

Weekly Column: EdTalk
Superintendent of Schools: Dr. David Leach
September 27, 2023

Most Warwick families choose school buses to transport their children, and their choices stand on solid grounds. This transportation method enhances safety and reduces delays, contributing to a positive school journey.

Thanks to our dedicated mechanics, all our buses are kept in top-notch condition, earning an outstanding Department of Transportation rating of 98.68% – surpassing even the commendable state average. The New York State Department of Transportation conducts bi-annual inspections of every bus in our fleet, and each is serviced every 3,000 miles.

Bus replacement is vital to ensure transportation safety and efficiency. There are three primary criteria to determine when a bus should be replaced – age, mileage and condition.

Our fleet's age distribution provides valuable insights. Buses that have served for 15 years or more form a minor part, with seven buses accounting for 10%. Those in the 11-to-14-year range form a sizable chunk, representing 24% with 17 buses. Notably, the majority of our fleet is newer, with 46 buses falling within the 1-10-year age bracket, constituting 66% of the fleet. As we consider maintenance strategies, it's worthwhile to note that buses nearing the 10-year mark might start encountering issues like engine failures. With increased age, repair costs rise, making it challenging to sustain operation.

Buses with high mileage, specifically over 125,000 miles, exhibit signs of internal engine wear. This can include problems with the transmission, head gasket, pistons, and bearings. In assessing our fleet's mileage, it's crucial to understand the distribution to ensure efficiency and safety. Nearly a quarter (23%) of our fleet has clocked more than 150,000 miles, while almost half (43%) has exceeded 100,000 miles.

As buses age, they become susceptible to chassis corrosion, affecting the body panels, roof sheets, and frame bolts. Such rust compromises the bus' structural soundness and safety. A bus with extensive rusting will likely fail a Department of Transportation inspection. Analyzing our fleet's expenses by age reveals that vehicles aged 10 years or older travel about 12,000 miles annually. This is at a cost of \$3.10 per mile. In contrast, vehicles younger than 10 years travel the same yearly mileage but at a more economical rate of \$2.64 per mile. This difference amounts to a 46-cent disparity per mile, highlighting the financial ramifications.

School bus driver recruitment remains a priority for our transportation team. School districts across the nation – including our own – continue to have trouble finding school bus drivers in the tightening labor market. The shortage makes transporting students to and from school a challenge. Currently, when all bus drivers report for work, every bus route is covered. However, if drivers are absent, we may need to change pick-up or drop-off times.

The district offers competitive pay, starting at \$25 per hour, for part-time bus drivers. Employee benefits include paid training; holidays; snow days; dental and vision insurance; and a \$1,000 signing bonus.

Our bus drivers complete extensive training before driving students. Background checks are performed on each applicant before obtaining their Commercial Driver's License (CDL) permit. Candidates must then pass a physical exam and drug/alcohol test prior to training. The candidate is then trained and must pass a road test from the New York State Department of Motor Vehicles.

If you are interested in becoming a school bus driver, please call our Transportation Office at 845-987-3035.

Here are some highlights from our schools this week:

Park Avenue Elementary School

Congratulatory letters were sent to fourth-grade students selected to serve on this year's Student Council. The club provides a lot of opportunities for students who are willing and able to demonstrate the high level of responsibility that comes with leadership. Park Avenue's main goal is to foster leadership skills and create an atmosphere where everyone feels accepted and appreciated.

Club Advisors Amy Buliung and Theresa Canfield, whom we thank greatly, wanted to share the following message: "We appreciate all of the students applying for this year's Student Council and respect very much their desire to be a school leader. This year we had an overwhelming number of applicants. As you can imagine, narrowing down the list to 13 students was very difficult. We hope you will continue to get involved and support our school and community." Congratulations to these students:

James Chavez Carey, Elizabeth Crispino, Sofia D'Agnese, Sabina Fasano, Camden Frederick, Maddie Maybeck, Madeline McDermott, Maeve McVeigh, Lochlann Mezzetti, Reese Roecker, Aaron Scalo, Isaac Spicehandler, and Clair Stough.

Kindergarten students continue learning classroom routines and teamwork with their classmates. With each passing day, students gain independence by walking themselves to class in the morning. Additionally, kindergarten students build fine motor skills by learning the proper way to hold scissors, pencils, and other tools.

Mrs. Canfield shared the following: "On September 21st we read *Why Do Leaves Change Color* by Chris Arvetis and Carole Palmer. Students learned that when fall begins, leaves die. There is less sunlight because the days are shorter and the leaves no longer 'make food.' As the chlorophyll disappears the other colors begin to show. To help our kindergarten students understand these changes, we used artwork. Students drew using scratch paper. The black symbolized chlorophyll so as children scratched it away other colors appeared."

Congratulations to these kindergarten ROAR award recipients: Shelby Kendrick, Riley Nicosia, Emma Richards, Mackenzie Brosnan, Logan Fierstein

Sanfordville Elementary School

In literacy, our third-graders continued to practice their communication skills as they focused on writing

well-constructed paragraphs with a main idea, supporting sentences, and concluding sentences. In addition, students focus on capitalization and punctuation.

Our fourth-graders are life-long learners as they engage in a reader's workshop. Students worked on reading in their just right books and being able to “stop and jot” in their books to write questions, connections, and predictions. During the writer's workshop, the fourth graders wrote about a memorable moment. They also wrote a story using their imagination, and a writing piece based on one of their doodle ideas. For word study, fourth graders worked with partners to separate words into syllables.

In second grade, students learn how to be responsible citizens in our school, home and community. Classes created posters to portray ways we can all be exemplary citizens. Some examples included: making food for homeless people, building a home for the homeless, helping someone find their classroom, following our PAWS behaviors in school, picking up garbage in the halls and outside.

Warwick Valley Middle School

At the Middle School, students in Heather Davis’ sixth-grade classroom learned that creativity can take a delicious and unexpected turn. Ms. Davis’ fifth-grade students last year wrote persuasive letters to Crumbl, a renowned name in cookie making, to convince the company to embrace their ingenious cookie ideas. Crumbl responded with recognition for the project and something even sweeter – boxes of free cookies. She invited her fifth-graders from last year and sixth-graders this year to come and enjoy them!

Last year, Ms. Davis’ class was given an unusual task: creating a weekly cookie menu. Her students were encouraged to brainstorm innovative flavors and combinations that would make anyone’s taste buds tingle with excitement. Her students eagerly accepted the challenge. Dividing themselves into groups, these young innovators crafted cookie recipes that ranged from the nostalgic to the avant-garde. It was a lesson in teamwork, as these students had to collaborate, compromise, and communicate effectively to turn their cookie dreams into reality.

They then put their persuasive writing skills to the test and composed heartfelt letters to Crumbl headquarters. In the letters, they detailed their cookie ideas, baking passion, and the unique twist each cookie brought to the table. In the project, the students were collaborators and communicators. They showcased the power of teamwork, innovation, and effective communication to achieve remarkable results.

Warwick Valley High School

Many of our clubs held their initial meetings for our club fair on September 28. Our Youth in Government program provides students with an unparalleled opportunity to gain firsthand insight into the democratic process, nurturing future leaders in the process. It’s worth noting that many current local and state officials were once participants in this very program. They used it as a stepping stone to their careers in public service.

Students in the program engage in an array of activities including mock conventions and student-run elections, giving them a practical understanding of democratic decision-making. We are fortunate to have Kevan Ottochian as our program advisor, who is also an alumnus of the Youth in Government Program.