

WVCSD EdTalk: September 28, 2022

Dr. David Leach, Superintendent of Schools

Our teachers, administrators, and staff recently evaluated several factors that affect student success, including resources, workforce, and culture. During our superintendent's conference days at the beginning of the school year, we discussed these factors, and I am glad to share them again here.

We are fortunate here in the Warwick Valley Central School District. The district's resources, workforce, and culture are an important part of delivering a quality education to our students, guiding them toward our *Portrait of a Graduate*. It is because of your ongoing support that we are able to have a school district with strong resources, a fantastic workforce, and a creative and collegial culture that nurtures teaching and learning.

Students and teachers: We started the morning by reminding ourselves of one of our guiding principles: We pledge to advocate for the needs of our school community and to be responsible stewards of their investment.

Of course, the students are first and foremost among school community members. This year, our student enrollment is 3,700. To ensure we can always meet the needs of each of them, we recruit and hire excellent educators. This summer, we welcomed 17 new teachers.

Hiring and keeping quality educators is tough in a competitive hiring environment like we have today, but we manage to attract and retain tremendous teachers year after year. Thanks to our amazing teachers, we've been able to add 43 new courses since 2014. We have a 95% four-year graduation rate and have been recognized for six years as a New York State Recognition High School.

During a recent visit by members of the Tri-State Consortium, one evaluator put it like this:

"It is clear that students are put first and they feel the passion for learning in the classroom."

Instructional Support Programs: Warwick schools are among the top in Orange County for the educational programs and educational support they provide to our students. We have individualized support at every grade level that is designed to meet the specific needs of students whose educational paths are as unique as they are. This even reaches to our youngest learners, who, thanks to federal funding, are able to take part in our Universal Pre-K program. This year, we have been able to accommodate 95 enrollees, up from 77 last year.

Safety, Mental Health, & Wellness: In another recent EdTalk, I wrote about the many steps our district has taken to ensure school security. Feeling secure has both physical and emotional

aspects, and my column outlined new developments related to new security apparatus installed in schools and new safety personnel and procedures. I also talked about the various programs and clubs active in our middle and high schools that support students academically and emotionally, promote positive decision-making, and play an important role in educating a well-rounded student.

We added a fifth school resource officer (SRO) to our team of Warwick Valley Police Department officers whose presence in our schools cannot be overvalued. Besides the security they provide, they connect with students in meaningful ways and are a part of each building's culture. We also added new security staff. This year, we are looking forward to more community forums and in-school events by our middle school and high school Prevention Coalitions, which do such great work exposing the dangers of drug and alcohol misuse and raising awareness of those issues with students and parents. Our DARE curriculum is also being revised and will be implemented by our SROs.

We also shared information about our ongoing ROAR and PAWS lesson programs, the presence of dedicated Crisis Response Teams at each school, upcoming visits from anti-bullying groups like Mallory's Army and Sweethearts & Heroes; and looked ahead to plans for No Name-Calling Week, Kindness Week, and Red Ribbon Week.

Capital Project Progress: When district voters passed the \$13.8 million capital project with a 75.25% approval back in December, there was a lot of excitement and curiosity around when projects would start. This summer, work at the football field, track, and all-new adjacent bathrooms began. At the high school, there's a new roof and new lighting, along with upgrades to the lobby, cafeteria, kitchen, and service areas. Both elementary schools have new lighting, and outdoor classrooms are being created at every building.

After this year's graduation, there will be work done on the roof at Sanfordville, the windows at Park, the high school auditorium, the ventilation at the middle and high schools, and the outdoor bathrooms at Sanfordville and the middle school.

Resource Stewardship: Being responsible stewards of the investment the community makes in our schools also applies to how we approach district budgets. Since 2014, the tax levy has increased by 1.42 percent per year on average. In fact, last year's budget – which voters overwhelmingly approved – created a 0.37% reduction. Over that eight-year period, our district has also increased non-tax revenue from \$1.38 million to \$3.9 million, and has seen New York State aid restored. That has resulted in a comptroller's audit rating of A+.

Again, thank you to the community for your support of our students, programs, and people. Our average annual budget approval rating is 70%.

Transportation: Despite the persistent national bus driver shortage and thanks to some tremendous work by everyone in our Transportation Department, the department has managed to

grow. We've brought on five new drivers, bringing our current total to 65 for the school year. We are currently busing students along 59 routes, which is two more routes than last year.

This year, we are also excited to be able to provide four late buses for after-school activities at the middle and high schools. Our driver recruitment efforts are ongoing, and our plan is to hire six additional drivers during 2022–23.

Here are some highlights from our schools this week:

Park Avenue Elementary School: Park Avenue is excited to announce its Drama Club's 2022–2023 production for third- and fourth-grade students, which is sponsored by the Park Avenue PTA. Under the supervision of Christy Brown and Amy Buliung, the club hosted its auditions on September 16. All interested third- and fourth-grade students were welcomed. Students worked hard to prepare for the auditions and waited anxiously to find out their roles. Students will have a demanding schedule, with only a month and a half to prepare before their first show. This year's musical, "Seusical Kids," will be performed at Park Avenue on November 18 and 19. We are so happy to share that this year's show will take place on our very own indoor stage!

Sanfordville Elementary School: Sanfordville students and staff celebrated Warwick's Spirit Week leading up to Homecoming! At Sanfordville, students participated in: Monday-Sports Day; Tuesday-Tropical Day; Wednesday-Wacky Wednesday; Thursday-Sunglasses Day; Friday-Warwick Spirit Purple and Gold Day; Saturday-Homecoming parade and game. A group of our fourth-grade students, teachers, Principal Johnna Maraia and parent volunteers represented Sanfordville by marching in the parade and then making their way to the football game to cheer on the Wildcats! Thank you to our PTA for helping to plan our fun week and thank you to the high school for including the youngest Wildcats!

Warwick Valley Middle School: Warwick Valley Middle School students and staff celebrated the week leading up to our homecoming game. On Friday, the entire student body gathered in our football stadium to participate in our first pep rally of the school year. Our varsity and junior varsity cheerleaders led the festivities with incredible performances that defied gravity. Teacher Michael Justiana got the crowd excited by mixing some awesome music that got all of our students on their feet! Students and staff then proceeded to compete in a variety of games. There was a nail-biting battle of Rock, Paper, and Scissors that was won by our one and only Brett Algera. Our hula hoop competition was won by our reigning champion, sixth-grader Jessica Larsen. In a relay race, our staff team came in second to our seventh-grade team. The event ended with an epic battle of tug-o-war that left the staff victorious.

Warwick Valley High School: Warwick Valley High School students participated in a week-long celebration of homecoming, otherwise known as Spirit Week. Students participated by dressing up each day according to themes, which included duos, dress for success, decades, and

superhero vs. villain. The week ended with a purple and gold theme, all in time for the pep rally on Friday afternoon. During the week, members of each class met at the bus garage to design and build their class floats for the Homecoming parade according to the theme of "Superheroes." A lot of creative communication and artistic talent were demonstrated each night. The floats this year were tremendous, not to mention the homecoming game and dance! What a great week of celebrating our Wildcat Pride!!!