

WVCSD EdTalk: January 21, 2022

Dr. David Leach, Superintendent of Schools

Governor Kathy Hochul delivered her first State of the State address in the Assembly chamber on January 5th. While her agenda wasn't focused too much on public education, a few topics caught my attention.

The Governor reiterated that the state would fully fund foundation aid. We'll have to wait until the budget is released to see if she will propose additional school aid measures in addition to her commitment to fully funding Foundation Aid. This commitment is good news for Warwick schools. With a 0% tax levy increase for the 2021–22 school year, the Warwick Valley Central School District maintained staff, student programs, and COVID-19 safety protocols while also providing property tax relief. The District currently receives close to \$28 million in state aid from New York.

Governor Hochul continues to focus on hiring shortages. She proposes allowing educators to begin teaching in the classroom while their certification application is pending with the Education Department. She is willing to waive the \$35,000 earnings cap imposed by law on retirees. She is looking to hire more staff in the Education Department's certification office to resolve employee shortages. And, she proposes giving teacher aides tuition assistance to become certified teachers and increasing teacher support through the Master Teacher Program.

Another focus is on the impact of the pandemic on students' learning and well-being. The budget will propose funding for recovery initiatives, including increased instructional time and additional mental health support for students and staff. There are plans to cover mental health services and home-based crisis intervention by expanding health insurance coverage.

In addition, the Governor is proposing a \$1 billion "ConnectALL" initiative to provide affordable broadband access across the state. The plan would include more accurate and publicly available broadband access mapping.

She wants to improve college enrollment opportunities, but she wants to tie it to the program's relative success in terms of funding eligibility. She wants to increase FAFSA completion and raise the possibility of making it a graduation requirement. She wants to streamline the SUNY college application process by allowing students to submit one application for multiple schools.

Finally, the Governor spoke about environmental and educational initiatives. By 2027, she wants all new school buses to be electric, and by 2035, she wants all school buses to be electric.

The state would fund the purchases as well as the charging infrastructure. She also wishes to expand the Clean Green School Initiative to provide funding for green infrastructure projects at over 1,000 public schools and funding for wastewater and stormwater infrastructure improvements.

Here are some highlights from our schools this week:

Pine Island Elementary School

In honor of Martin Luther King, Jr's upcoming birthday, students in Aimee Urvater's PIE class recently read a story about the civil rights leader. After reading the story, students brainstormed words and feelings that described him. Kindness, fairness, justice, and peace were a few words the students shared. Ms. Urvater asked the students to model a few of Dr. King's characteristics in their classroom, in the cafeteria, and on the playground. Each student then had the opportunity to decorate a peace plate. The students had fun decorating their peace plates with flowers, sunshine, trees, and blue skies.

Park Avenue Elementary School

The Park Avenue Green Cub Club has focused on sustainable school initiatives and hands-on projects this year. Before the holidays, third-graders in the Green Cub Club organized and executed a clothing drive initiative. They created and shared their promotional video with all classrooms asking families to donate lightly used clothes to the Warwick Hope Chest, a popular thrift boutique and free clothing bank that supports local families in need. The group discussed promoting the initiative in a "green" way by making a video rather than handing out flyers, cutting down on waste by recycling clothes, and giving to those in need during the holidays.

Sanfordville Elementary School

"My personal best may be different than your personal best... and that's okay." Graig McElroy shared this sentiment with his PE students as he talked about doing a perfect push-up. He explained how he used only to recognize those students who could do ten perfect push-ups with a "Perfect Push Up" Certificate. After reflecting on this practice for some time, Mr. McElroy realized that some students could already do eight push-ups while some could only do one. If each of these students worked hard to do two more push-ups, why should only the student who reached 10 get the reward? Our physical education team now rewards students for working hard to get stronger and strive for their own personal best. They have implemented a tiered reward system that recognizes all successes, moving from 0 to 2, 5, 10, 20, 30, 40, 50 push-ups, or more!

Warwick Valley Middle School

Our eighth-graders are learning basic computer coding. They have been exposed to the coding program, Blockly, developing simple commands for drones to fly in a square. Students have been working together to make their drones fly around their workspace. While working through this process, students discover precisely how long the device should hover in the air before turning, how far it should move in a direction before stopping, etc. Learning how to program a device such as a drone provides our students with the opportunity to step outside of their typical academic day.

Warwick Valley High School

Students in Kirk Thomas' Communications 2 class are creating a short introductory film for parents of incoming eighth-graders. The film will highlight the academic and extracurricular activities that Warwick Valley High School offers. On February 1st, the high school administrators and school counselors will meet with parents of students entering the high school next September. The event will open with a student-created film.