

**Weekly Column: EdTalk**  
**Superintendent of Schools: Dr. David Leach**  
**January 10, 2024**

In the past couple of EdTalk columns, I've discussed initiatives, successes, and goals in our elementary schools and middle school. It's been a pleasure to prepare these overviews. I wanted to share student and faculty successes and accomplishments, as well as educational aspirations for the rest of this school year and beyond. This week, the faculty and students of Warwick Valley High School are in the spotlight.

Our high school administration, led by Principal Georgianna Diopoulos, keeps faculty and staff informed and engaged with Wildcat Weekly. The weekly handout provides building employees with reminders and safety tips, space for shout-outs, and a calendar of upcoming events. As an academic centerpiece, each weekly communicate features an "instructional strategy of the week." Some of the strategies recently are: Error analysis, improving group work, techniques for answering questions from students, and effective note taking strategies for students.

This example is just one of how our collaborative team of educators shares situations and ideas to elevate learning experiences for our students. Faculty meetings at the high school often turn the focus to professional development, and teachers benefit from departmental and interdepartmental efforts to tackle instructional topics and hurdles faced in the educational setting, such as: open-ended routines, creating discussion based on learning objectives, and helping lessons to be more aligned with lesson objectives.

This approach has fostered, within our staff, a community of Lifelong Learners, who model lifelong learning behavior for our students. So many of our teachers and administrators continue to pursue additional degrees, certifications, and interests. And not only do they bring relevant knowledge back to their students, but their own curiosity and pursuit of that knowledge encourages students to be proactive with their own interests, to pursue learning experiences and avoid stagnation.

Two wonderful examples (among many) from our faculty are:

Lisa Reece, Science

In 2022, Ms. Reece took a trip to Finland to study the Finnish education system. This past summer, she traveled to Australia, New Zealand, and Fiji to do the same. She has traveled the globe to gain a more global perspective on teaching and explore other countries' education methods. This year, she will present at a national conference for science teachers, hosted by Nourish the Future. She will share what she learns with other Master Teachers and utilize her expanded knowledge in the classroom.

Eduardo Avila, Criminal Justice

Mr. Avila is currently working on his PhD dissertation in Criminal Justice. He was recently recognized by the Detectives Crime Clinic of NY/NJ for outstanding performance in crime prevention, apprehension, and prosecution. The NYPD Detective/Organized Crime Control

Bureau presented him with this award. Mr. Avila's membership in the Detectives Crime Clinic also creates unique networking and collaborative opportunities for his students in the school's Criminal Justice Program.

Lifelong learning, in many ways, means independent learning. Our district's Portrait of a Graduate includes lifelong learning because we want our students to solve problems. But, perhaps more importantly, we also want to inspire in them an intellectual curiosity to identify and explore the problems that pique their own interest; to work toward solutions that will make them feel fulfilled.

Two groups of students who embody this mindset are our Science Research and Senior Project students. Students in both programs are required to choose a research topic, design their own course of study, and identify a mentor in their chosen field. With this mentor, they build rapport and collaborate independently. Senior Project is a national program and the Science Research program is affiliated with SUNY Albany. Both require students to be primarily self-directed in meeting rigorous benchmarks, including college-level research papers, professional journals review and summary, adjudicated presentations, and more.

Having spent time with both groups of students this year, I can say that I am blown away by the ambition and scope of their projects. I can't wait until June for the Senior Project Boards and Science Research Symposium. In fact, I congratulate the Science Research seniors, who have reached the third year of this demanding, but rewarding, three-year program!

The mentor aspect of these two programs delivers the obvious value of students benefiting from professional expertise, insights, and connections. It also encourages and enables students to be active participants in the vibrancy of their own communities, which is another tenet of our Portrait of a Graduate; we refer to it as being an Ethical and Global Citizen. Encouraging students to make connections in the community is a vital part of our educational approach. This helps them build skills as Communicators and Collaborators – all qualities that will benefit them in their post-secondary endeavors.

I hope you enjoyed these three weeks of insights and highlights from our four schools. Being privy to all of our staff's milestones, honors and awards, innovations and strategies, I could go on for pages and still not cover them all. Happily, we have an active website and social media, where you can always peek at what's occurring around the district. I hope you'll check in with us regularly, to learn more about what's happening in academics, the arts, athletics, co-curriculars and everything else happening in Wildcat country.