

**WVCSD EdTalk: June 14, 2023**

**Dr. David Leach, Superintendent of Schools**

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In our pursuit of equipping students for their future, we prioritize literacy and mathematics, while also acknowledging the importance of additional skills highlighted in our Portrait of a Graduate. These encompass fostering collaboration, teamwork, problem-solving abilities, a lifelong thirst for learning, awareness of global issues with ethical responsibility, a harmonious blend of critical thinking and creativity, effective communication skills, and the ability to make sound decisions. Furthermore, we ensure that students are well-versed in utilizing contemporary technology to discern the most suitable tools for any given task.

One approach our district employs to achieve this goal is through Project-Based Learning (PBL), a method that research shows "can increase retention of content and improve students' attitudes toward learning." The PBL approach asserts that students learn best when they can connect facts to experiences and real-world situations. The website Edutopia cites research by Barron & Darling-Hammond (2008) and Thomas (2000) to provide an essential view of PBL: students learn knowledge to solve problems as they would in the real world, have increased control over their learning, teachers serve as coaches and facilitators of inquiry/reflection, and students may work individually or in pairs or groups.

Recently, we celebrated the accomplishments of 24 seniors who participated in two of our district's most popular PBL programs - the three-year Science Research program and the Senior Project class. Both courses employ PBL methodologies and rely on inquiry-based teaching/mentoring by skilled educators, empowering students to take an active role in guiding their learning.

The Senior Project is a nationally recognized program that our faculty has refined over 18 years of offering the class. Students must fulfill four key components: selecting an independent study project and finding a mentor, writing a 10-page collegiate-level paper, creating a portfolio to document their process, and delivering an oral presentation on their outcomes to a panel of judges. Once again, I was amazed by the diverse range of projects this year, which included making a 1948 Ford truck street legal, creating fused glass art, learning guitar to compose an original song, designing and coding a video game, organizing a benefit rock concert, crafting artisan soaps, mastering the pastry arts, excelling in the Air Force ROTC physical challenge, and much more!

Congratulations to this year's Senior Project graduates: Sarah Aljucic, Nathan Durgin, Jackson Frommeyer, Marissa Gratzel, Ada Gurvich, Owen Hoey, Elizabeth Ladouceur, Madeline Lee, Patrick Liszewski, Melany Ortiz-Gonzalez, Sierra Roberts, Sofia Roldan, Camryn Schultz, Alexandra Turner, Elizabeth Verboys, and Grace Vitkovsky. A special congratulations to John

Ruskiewicz, the young man who restored the Ford, for earning the Senior Project Excellence Award.

Additionally, seven more seniors participated in the annual WVHS Science Research Symposium held last Monday. The three-year Science Research Program is recognized by the New York State Board of Regents and offered in partnership with SUNY Albany. Students select their own research topics and collaborate with professional mentors in the scientific research community. This year, students worked with mentors from esteemed institutions such as Harvard Medical School, the Department of Genetics at the University of Alabama, Emory University School of Medicine, Penn State University, and more. To successfully complete the rigorous program, students must:

- Select their topic/field of study
- Communicate with professional mentors in that field
- Design and conduct original research
- Read and summarize peer-reviewed articles and scientific papers
- Maintain a laboratory notebook
- Build a scientific portfolio
- Discuss and analyze results at symposia
- Write a final research paper

These programs, the Senior Project and the Science Research Program, exemplify our commitment to providing students with authentic, hands-on learning experiences that foster critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration, and a deep passion for learning. We are incredibly proud of the achievements of our students and extend our heartfelt congratulations to each of them for their hard work, dedication, and outstanding accomplishments. As we continue to prioritize a well-rounded education that prepares students for their future, we remain dedicated to nurturing their talents, empowering their curiosity, and equipping them with the skills and knowledge they need to thrive in an ever-changing world.

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

### **Park Avenue Elementary**

Park Avenue Elementary School organized the annual "Sports Day" event with a fresh title and format known as Park Ave Palooza! This school-wide celebration highlighted the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support program, with all Park Avenue students engaging in different stations led by teachers and staff. At the STEM station, students took part in a unique LEGO challenge activity infused with physical education. Working in teams, they sprinted to a basket to select a summer-themed LEGO building category, completing each build within a 5-minute period before dashing back to the basket for a new category. The staff supervised various

entertaining activities, including parachute games, relay races, limbo, and engaging games like Mission Impossible and Human Pinball.

Furthermore, the 25th annual String Fling Concert took place at the high school, where Park Avenue's fourth-grade orchestra students were thrilled to perform for older orchestra students and a broader audience of family and friends. Playing alongside their older peers in the same venue was a memorable experience for our students, marking a fantastic conclusion to a year of musical learning. Our gratitude goes to Park Avenue's orchestra teacher, Keely Blaikner, for her exceptional preparation of the students.

The Park Avenue PTA organized the annual Family Picnic/CrazyTicket Night, drawing the participation of numerous Park Avenue family members. The evening was filled with dancing, delectable food provided by various food trucks, and opportunities to connect with others while relaxing on camping chairs. Winners were awarded baskets donated by local businesses, families, and Park Avenue staff. We extend our heartfelt appreciation to the PTA for their immense efforts in making this event a success.

### **Sanfordville Elementary School**

The staff extends congratulations to the student-athletes, coaches, volunteers, and parents who participated in the Elementary School Special Olympics at Presidential Park Elementary School in Middletown. A special thanks goes to Pupil Personnel Services Director Patricia Close, SES Principal Johnna Maraia, the team coaches Carla Overbey, Amanda Undersinger, Brendan Bauer, Colin Hernandez, Scott Meyer, and the dozen school volunteers. Our talented athletes showcased their skills in basketball and soccer challenges. We commend all of our student-athletes: Julian, Ariel, Benny, Breckin, Isabella, Braden, Philip, Christopher, Michael, and Matthew!

Recently, Sanfordville hosted an author visit featuring Lauren Magaziner. This engaging all-day event united the school community, providing insights into the journey of becoming a writer and the intricate process of publishing a book. Students participated in a morning seminar tailored to their grade level. In the afternoon, a selected group of fourth-graders enjoyed a lunch and writing workshop with the author, offering them a unique opportunity to interact with Magaziner and ask questions about her books and life. During her free time, Magaziner graciously answered questions and autographed books for the students. We express our gratitude to the PTA for sponsoring the visit and to Media Specialist Danielle Cancel for organizing the day.

Additionally, the PIE and MAC families organized a delightful family picnic at Stanley Deming Park. Families brought various dishes and snacks to share, and the children were treated to a surprise visit from a local ice cream truck! The event drew over 250 attendees, marking the

largest turnout to date. The kids had a wonderful time playing near the stream, on the playground, and on the basketball courts while mingling with old and new friends.

### **Warwick Valley Middle School**

In an exciting classroom project, a group of our fifth-grade students recently embarked on a mission to design and construct unique ecosystems within a building provided by the innovative organization called "Rooms for Rescues." Each group was assigned a specific animal and given the task of creating a room that would replicate the natural habitat of their chosen creature. Through a combination of research, creativity, and teamwork, the students developed poster boards and intricate three-dimensional models showcasing their envisioned rooms. To successfully complete the assignment, each group diligently researched their chosen animal species, focusing on aspects such as their natural habitat, diet, social structure, and unique adaptations. Armed with this knowledge, the students took on the challenging task of designing a room that would cater to the specific needs of their animal while promoting its overall well-being.

The Rooms for Rescue project provided an exceptional opportunity for the students to delve into the intricate world of animal ecosystems while fostering their creativity and teamwork. Through thorough research and innovative design, the students aimed to offer a glimpse into the diverse habitats that animals consider home. By simulating these environments within the confines of a classroom-sized room, the students hope to inspire others to appreciate and comprehend the significance of preserving and protecting these precious ecosystems.

### **Warwick Valley High School**

A lot of activities unfold at the high school during this time of year. The ongoing renovations of the football field are nearing completion, ensuring that a traditional graduation can take place as long as mother nature cooperates. At the 2023 Once Upon A Child symposium, nine original children's stories were unveiled in the Video Production edit room at Warwick Valley High School. Over the past few years, a collaborative effort between the English, Art, and Career and Technical Education departments has yielded numerous children's stories through an interdisciplinary and multifaceted process. Students in Danielle Debella's Creative Writing classes write the original stories, while artists in Kristen Spano's Drawing and Painting and Portfolio classes provide illustrations and produce a book. Upon completion, students in Daniel Ceconie's Video Production classes create narrated videos of the children's stories, utilizing the Ken Burns effect, a panning and zooming technique used in video production to enhance the still illustrations. The entire project typically takes about three months to finish, resulting in a captivating showcase of written, artistic, and technological creativity. The children's stories from the 2023 Once Upon A Child event can be found on the District's "Warwick Valley Television" YouTube Channel or directly at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QkrGr3MoBL8>.