

Weekly Column: EdTalk
Superintendent of Schools: Dr. David Leach
December 6, 2023

Warwick Valley High School AP Environmental Science students last week visited the Village of Warwick Wastewater Treatment Plant. There, they gained an understanding of wastewater processing, including the latest technological advancements in water pollution control. They also conducted a field investigation at nearby Wawayanda Creek, testing water quality.

Jason Touw's students collected and tested samples upstream and downstream of the plant's discharge pipe. They tested for dissolved oxygen, dissolved solids, nitrates and phosphates. The field experience was one of many for this class this year.

In two weeks, Mr. Touw's students will visit the Wallkill National Wildlife Refuge to look at how different federal lands are managed. They will talk with wildlife biologists and a US Fish and Wildlife Service law enforcement officer. His students will also follow the trail of recyclables from the school bins, to the transfer station in Goshen, to a transfer station in Rockland County, and then eventually to a recycling sorting plant in the Bronx. At the plant, large recycling bales will then be shipped to buyers.

The Warwick Valley Central School District has a lot of field trips that support the curriculum. Field trips motivate and connect students to classroom learning. They help build confidence in a topic or subject and promote higher level thinking. Visual and kinesthetic learners can see, touch and feel real-life learning.

To ensure that these off-campus experiences are meaningful and relevant to student learning, the district has classified student trips into three categories.

The first category is educational field trips, which directly relate to the curriculum. The Environmental Science trip noted above falls into this category. These trips are considered part of the school's curriculum and are subject to the same rules as regular classroom activities, including student conduct and attendance. When deciding whether to approve these trips, factors such as their connection to the curriculum, distance, transportation availability and cost, and weather conditions are taken into account.

The second category of student trips includes those organized by school organizations, such as sports teams, performing groups, and clubs.

The third category includes approved group trips, like the senior class trip.

The district arranges more than 50 field trips annually for Warwick Valley students. These trips also provide students with opportunities to apply the concepts they learn in the classroom in real-

world environments and situations, which can be inspiring and motivating. They also give students the chance to learn while interacting and socializing with their peers in a relaxed setting outside of the usual academic environment. This approach helps build relationships and promotes collaborative work.

To ensure meaningful and relevant trips, the teachers select appropriate destinations. It also sets clear objectives, and provides background information for students. Here is just a sampling of some of the field trip destinations Warwick Valley students have enjoyed. In addition to this list, the district also arranges numerous college visits throughout the year and many visits to area high schools for academic and arts competitions.

International Beauty Show (New York City), Thunderbird Farms (Goshen), National Association of Broadcasters Expo (NYC), Orange County Emergency Service Center (Goshen), Yankee Stadium (Bronx), STEM Day at Hershey Park (Hershey, Pennsylvania), FDR Library (Hyde Park), Radio City Music Hall (NYC), Phantom of the Opera on Broadway, Music in the Parks Competitions at Dorney Park (Allentown, Pennsylvania), Regeneron/DNA Learning Center (Sleepy Hollow), Warwick Wastewater Treatment Plant, Wallkill National Wildlife Refuge (Pine Island), Westchester Incinerator (Peekskill), Liberty Science Center (Jersey City, New Jersey), Pochuck Mountain State Park (Pine Island), New York Library Association Library Lobby Day (Albany), Orange County Government Center (Goshen), Hudson Theatre (NYC), the Metropolitan Museum of Art (NYC), Legoland (Goshen), Storm King Art Center (New Windsor), Bear Mountain Zoo (Bear Mountain), Woodmont Day Camp (New City), Wright Family Farm (Warwick), Museum Village (Monroe), Turtleback Zoo (West Orange, New Jersey), Museum of the Hudson Highlands (Cornwall-on-Hudson), and West Point.

Despite the logistical challenges and expense of field trips, the benefits far outweigh the effort. As educators and parents, it's critical to recognize the value of these experiences and advocate for their continued inclusion in our children's education.

Here are some highlights from our schools this week:

Park Avenue Elementary School

Kindergarten students investigated and explored natural forces, using a bridge they constructed out of index cards. The universal question: How strong is your bridge? Kindergarten scientists hypothesized about the weight their bridges would hold before collapsing under various classroom items – crayons, paperclips, cotton balls, straws and washers. They graphed their results and shared them with fellow scientists. Ms. White's class recorded their results in their Family Response Journal, so families could discuss and learn at home. Families wrote back thanking students for teaching their families about heavy vs. light, gravity, forces, and push and pull.

Second graders learned about quick changes to the earth and created models of those events, including volcanoes, landslides and earthquakes. Students thought about how engineers design and build structures to withstand earthquakes, then collaborated and communicated to plan and build successful structures of their own. Using index cards, tape and popsicle sticks, teams had 35 minutes to create 12-inch tall structures that could bear the weight of a post-it pad and withstand a simulated earthquake for 10 seconds.

Sanfordville Elementary School

Students in the fourth grade completed their STEMscopes unit, Organism Structure and Behavior. They used the scientific knowledge they gained to design and build a model of a new animal species found on a remote island. They were given the opportunity to be the first “Junior Zoologist” to visit the island and learn about this new species, and then teach others about it. They worked collaboratively with their peers in small groups to plan and create a model of this animal. This approach was to show how their animal senses danger and responds to it. This information was shared with others in a “zoo exhibit” using an animal identification sign created in Google Drawing. Students shared their exhibits with classmates and visitors.

December 1 marked the end of school's first trimester. However, it was also the day our students participated in the PAWS Celebration. At 9:15 a.m., Kindergarten, first, and second grade students were invited to participate in a game show celebration and third and fourth grade students were given the opportunity to test their knowledge at 10:15 a.m. This celebration was a fun way to help celebrate and reinforce our Polite, Accountable, Wise, and Safe choices that our students have been making so far this school year. Later that evening, the school community tested their knowledge with their families and friends. Current Sanfordville families could sign up in teams of 8-10 people to compete in this fun-filled event. Thank you to the SES PTA for organizing this event!

Warwick Valley Middle School

The middle school partnered with the Albert Wisner Public Library so that all of our fifth grade students could experience their first middle school field trip. During the visit, students toured the library like a scavenger hunt. This was to familiarize them with the library's many collections and areas. They learned the process of checking out a book. They also enjoyed the library's comfy area for a read-aloud by one of the librarians. Every student goes home with a library card application. Library cards will be processed and mailed home to the student and their parents (who will ultimately be responsible for check-outs). The visit ended with a raffle/giveaway to encourage students to visit the library again.

Warwick Valley High School

The high school is thrilled to announce that they are proudly collaborating with local radio station WTbQ for the Eighth Annual Toys for Military Tots Drive. This heartwarming initiative aims to collect donated, unwrapped toys for children ranging in age from baby to 12 years old.

The partnership with WTBQ, spearheaded by Orange County Executive Steve Neuhaus; former Senator Mike Martucci; John (Cheech) Richici, President of the Nam Knights; Amanda Dana, Director of Orange County Tourism & Film; Orange County Bank & Trust; and John S. Burke Catholic, among others, underscores community-wide support for this cause. This collaboration not only exemplifies the spirit of giving during the holiday season but also extends gratitude to those who make significant sacrifices for our nation.