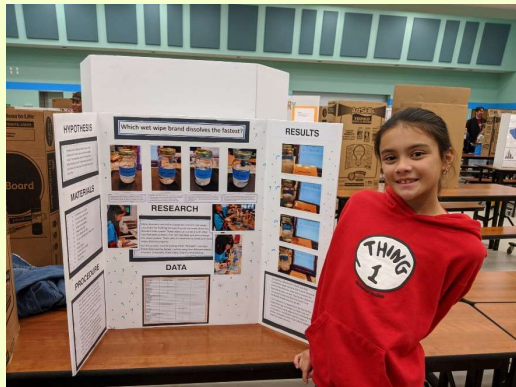


# VRA STEM Fair

*Congratulations to our  
STEM Hawks!*



Owen Randeau, 4<sup>th</sup> grade  
(picture unavailable)  
**EARLY TSUNAMI**



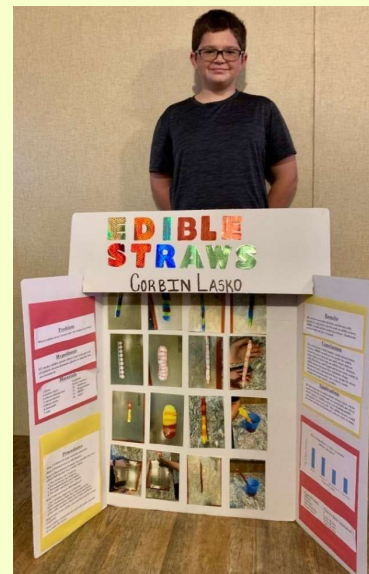
Adelynn Rosario, 4<sup>th</sup> Grade  
**WET WIPES**



Trevor Ruiz, 5<sup>th</sup> grade  
**FOODS OF THE FUTURE**



Lani Modansky, 5<sup>th</sup> grade  
**MICROPLASTICS**



Corbin Lasko, 5<sup>th</sup> grade  
**EDIBLE STRAWS**





# Band Concert



The first Band concert of the 2019-2020 school year took place on December 10<sup>th</sup>.

Middle schoolers, led by Mr. Burk, prepared a night full of music and fun that families truly enjoyed.

The Beginning Band (6<sup>th</sup> graders) performance included a demonstration of students skill growth and a showcase of their favorite tunes.

The night continued on with the delightful performance of the 7<sup>th</sup> grade Band, followed by the 8<sup>th</sup> grade Band.

*Congratulations to all our musical Hawks!*

# Chorus Winter Concerts

## VoV

The Voices of the Valley, directed by Ms. Knoblauch, have been busy over the past month captivating audiences with Holiday music and cheer at the Jacksonville Airport, Nease High School and VRA.

Parents, students and community members enjoyed beautiful Winter Concerts on November 25<sup>th</sup>, December 9<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>.

*Thank you VoV for the wonderful shows!*





# PBIS Middle School Reward

Would you like to attend a **UNF** women's basketball game as they take on **Liberty University**? You can enter a drawing to receive one ticket to attend the game, held on Monday, January 27.

## UNF Ladies Basketball Game



### Permission Slips

Beginning Monday, **December 16<sup>th</sup>**, you may pick up a permission slip from one of the following teachers each morning from 8:05-8:30am:

- Ms. Zitiello  
(6<sup>th</sup> Grade - Room 604)
- Ms. Dresback  
(7<sup>th</sup> Grade - Room 610)
- Ms. deRemer  
(8<sup>th</sup> Grade - Room 613)

### How to Enter

Return your signed permission slip, along with 25 Hawk Bucks to Ms. Zitiello (6th), Ms. Dresback (7th) or Ms. deRemer (8th) by Friday, **January 17**.

### Drawing

On Tuesday, **January 21**, 100 students will be chosen at random to receive one ticket to attend the event on January 27. Students who are chosen will be notified during their 1<sup>st</sup> period class on Wednesday, **January 22**. Students not chosen will receive a complete refund of their Hawk Bucks.

## Family Bingo Night

Save the date and get ready to have some family Bingo fun at VRA on **January 24<sup>th</sup>** at 6 pm.



**MORE INFORMATION  
COMING SOON!**



# Student Council Sock & Shoe Drive



Our 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Sock and Shoe Drive will take place the week of December 16<sup>th</sup> -20<sup>th</sup>. We are hoping to collect 100+ new or gently used pairs of shoes (children's & adult sizes) and 200 pairs of new socks. All donations will be directed to our sister school, Southwoods Elementary and the Salvation Army in St. Augustine.

Southwoods Elementary is a Title I school where the majority of their families receive services and assistance.

Southwoods Elementary has been designated as a "Community School" by the School District, providing services to the families in that area beyond the scope of a typical elementary school.

Donations will be received in the front office and in Ms. Hill's classroom (Room 408). Students who bring donated items will receive two (2) Hawk Bucks for each donation.

Thanks in advance for any help you can give in making this effort a success!!!



## Guidance Corner

This year our awesome school counselors are bringing the

### *HOME & SCHOOL CONNECTION NEWSLETTER*

to our school to share with all VRA parents, guardians and caregivers.

This monthly publication provides parents with practical tips so they can:

- Make learning fun with simple activities
- Boost motivation and improve school success
- Build positive character traits
- Strengthen family life and enhance parenting skills

We hope you enjoy and take advantage of this new resource included in the next few pages.





# Guidance Corner

## Home & School CONNECTION<sup>®</sup>

Working Together for School Success

December 2019

Valley Ridge Academy

Guidance Department

### SHORT NOTES

#### Spot the object

Finding hidden pictures is not only fun—it also improves your youngster's attention to detail. Try a book from a series like *Where's Waldo?* (Martin Handford) or *I Spy* (Jean Marzollo). Or search the internet for "hidden pictures." She can print out the pages or play online.

#### Tell the truth

Show your child that being truthful matters—even in situations where no one would know the difference. For example, if you leave a store without noticing an item under your cart, let him see you return to pay for it. Explain that being honest is the right thing to do and it makes you feel good.

#### The best gifts

This holiday season, help your youngster brainstorm presents that don't cost a lot of money. For instance, she might make a book of coupons that family members can redeem ("Good for one dog wash"). Or the two of you could bake muffins for teachers and neighbors.

#### Worth quoting

"Kindness is like snow. It beautifies everything it covers." *Kahlil Gibran*

### JUST FOR FUN



**Q:** Why did the walrus stand on the marshmallow?

**A:** So she wouldn't fall into the hot cocoa!

## We're a family of readers

When families share a love of reading, children develop stronger literacy skills and are more motivated to pick up a book. Here's how some of our readers have made reading a family affair.

#### After-dinner novel

"We pick a novel all ages can enjoy—often one my wife or I enjoyed as a child—and take turns reading a chapter a night. The kids look forward to it, especially if we stopped at a cliff-hanger the day before. After each chapter, we share our opinions of the book and say what we think will happen tomorrow."

#### Reading adventures

"Every time we visit the library, we look for books related to someplace we're going soon. Before a visit to the aquarium, we found nonfiction books about sharks and dolphins. And before a trip to my sister's apartment in the city, we read about skyscrapers, subways, and taxis."



#### Treasure hunts

"When my son first learned to read, he searched for free reading 'treasure.' He'd collect maps from parks and malls, brochures from the vet's office, and even fortunes from cookies. Soon, our whole family was adding to the 'treasure chest.' We've learned a lot, like how dogs communicate and what fun things there are to do at our favorite park."♥

### Clearing out clutter

Try these ideas for decluttering during winter break, and your youngster will start the New Year with organized spaces to work and play:

- Have your child sort through her backpack and study area. She could file old tests and quizzes, save favorite papers and projects, and discard anything she won't need when school starts again.
- Let your youngster start a donation box in her closet for outgrown clothes and toys. Once the box is full, decide together where to donate it—she'll discover the satisfaction that comes from helping others.
- Suggest that your child label separate containers for smaller items like erasers and sticky notes. Putting them into the correct bins gives her practice with sorting and makes school supplies easy to find at homework time.♥





# Guidance Corner

## I can handle that!

What is your child capable of doing for herself? Probably more than she realizes. Encourage her to become more responsible with these tips.

**Manage a social life.** Let your youngster call friends to set up her own get-togethers. She can also RSVP to birthday parties and pick out and wrap gifts. If she's sleeping over at a friend or relative's house, ask her to pack her own overnight bag herself.

**Do minor repairs.** Teach your child how to use a screwdriver and other tools safely. You can watch as she puts her



know-how to work fixing a younger sibling's toy or tightening a loose doorknob.

**Track "inventory."** Is your youngster running low on crayons, shampoo, or her favorite cereal? Have her keep a list on the refrigerator.

**Cook food.** Your child can learn to make sandwiches and salads, mash potatoes, and whisk eggs. With supervision, she could peel and chop vegetables and use the microwave. *Idea:* Encourage her to be creative in the kitchen and come up with her own recipes.♥

## ACTIVITY CORNER

### Connect with history

Become history "tourists" in your own town. These activities help your child learn about history and make connections to what he's learning in school.

#### Exhibits

Visit historic sites and museums. Your youngster may learn how people made hand-dipped candles or crafted armor. Encourage him to ask staffers questions about the time period. He might inquire about chores children did, for instance.



#### Historical markers

These plaques tell what happened in specific locations. Perhaps a one-room schoolhouse once stood in your town or a famous inventor was born nearby. Stop to read and discuss the markers. Tip: Search for markers near you at [hmdb.org](http://hmdb.org).♥



### Drugs: Start a conversation

It's never too early to discuss drugs with your youngster. In fact, opening the lines of communication now will pave the way for more serious conversations as he gets older. Consider this advice.

• **Begin with questions.** Find out what your child knows about drugs. What has he learned in health class or heard from other kids? Using his knowledge as a starting point will lead to a more meaningful discussion and allow you to correct misconceptions.

• **Discuss safety rules.** When you take medication or give any to your youngster, read the instructions together. Explain that taking more than directed is dangerous and that he's not allowed to take medicine without your permission. *Note:* Be sure to keep your medicine cabinet locked.♥



### Motivated from within

**Q:** My daughter told me that her friends "all" get rewards for good grades and she wants to get rewards, too. How should I handle this?

**A:** Help your child see that doing well is a reward in itself. That way, she won't get in the habit of depending on rewards like money or stickers.

First, encourage her to focus on the excitement of learning rather than just on her grades. Say she aced a science test. Of course you're proud of her and you'll let her know it. But also

ask her to explain a concept or show you an experiment or activity she did in class. ("You answered that an apple floats but a grape sinks—I'd like to see that!")

Also, help her see how her effort leads to natural rewards. If she brings home a good math grade on her report card, you could say, "Great job. I know you worked hard to learn multiplication facts. Bigger problems will be easier now that you've memorized those."

Over time, she'll realize how rewarding it is to learn new things, work hard, and succeed—without rewards from anyone else.♥



#### OUR PURPOSE

To provide busy parents with practical ideas that promote school success, parent involvement, and more effective parenting.

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# Guidance Corner

## Middle Years

Working Together for School Success

### Short Stops



#### A cozy tradition

Family traditions give tweens a sense of security as they deal with the ups and downs of adolescence. Here's one idea: Have hot chocolate parties on cold winter days. Set out toppings like marshmallows, cinnamon, and nutmeg. Then, chat about your day while you enjoy your treat.

#### Welcome, second semester!

Before your child goes back to school, remind her to check her schedule for any changes second semester will bring. She should make sure she knows where new classrooms are and what supplies she'll need. *Tip:* Send an email introducing yourself to any new teachers she has.

#### Middle school dating

If your tween mentions classmates who are dating, ask him what that means in middle school. Often, tween relationships start with "talking," which means texting or chatting on social media. Ask your child whether he's interested in anyone, and share your expectations, such as only exchanging messages and photos he'd be okay for you to see.

#### Worth quoting

"There are no shortcuts to anyplace worth going." *Beverly Sills*

#### Just for fun

**Q:** What word is spelled wrong in every dictionary?

**A:** Wrong!



## Healthy technology habits

Limiting your middle grader's screen time encourages her to interact with people in real life and focus on schoolwork. Try these tips.

#### Join in

Setting limits on electronics use for the whole family may make your tween more likely to cooperate. Ask everyone to silence and put away devices during game nights or car rides. You can enjoy conversation and pay attention to each other. Also, set up a charging station where everyone leaves devices at night so that sleep isn't interrupted.

#### Socialize face to face

Suggest that your child brainstorm screen-free activities to do with friends. *Examples:* Make up dance routines, work on a giant jigsaw puzzle. Or they could use electronics in ways that don't involve staring at screens. Maybe they'll sing along with a free karaoke app or go



outside and see who can take the coolest nature photos.

#### Stay focused

When your middle grader uses electronics for homework, have her close all apps or windows that she doesn't need for the assignment. She should also turn off notifications so she's not tempted to reopen the apps she closed. And if she takes a break, encourage her to make it screen-free. Perhaps she'll go for a short walk or play with her dog. 🐾

## Developing a growth mindset

Does your child know that learning actually makes his brain grow? Help him adopt a *growth mindset*, or an attitude that he can develop his abilities if he works at them, with this advice.

■ **Find alternate routes.** Say the dialogue in a story your tween is writing sounds unrealistic. Rather than thinking, "I'm just not a good writer," he could look for ways to improve his writing. Perhaps he'll ask someone to act out the story with him and decide how the characters would really talk.

■ **Aim for variety.** Encourage your child to strengthen the growing connections in his brain by learning new information in multiple ways. For example, to study Spanish vocabulary, he could choose a picture book and listen to an audiobook version of it in Spanish while he follows along in the book. That way, he'll see, hear, and say the words he's learning. 🙌





## Meaningful math

Math isn't just for the classroom. Numbers help to determine professional football team rosters, which TV shows stay on the air, and how new cars are designed. Your child can work with data, ratios, and percentages in areas that interest him. Share these examples.

### Sports

Let your middle grader compare stats of teams and players in his favorite sport. He might look up and chart a hockey team's win-loss record and the star player's goals, assists, and total points. What percentage of the team's goals has that player scored so far this season?

### TV shows

Television networks and streaming services decide which shows to keep based on how many people watch them. For a



month, suggest that your child follow weekly Nielsen ratings online for your family's favorite shows (see [nielsen.com/us/en/top-ten/](http://nielsen.com/us/en/top-ten/)). By what percentage do viewer numbers change from week to week for each show?

### Cars

Engineers use math to design fuel-efficient cars. Ask your tween to look up the weight and gas mileage for various cars and calculate the weight-mileage ratio. He'll discover that lighter cars generally get better gas mileage. 🍌



## Spread kindness

**Q** I recently overheard my daughter and her friend making mean remarks about another girl. How can I encourage my child to be kinder?



**A** Being kind has benefits that matter to tweens, like helping them make and keep friends and feel good about themselves.

Suggest that your daughter challenge herself to do at least one kind act each day. Maybe she could smile and say good morning to the bus driver or custodian, or invite someone who's sitting alone in the cafeteria to eat lunch with her.

When you ask your child about school at the end of the day, be sure to include, "Who were you kind to today?" and "Who was kind to you?" Tell her what you did that was kind, too—you'll give each other ideas to try another day. 🍌

## Ready, set, debate

When would you want your tween to argue with you? During a friendly debate! Knowing how to make a strong argument can help her write persuasive essays and participate in class discussions. Here's a fun way to practice.



**1. Choose a topic.** You might debate whether it's better to shop online or in stores, or whether we should colonize Mars or the moon.

**2. Prepare arguments.** Have each person write down facts that support each side. *Examples:* Shopping online saves time because you don't have to drive to a store, and you can quickly compare options from several sites. But in a brick-and-mortar store, you can choose the vegetables you want or try on clothes, and you'll get in more steps for the day.

**3. Hold a debate.** Assign half the family to one side and half to the other. Then, present your arguments for your side. Next, swap sides—each person argues the opposite position. Did anyone's opinion change as a result of the debate? 🍌

## Parent to Parent

### Nervous? Try this

My son Ben loves to play piano, but he was nervous about this year's recital. I recently gave a big presentation at work, so I knew how he felt. I decided to talk to him about strategies I used to calm my nerves.

I told Ben that I practiced a lot. That helped me feel more confident because I knew the material better. Then during the presentation, I looked for friendly faces in the crowd. I

also kept going even when I stumbled over a few words.

Ben has been practicing for his recital, and he has also asked me to listen so he could play in front of an audience.

He said that on recital day, he plans to glance at our family for a boost of confidence before he sits down to play. I'm hoping that following my advice will make him a little less nervous. 🍌



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# Winter Wonderland Camp



This holiday season,  
give your kids the gift of fun, excitement  
and STEAMtastic adventure with a  
Challenge Island® Winter Break Camp!

Built around pop culture themes kids love, our whimsical camps are mini-vacations in their own right – the perfect accompaniment to a winter staycation or quick getaway. No matter your child's passions, we have a colossally cool, Challenge Island adventure waiting to be opened and enjoyed!

9am-noon or 9-5pm

DEC. 30, 31 & Jan. 2, 3

\$140/\$180

## Winter Wonderland Camp

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Register online at [challenge-island.com/firstcoast](http://challenge-island.com/firstcoast) or call 904-447-9547

COST for 4 days: \$140 for half days or \$180 for full days . Supply fee \$10

Glide on over to the coolest camp in town where you will take a STEAMtastic journey through Challenge Island's Winter Wonderland! Your icy adventure will include designing and decking out your very own icy igloo, use cool science to make frosty slime and frozen treats! Challenge Island Winter Wonderland Camp promises to be a STEAM-riffic!