

**Weekly Column: EdTalk**  
**Superintendent of Schools: Dr. David Leach**  
**January 17, 2024**

Warwick Valley Central School District is proud of our continual efforts to stay on the leading edge of Pupil Personnel Services (PPS) and Special Education. EdTalk has focused on successes, ongoing initiatives, and goals around the district for the 2023-2024 school year. We looked at elementary, middle, and high school programs. This week I am delighted to share some notable news that highlights our district's commitment to inclusive education. I am also proud to share the valuable opportunities it provides for our students and educators.

Recognizing the importance of successful co-teach implementation, our district provides Co-Teacher Training for kindergarten through 6th grade, based on the latest best practices. This year, our vigorous training schedule began in November. General education and special education teachers divided into two groups – kindergarten through 4th grade and 5th grade through 6th grade – participated in these sessions. This approach fosters collaboration and collective understanding between teams.

So far, we have held two sessions and the feedback received has been overwhelmingly positive. With four more sessions planned throughout the remainder of the year, we've been delighted and encouraged by the effectiveness of this training to enhance the co-teaching experience for faculty, and by the learning benefits ultimately passed along to our students.

Our district also provides Professional Development for Instructional Aides to ensure we are doing our finest to meet special education students' needs. These trainings cover crucial topics such as the Power of Relationships in Reinforcing Classroom Behaviors, Instructional Foundations, and Choosing Words Wisely to Maximize Student Learning. This initiative reflects our district's commitment to making sure all staff members have the knowledge and skills to support a student body with diverse needs.

During the busy December, our Elementary Special Olympics Team still found the time and motivation to gear up for this year's competition! The Special Olympics program promotes inclusion by bringing students with and without intellectual disabilities together as teammates. Participants learn about teamwork and physical activity benefits. Warwick Valley is proud of the athletes who train and compete in this popular program. We look forward to seeing our team compete in April, at the Special Olympics event at Presidential Park Elementary School in Middletown.

Students from our Life Skills program, with the support of our high school team, embarked on two vocational field trips recently. The first of their trips took the students to Wright Family Farm, where they engaged in hands-on experiences and learned about agriculture and farming. Their second trip had them "heading out to pick a few things up" at Warwick ShopRite. The experience, designed to promote independence and community exploration, had the students create and fill individual grocery lists, and then navigate the self-checkout line.

Looking ahead to the remainder of the 2023-2024 school year, the district aims to continue driving improvements in co-teacher training, ensuring that teachers are comfortable with various models to enhance their classroom practices. This commitment to ongoing professional development aligns with the district's dedication to creating a supportive learning environment for all students.

Finally, we had an external audit of post-secondary transitions for special education students, which yielded positive results. To improve this process even further, we will plan to facilitate conversations with other districts and schools. We will reach out in collaborative efforts to enhance transitional planning for students entering the workforce or pursuing higher education.

Our faculty, staff and support system continue to actively seek opportunities for improvement. Through effective training, engaging initiatives, and a focus on post-secondary transitions, Warwick Valley remains committed to fostering inclusion and a supportive educational environment for every student.

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

### **Park Avenue Elementary School**

Second graders were introduced to First Chapter Flashlight Friday last week in the library. These are fun and exciting ways to expand students' perspectives, while engaging them in reading. Students are encouraged to select a book different from their preferred genre/subject. Once everyone has selected a book, the lights are turned off and reading begins with a flashlight! Mr. Spicehandler shared that "utilizing flashlights to read in the library is an exciting activity for students, and increases their engagement in discovering new stories, topics and genres outside of their previous interests." Expanding their perspective and broadening their horizons in this way through reading is an effective way to support students in becoming global and ethical students, communicators, collaborators and life-long learners."

In 1st grade students started a Lois Ehlert-inspired birch tree project. They began by reading Snowballs, by Ehlert, and discussing the imagery used throughout the story. Focus was on the white and black birch trees, and the colorful cardinals depicted. After reading the story, the artists made their own birch trees from cardboard and black paint. They created vibrant watercolor and oil pastel pages. These paintings will be used to make a collage of colorful cardinals. Ms. Martimucci reports, "First graders had a fun time crafting beautiful painted papers with different art techniques and materials to create their winter birch tree scenes next time in art class!"

### **Sanfordville Elementary School**

Congratulations to the SES students whose artwork was selected for the NYSED 2024 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Student Art & Essay Exhibition. Students submitted original artwork reflecting what they learned about Dr. King's Six Principles of Nonviolence. SES artists whose artwork was shown in the exhibition were: Teddy Davis, Blake Warmbier, Cameron Stanton, Morgan Pegues, Alexis Obrotka, and Pleasant Smith. Great job to our creative and talented young artists, and thank you to art teacher Sunhwa Gil for submitting our students' work.

Ms. Cancel's 2nd graders learn how to use call letters to find fiction books in the library. The teacher shared that "E" represents easy books, and "F" is for fiction. After learning that call letters represent the first three letters of an author's last name, students were challenged to a book-finding scavenger hunt based on call letters. Students worked collaboratively in groups to hunt for books in the library.

And, let's hear it for the Sanfordville Special Olympic athletes, who began practicing for this year's competition in April! This past Wednesday – and once every week between now and April – students will practice after school with coaches and volunteers. This year Sanfordville has 10 athletes headed to the games, along with 20-plus volunteer assistants. Students competing in Middletown on April 13 will show off their soccer and basketball skills.

### **Warwick Valley Middle School**

Ms. Shook's science classes completed a fascinating experiment on convection currents within the Earth's mantle. With containers filled with cold water, coffee cups, a cup of hot water, and a vibrant dye representing subterranean molten rock, students observed and documented the mesmerizing patterns that formed as heat was transferred through the fluid. This dynamic experiment gave students a tangible way to understand the intricate interplay between temperature, density, and movement beneath our planet's surface. As students observed the dyed water swirling and rising, they recorded their data and observations in groups. The lesson also gave students a deeper understanding of our planet's forces.

Students have also received valuable health education on the essential concepts of stroke and heart attack, through a combination of interactive lessons, informative discussions, and real-life case studies. Students have learned the key differences between these two medical emergencies. They explore the physiological aspects of both, as well as preventative measures and lifestyle choices that affect cardiovascular health. Intertwined with the unit on cardiovascular health is the topic of CPR. The module equips students with the knowledge and practical skills necessary to respond effectively in emergency situations. This is done through theoretical lessons and practical demonstrations. Students learned the importance of early intervention in cardiac emergencies, how to assess a victim's condition, perform chest compressions, and administer rescue breaths. Ms. Gouveia aims to empower her middle school students to make informed decisions about their well-being, and become advocates for heart health in their communities.

### **Warwick Valley High School**

Sophomores heard about the opportunities and benefits of Career & Technical Education (CTE) courses from peers who are currently enrolled. Their firsthand testimonials provided unique insights into practical skills acquired in courses such as Cosmetology, Video & TV Production, Criminal Justice, Aviation, and Health Occupations.

WVHS and BOCES provide diverse CTE offerings that prepare students for various post-secondary pathways. In fact, students can explore cosmetology, broadcast production, and criminal justice right here at the high school, thanks to our in-house CTE programs. Cosmetology equips students with essential skills for beauty industry careers, while Video & TV

production focuses on media creation expertise. Both provide hands-on experience, including open-to-the-public days at the Wildcuts Salon, or filming, editing, and producing television and digital content. Our Criminal Justice program is a two-year commitment that helps students develop the fundamentals of law enforcement, criminal investigations, and the judicial system. It establishes a strong foundation for students interested in careers in law enforcement and other adjacent fields. Some CTE programs available to Warwick students at the BOCES campus include Dental Assistant, Aviation, Education, Carpentry, Electrician, and Heavy Equipment Operation. CTE is a collaborative effort between the high school and BOCES, giving all students equal access to comprehensive and diverse experiences, and equipping them with practical skills and knowledge for success in their chosen fields.