

WVCSD EdTalk: December 7, 2022
Dr. David Leach, Superintendent of Schools

It is not uncommon for the New York State Council of Superintendents to conduct surveys from time to time. One recent survey, titled *Schools taking on greater missions; aid increases benefit students*, was conducted online between October 5 and 25, 2022. Similar surveys have been conducted by the council each year from 2011 through 2019, and again in 2021. 467 superintendents participated in the most recent, with a response rate of 64.6%. New York City was not represented in the survey. The city serves 39% of all schoolchildren in the state and receives separate consideration.

Superintendents across New York State report increased optimism about their schools' financial outlook following an increase in NYS Foundation Aid and federal COVID Relief Aid. Additionally, superintendents anticipate that school budgets for 2022–2023 will improve a wide range of student services. They also emphasize that districts have taken on vastly expanded responsibilities when it comes to helping students and families with non-instructional concerns, especially when it comes to mental health. Teacher and other staffing shortages across the country – by which our district has remained largely unaffected – have been cited as impediments to schools meeting those needs, while the threat of a "fiscal cliff" prompts concerns about the sustainability of the improvements made to schools.

Here are some of the other key findings from the recent study.

- Most superintendents see a positive impact on 11 areas of student services from the current district budgets. The program includes core instruction at the school level, mental health services for students, extra academic assistance, and school security. From 2011 to 2019, there were nine surveys, but only twice did a majority of superintendents think things would get better.
- Superintendents in communities where more students live in poverty and where state Foundation Aid and federal COVID funding are higher, are more likely to think that many student services will improve.
- Superintendents have noticed that schools are doing more to help kids and families in the community with physical and mental health, food, recreation, and other things.
- 90% of respondents said that their schools have assumed a greater service role since the outbreak of COVID-19.
- 81% percent said their schools are now the first and easiest place for young people to get mental health help.
- 55% are somewhat or very optimistic that their schools will continue to provide services adequate to students' needs over the next three years. – up from 25% in 2019.

- More than 50% of respondents agreed, in increasing measure, that they felt the polarization of politics had negatively affected their district's ability to deliver quality education as a result of the pandemic.

To me, among the most significant findings of the survey was the fact that superintendents often express their pride about the work of their schools in their open-ended comments, as well as their appreciation for the efforts of their colleagues and employees. It is a shared belief that schools are the cornerstone of the communities in which we live. A belief that schools are gateways to opportunity for our children, and that they are a pillar of our democracy.

I couldn't agree more.

Here are some highlights from our schools this week:

Park Avenue Elementary School

As part of their study of natural processes on earth, students in second grade are studying natural changes. The children have enjoyed creating model volcanoes, landslides, and earthquakes. Students thought like engineers to design and construct structures that could withstand earthquakes and hurricanes. Using index cards, tape, and popsicle sticks, teams formed 12-inch tall structures capable of bearing a pad of post-its and withstanding a simulated earthquake for ten seconds. Afterward, the scientists shared their research and thought processes with their colleagues.

Sanfordville Elementary School

During a unit on Hazardous Weather, our Partners in Education (PIE) 3/4 team created green-screen weather broadcasts, published newspapers, and built and tested a model home. It was a pleasure to have parents participate in the hazardous weather simulations and testing, and we will be posting our broadcasts online. Students are taking charge of their education, and using their knowledge to impact the world is inspiring positively.

This year's show will be Disney's *The Jungle Book Kids!* The performances will take place on Saturday, April 29, 2023, at 11:00 am and 1:00 pm. Students in third and fourth grade have received their audition applications and a list of songs to learn. A parent meeting and auditions will occur in December. Students will begin practicing for the show when school resumes in January.

Warwick Valley Middle School

We held our first in-person celebration of the Student of the Month for this school year last week, and it was a memorable experience for all of us. The Student of the Month honorees for September and October were recognized as part of the celebration. A breakfast ceremony was held at the Dorothy Wilson Center to celebrate this achievement with families and students. Both parents and students attended the ceremony. Congratulations to all the recipients of this award!

Warwick Valley High School

It has been a busy few weeks for our performing arts students as they have been learning their music and practicing for this month's holiday concerts, the first of the school year!

Our orchestra concert will be on December 6. The Chamber Strings and Symphony Orchestras will perform holiday and winter-themed music from various genres, including classical, jazz, and rock songs. We will continue the tradition of solo performances by seniors this year, and we are also looking forward to being joined by some members of the eighth-grade orchestra.

On December 8, our choral ensembles will be performing a program of pieces with the theme of *Coming Home for the Holidays*. The Meistersingers, Treble Choir, Jazz Choir, and Mixed Chorus will perform together, along with some of our middle school singers.

On December 13, the Concert Band, Jazz Ensemble, and Wind Ensemble, all under the direction of Ms. Megan Schafer, will be performing an array of winter compositions with a flare of modern, sassy holiday themes.

All concerts begin at 7:00 pm, and all are welcome to attend. We invite all of our Warwick neighbors to come hear our incredibly talented students during the winter concert series.