

Weekly Column: Ed Talk
Superintendent of Schools: Dr. David Leach
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We are delighted to welcome new families to Warwick Valley Central School District this school year, particularly at the elementary level, where literacy forms the cornerstone of our academic program.

As part of the school's elementary literacy program, students engage in independent reading, read-alouds, shared reading, word work, and small group instruction. The program includes significant attention to word study, which emphasizes sound-based and word-level analysis as well as phonics, phonological awareness, vocabulary, and spelling.

Primary educators follow research-backed best practices in phonics, fluency, comprehension, writing, vocabulary, and background knowledge. It is important to combine code-focused strategies with meaning-focused strategies when teaching reading. Developmentally appropriate, explicit instruction in various literacy aspects is the key to successful reading instruction.

Reading and writing development are seen as complementary processes, with the writer's workshop encouraging students to explore their unique voices, choose their topics, build stamina, collaborate for feedback, and engage in focused mini-lessons.

This approach avoids the polarization of the media's portrayal of the "reading war" and emphasizes a unified view of literacy. In September, families will be able to learn more about our commitment to developing skilled, confident, and engaged readers at Meet the Teacher nights.

Here are some highlights from our schools this week:

Park Avenue Elementary & Sanfordville Elementary:

First grade students from Sanfordville and Park Avenue elementary schools have been enjoying daily "Summer Surprises" to celebrate the last full week of this year's Summer Academy! Each summer surprise was kicked off with a fiction or nonfiction story to engage students and build excitement. These surprises included:

- Monday: Beach ball day
- Tuesday: Beachy Craft
- Wednesday: Solar oven pizza bagels
- Thursday: Sunshine Craft
- Friday: Flashlight Fun

Fourth-grade students completed their cultural, project-based unit this week. The groups collaborated on adding new layers to their piñata project by incorporating a theme. They designed the physical model together in groups, harnessing their creativity to bring the project's vision to life. Students each took on designated roles within their groups to complete the project. The teams celebrated their completion by breaking open their piñatas outside and collecting treats inside!

Warwick Valley Middle School

One of our classes highlighted this summer was our STEM/Robotics class led by Andrew Warren and Jaime Barchi. As part of the Middle School Summer Academy STEM course, students created “robot hands” out of card stock, straws, string, and tape. They learned about the mechanical principles that make their hands move, and the names of the bones in the hand. By making these models, students gained an understanding of the engineering design thinking process in a fun and hands-on way. Designing and building a robotic hand involves overcoming various challenges and obstacles.

Students learned critical problem-solving skills as they troubleshooted issues and improved their designs. Robotic hands offer a canvas for creativity. Students can customize designs, experiment with materials, and develop creative solutions to design problems, promoting innovation and out-of-the-box thinking.

One student, Nathan Spear, enjoyed the activity so much that he designed and built an entire robot arm out of the same craft materials. By pulling a string, Nathan made the arm move and grip small objects. Nathan has been consistently engaged and enthusiastic about STEM activities, and has created innovative ways to extend each activity he has done.

This course has allowed students to highlight many attributes of our Portrait of a Graduate!

Warwick Valley High School

The WVHS Ambassador program – an extension of the successful WVMS Wildcat Ambassador initiative launched in 2020 – continued to blaze its trail of leadership excellence last week. This was when 40 student ambassadors convened for leadership training. The training actually focused on effective communication, which is an essential skill for our district's Portrait of a Graduate. Ambassadors will play a pivotal role during our new student orientation. They will help incoming freshmen have a seamless transition into high school and feel empowered doing it.

The Wildcat Ambassador program emphasizes leadership, extending beyond theory and embracing practical application. Participating students work to establish the foundation of a supportive high school community for their incoming peers. With ninth grade orientation on the

horizon, these trained leaders are primed to orchestrate engaging activities, answer questions, and offer invaluable insights. This will assist incoming freshmen in navigating their new academic environment.

The WVMS Wildcat Ambassador program has been a resounding success. Its significant positive impact at the middle school has laid out a robust framework upon which the high school program can build. The expansion of the ambassador program reflects Warwick's commitment to nurturing resilient, forward-thinking leaders who leave indelible marks on their communities.