

Weekly Column: EdTalk
Superintendent of Schools: Dr. David Leach
November 15, 2023

On Tuesday, November 7, during our Superintendent's Conference Day scheduled to coincide with Election Day, our district held an emergency training and active shooter drill at Warwick Valley High School. This is the first in a multi-phase training series that is part of our ongoing efforts to keep our schools a safe and secure learning environment for everyone. The training exercise included a collaborative team of law enforcement from the Town of Warwick Police Department, including our own School Resource Officers, and the local Tactical Response Unit (TRU), which is, essentially, Orange County's version of a SWAT team.

With students off for the day, Tuesday presented the ideal opportunity for administration, faculty and staff to begin learning the foundation upon which future training will be built. As everyone gathered in the auditorium before the presentation, I heard a number of colleagues lamenting the fact that such training is necessary. Of course, I agree that it is a disturbing prospect for any of us to consider, but as our keynote speaker and training leader Lt. Kevin Phillips pointed out, it is an unfortunate symptom of the times. In 2022, there were 51 school shootings.

Lt. Phillips is part of the Woodbury Police Department and the TRU. He shared 30 years worth of experience with us, beginning his talk with a brief history of, and the recent escalation in, school shootings. His goal for the first session was to give district employees a sense of the TRU's approach to crisis situations, letting us know what we can expect and the things we should do to help ensure their smooth tactical operations.

During the training, our employees were divided into three groups, elementary employees, middle school employees and high school employees, and this included people from every department, and who fill every role in our school community. The three groups rotated through three settings wherein the officers demonstrated their training and techniques in critical situations. There were two hallway/classroom settings, along with a large group setting in the high school media center, where a hostage scenario was staged.

We have shared more detail about last week's training on our district website, and I invite you to read that article for more insight. The subsequent sessions, which we estimate will be held every six months, leading up to an active shooter training for employees and students. We do not have dates set for those training sessions yet, but we will keep everyone updated. Training will not be open to the public or the media, for security reasons.

This training is another of Warwick's numerous security and safety initiatives, and further highlights our commitment to the safety of the students in our care. Other measures we have

already taken this school year include updating our District-Wide School Safety Plan, and partnering with a security consultancy we contracted with at the beginning of the school year, to assess and, where needed, improve the safety and security measures we currently have in place at our schools.

I want to commend our faculty and staff for being so invested in this important training. It was an important and impactful day, and everyone came together to focus on these essential topics. Their dedication to the safety of our students and the well-being of our school community is greatly appreciated. We also cannot thank our law enforcement agencies enough for the time and attention they've paid our district already. It may seem odd to say that we are looking forward to future training sessions, given the subject matter, but each subsequent session will provide us with more knowledge, invaluable opportunities to learn how to respond and to practice responding, and to test our current safety protocols and measures.

Here are some highlights from our schools this week:

Park Avenue Elementary School

Veterans Day is a big deal at Park Avenue. For years now, our community has demonstrated a commitment to honor its veterans by organizing and hosting a wonderful Veterans Day Celebration that takes place in our gym, with a PTA-sponsored breakfast in the cafeteria for veterans and their student family members. This year's event included:

- The presentation of colors by a US Marine Corps Color Guard
- The High School's Meistersingers directed by Noreen Hanson
- Performances by the Wire Choir and Park Avenue students, directed by Elissa Maynard and Katlyn Chester, respectively
- A roll call of veterans' names

This is a huge, annual expression of gratitude for all of our local veterans and veterans across the nation!

Our new volunteer newspaper club is just getting warmed up. *The Paw Print* will give participating third and fourth grade students opportunities to hone their journalistic (and other) skills. Students can serve in a variety of capacities including writing, photography, designing, etc. I'd like to thank club advisors Krystie Gilmore and Ashley McPherson for spearheading this club and volunteering so our students can benefit from this wonderful experience.

Sanfordville Elementary School

Kindergarten through fourth grade classes have taken time to learn more about our veterans, reading books, discussing Scholastic Magazine articles, and watching videos about military

families and their service. Some classes created cards and wrote letters that were dropped off at the local VFW, and some classes were even visited by special veteran family members.

Megan Bensetler and Kaitlyn Lordy hosted their inaugural *Kindergarten Buddies Applefest* with Alexandra Steinberg's fourth grade class. The students collaborated to taste test different apples and recorded their opinions about each. Then, students held a vote to see which one was the most popular. The green apple was their favorite. The problem-solving buddies also investigated the cores of apples, which look like stars, and completed a star craft with the apples. Our teachers can't wait to make this an annual event with their kindergarten buddies.

The SES Drama Club is happy to announce this year's production, *Finding Nemo Kids!* The third and fourth graders will begin auditions in mid-December. Rehearsals will begin when the school reopens after the holiday break in January, and the performances will take place on April 26 and 27.

Warwick Valley Middle School

The eighth-grade students are diving into an exciting journey in their Technology Classes. In the new marking period students are exploring two fascinating fields: Automation and Robotics, where they learn about the intricate art of transferring energy using gear ratios, and Green Architecture, delving into the principles of sustainable home design, renewable energy, and energy conservation.

Both courses empower students with knowledge and skills that are not only valuable today but will also play a pivotal role in shaping a sustainable and technology-driven future. These courses truly encompass all aspects of our district's Portrait of a Graduate. As our students continue to learn, experiment, and innovate, we can look forward to a brighter and greener tomorrow.

In Brett Algera's and Stephen Garby's fifth grade math classes, the spirit of division is alive and well. Students embarked on a captivating poster project that not only tested their mathematical prowess but also showcased their creativity and presentation skills. Working in small groups, these students created posters that brought word problems to life. Each group met and exceeded the criteria for the project, presenting their solutions with confidence and flair, both verbally and visually. It's clear that these students are not just learning about division; they're embracing it with enthusiasm and innovation.

Warwick Valley High School

Local veterans visited the High School in honor of Veteran's Day. They provided students with unique and invaluable opportunities to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences that come with serving in the military. This visit offered our students a glimpse into the history of our nation, and created a bridge between generations, fostering respect and appreciation for those

who have dedicated their lives to protect our freedoms. As the veterans shared their personal stories, students had the chance to connect with the human faces behind the uniform, making the experiences of these brave men and women more relatable. Their firsthand accounts, whether from times of peace or conflict, offered our students insight into the values of honor, commitment, and service to our country, and inspired them to consider the importance of citizenship and community involvement.

The impact of this visit goes beyond the classroom, as it helps to instill a sense of gratitude and pride in our students. Meeting our local veterans helps create a sense of unity and respect within the school community, strengthening the partnership with our school community at large. By hearing about the challenges, triumphs, and sacrifices these veterans have faced, students gain a greater appreciation for the freedoms they enjoy every day and are inspired to become informed and active citizens. We extend a heartfelt thanks to our veterans for spending the day with our high school students and for their continued service.