

Last week, I shared that the Warwick Valley Central School District conducts enrollment studies in order to assess recent demographic factors and make projections for the future. The data collected through these studies informs decision-making related to staffing, funding, and program and facility planning.

According to the latest study, the district is expected to experience overall stability in enrollment between 2023 and 2032, with small fluctuations in the enrollment of different grade levels. This type of planning is a dynamic process, with periodic updates allowing for the incorporation of changes in district trends. Such changes may be due to fluctuations in the number of children being born, the number of families moving into the community, or the number of children attending non-public or charter schools.

I also promised last week to share an overview of enrollment projections at each school, as well as a closer look at information pertaining to births and population. Provisional data from the National Center for Health Statistics reveals that there were 3,659,289 births recorded in the United States in 2021, representing the first increase in births since 2014 and a 1 percent rise compared to the previous year. However, this number is still lower than the number of births recorded in 2019.

Birth rates in Orange County reached a peak in 2006 with 5,433 births, before dropping to a historical low of 4,724 in 2012. Since then, contrary to national and state trends, births have increased nearly 11% with 5,234 recorded in 2020.

Births within our district have fluctuated between 2007 and 2020. There was an unusually low number of births recorded in 2015 – just 143 – but the number of births in 2018 and 2020 (181) were among the highest of the period. This demonstrates the variability of birth rates within the district over this time period. By closely tracking and analyzing birth rate trends, school districts can better plan for the needs of their student populations and allocate resources accordingly.

The population of the Town of Chester grew by 665 residents, or 5.6%, between 2010 and 2020. In contrast, the population in the Town of Warwick remained stable over this period, with a loss of only 38 residents. The population within our district also remained stable, with an estimated 23,453 residents living in the district in 2020. These data suggest that the population in these areas has remained relatively constant over the past decade. It is also important for school districts to track population trends in order to understand the potential impact on enrollment and resources.

Interestingly, between 2010 and 2020, the age structure of the resident population in our district underwent notable changes. Census estimates indicate that the segment of residents aged 19 years or younger decreased from 26.8% to 23.3%, while the percentage of residents aged 65-plus increased from 13.8% to 17.8%. These shifts in the age distribution of the population can have important implications for the community, particularly in terms of the needs and preferences of its residents.

The ethnic composition of the resident population within our district has undergone changes between 2010 and 2020. The white segment of the population decreased from 82.0% to approximately 78%, while the Hispanic group grew from 9.4% to 12.5%. Meanwhile, the Asian/other, Black, and multi-racial segments each represented less than 4% of the resident population in 2020.

Next week, I will present a review of the housing market in Warwick and enrollment in non-public schools. This information will be useful for understanding trends and conditions within the community and can help inform decision-making for the school district. By staying informed about the housing market and non-public school enrollment, the district can better understand the needs and preferences of its constituents and plan accordingly.

*Here are some highlights from our schools this week:*

#### **Park Avenue Elementary School**

First-grade students in Aimee Urvater’s class learned how to add descriptive words to their writing during their Writer’s Workshop sessions. While revising their whole class how-to books with the title “How-To Make an Ice Cream Sundae,” students perfected the process of adding descriptive language related to ice cream toppings. Students generated words such as sweet, squishy, and sour as details in their sentence writing. They also added words such as colorful and crunchy when describing sprinkles as ice cream toppings. The transfer of this skill into their how-to writing proved to make their writing more “colorful,” descriptive, and interesting to read. Congratulations to our first grade writers!

#### **Sanfordville Elementary School**

As students returned from the holiday break, teachers and staff took the opportunity to revisit and review PBIS expectations of PAWS Behavior. In class, students discussed the behavioral matrix of behaviors in the classrooms, hallways, bathrooms, cafeteria, playground, and buses. These school-wide expectations of behavior help create an environment that promotes safety, acceptance, and a sense of belonging where students are ready to learn! Each class in the building created a PAWS poster highlighting our expectations, which are now displayed in the cafeteria. As a school-wide celebration for demonstrating PAWS Behavior throughout the first trimester, the SES PTA sponsored the visit of singer/songwriter Jared Campbell. Jared shared the

message of being kind, believing in yourself, being a good friend, knowing you are valuable, and being your own superhero by demonstrating positive behavior through music and song.

Sanfordville's Leadership Club has been busy making SES a better place this year. Students have written acrostic poems on what it means to be a leader, brainstormed many ideas on how to improve our schools, buses and grounds; sent ornaments and cards to the local nursing home; created a public announcement video; started a New Student Committee to greet new students and teach them what SES is all about; helped advertise and collect for the Toys for Tots Drive; ran their very own coat drive that was very successful; and even created and stocked teacher supply bins in the faculty room and copy room! During the upcoming weeks members are working on putting together information and activities for the New Student Welcoming Committee to get new students acclimated to Sanfordville.

### **Warwick Valley Middle School**

The Friends from the Hathorn House presented to Warren Patafio's seventh grade classes. The Hathorn House is a historical society dedicated to honoring the legacy of Revolutionary War militia leader John Hathorn and the men of his regiment. The Hathorn House presented four different stations, which incorporated life in the Colonial Era, emphasizing a focus on life in Warwick during the American Revolution. Each station was facilitated by a historical actor.

Sue Gardner presented a virtual map of Warwick in which the students were able to pick key locations throughout Warwick that had important significance during the American Revolution. Leonard Wood discussed life for a Colonial surgeon and discussed the primitive surgical techniques of the era. Cindy Wolf demonstrated and allowed students the opportunity to learn about and try on colonial fashion and spoke to the importance of women's roles during Colonial times. Lastly, Orange County Community College professor Joshua Moser discussed how people were split between being a Patriot or a Loyalist during the Revolution. The students had the opportunity to experience how people actually voted in Warwick elections; voting for King George or for rebellion. We would like to thank our friends from Hathorn House for spending the day with our students.

### **Warwick Valley High School**

Every year, Ms. Danielle Bugasch, an English teacher, engages her ninth grade students in an interactive and educational experience by conducting a classroom trial based on a work they have read in class. This year, her classes created a case and trial based on the short story, "The Most Dangerous Game," in which they will determine the guilt or innocence of the protagonist Sanger Rainsford for the murder of General Zaroff. To make the experience more realistic, the students were given roles as members of the prosecution or the defense team, including lead attorneys, members of the legal team and expert witnesses. The jury is made up of a diverse group of faculty members, administrators, and past students who have enjoyed this project in the past.

The project requires that students perform extensive research, work collaboratively, speak publicly, gather evidence and write argumentative essays. This provides them with a hands-on learning opportunity to develop their critical thinking, research, and public speaking skills. Additionally, the students learn many aspects of legal court procedures and protocols, such as reciting opening statements, summarizing their cases with closing arguments and objecting to questioning by giving reasons such as hearsay, leading the witness, asking and answering a question, and speculation.

The annual classroom trials are always enjoyed by the students and many have reported that it is their favorite project of the year. It provides them with a fun and interactive way to learn about legal court procedures and enhances their understanding and appreciation of the literary works they are studying.