

Weekly Column: EdTalk
Superintendent of Schools: Dr. David Leach
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This year we introduced Portrait of a Graduate in Action to our district website's News section. The articles discuss the seven qualities of our district's Portrait of a Graduate. This document represents our community's aspirational vision for the skills, attributes and dispositions every Warwick Valley graduate should possess. Community input was an invaluable part of developing the Portrait of a Graduate, so we wanted to come up with a way to bring the seven qualities to life for readers in the community by providing context straight from our programs, our classrooms, our faculty, and, of course, our students.

The stories highlight instances of the seven qualities "in action" in the district. They are examples of qualities being nurtured and of individuals putting them into practice; usually they are both. Using personal anecdotes and everyday evidence, these stories focus on educational relationships, experiential learning, the importance of student choice, group collaboration and the development of enduring academic, interpersonal and critical thinking skills. I hope these pieces provide a sense of how the Portrait of a Graduate is not only incorporated into our curricular programs, but it is an integral part of our overall school culture!

This week, I'd like to introduce four of the stories we have done so far. I encourage you to visit our website to read more. As a reminder, the seven qualities are: Collaborator, Communicator, Creators & Innovators, Ethical & Global Citizens, Resilient Individuals, Problem-Solvers, and Lifelong Learners.

Three Qualities Shine Through in Homecoming Camaraderie

We profiled the dedicated float-building students from each WVHS class during Spirit Week 2023, highlighting effective Creators, Collaborators and Communicators. We were in the transportation garage, as the teams were "in a feverish race to complete their floats by Thursday night... meeting and strategizing... handing responsibilities to each other." The article looks at students working together to take a project from concept to completion and onto Main Street. It was a hectic week around a beloved Warwick tradition. The story reflects that strong sense of community that comes with the parade and game every year.

Lifelong Learning Modeled

Most recently, we profiled WVHS science teacher Lisa Reece. Her dedication to lifelong learning satisfies her own interests and curiosity and, more importantly, allows her to bring new opportunities and unique inspiration to her WV students! We talked to Ms. Reece about her trip to space camp, her global travels experiencing classrooms and educational systems from Finland to the Peruvian Amazon. She also talked about her role as a NYS Master Teacher Emeritus, and being a Master Gardener through Cornell Cooperative Extension. It is a fun article wherein Ms. Reece encourages students to follow her lead, and "not to be afraid to put [themselves] out there!"

Elementary Students Get Firsthand Civics Lesson

Being a Global & Ethical Citizen includes civic responsibility and willingness to engage with your community. To learn how their community works, students in our Partners in Education (PIE) program took a field trip to Town Hall. The story follows them through a day of discovery, from checking out the big equipment used by the DPW to the cars used by the WVPD. The students also met with the Town Supervisor and Trustees. They shared some ideas for civic enhancements that they had brainstormed and written down to share with Town officials.

Innovators Explore Interests in a 3-Year Research Program

Students in our Science Research Program begin during their sophomore year and, over the course of the program, interact with the scientific research community. They conduct, record, report on (and possibly publish the findings of) authentic research projects of their own design. Innovation is at the forefront of this article, focusing on WVHS students who push themselves into areas of study that extend beyond what is not typically part of the high school curriculum. For example, topics range from neuroscience, medicine, bioengineering, etc. The story is told through student accounts and a discussion with program advisor, WVHS science teacher Kristin Touw. It also looks at how the program helps students build strong collaboration and communication skills.

I hope these introductions have piqued your interest, and I encourage you to read more about Portrait of a Graduate in Action on our district website. Type "portrait of a graduate" into the search window to view all articles in one place.

Here are some highlights from our schools this week:

Park Avenue Elementary School

The auditions for this year's Park Avenue Talent Show have all been done, and our resident performers and artists – even martial artists! – are ready for next week's extravaganza. The Park Avenue Talent Show will be on Friday, January 26. (Snow Date: February 2). Our annual talent show gives students in all grades the chance to showcase their talents, interests, and practice.

Last week was No Name-Calling Week in our schools. We emphasize kindness in action, with our theme: In a World Where You Can Be Anything, Choose Kind! We all enjoyed a project that highlighted kindness as an alternative to name calling and teasing. Blank cards were distributed so that students could write gratitude statements on them. These statements could include thanking someone for a good deed, or sharing how someone around them spread kindness. Positive notes will be displayed on the walls near the lobby. The No-Name Calling Week celebration featured all kinds of fun activities, including themed dress days. It was a shortened week, but we had a couple of days to enjoy! They wore their favorite sports teams' colors and/or jerseys to show how it's critical to Team Up Against Teasing. And then it was sweatshirt/sweatpants day, to show that It's No Sweat to be a Friend to Someone!

Sanfordville Elementary School

Our SES students are growing as writers! Ms. Jackson's Kindergarten class has been working hard to fine-tune their writing mechanics: finger spaces, upper case, letters, usage, and punctuation. Doing so has enabled the students to express their ideas more clearly through writing. Through independent brainstorming and partner collaboration during writing workshops, their skills grow daily!

Meanwhile, our second grade authors published their nonfiction writing! The students learned different writing strategies that help readers learn about a specific topic. The students choose their own subjects, including turtles, video games, dance, landforms, weathering and erosion, and cats. Students utilized strategies like including a hook, adding comparisons, making twin sentences, using size, shape and color to describe their topics, and including pop out words to make their writing exciting! Students celebrated in our classes, and provided feedback on each other's writing. They also used props to show off their writing!

Although it was a weather-shortened week, everyone at SES enjoyed (and learned from) participating in the nationwide No Name-Calling initiative. In Warwick, our official No Name-Calling Week slogan was: In a World Where You Can Be Anything, Choose Kind! Our students participated in activities that helped them realize the impact of verbal bullying. We taught them strategies for coping with and ending name-calling. Sanfordville students and staff also supported No Name-Calling Week by dressing in unity for themed days.

Warwick Valley Middle School

The first trait of our district's portrait is that of a collaborator. The middle school has been busy collaborating with both the community and across grade levels. Last week, Mr. Patafio's 7th grade Social Studies classes hosted the Friends of Hathorn House. This is a community-based organization that brings colonial times to life in the classroom. Our guests were dressed in 18th century clothes and had stories to tell for the characters they portrayed. Our students rotated through three informative stations – a colonial doctor who taught about Revolutionary-era medicine; a station about garments, and how clothes were produced in the 1700's; and a third station had students read a Revolutionary-era Warwick map, to learn what life was like in our area, as people braved nature's elements with the war continuing around them! Additionally students learned that John Hathorne was appointed the Colonel of the Orange County Militia in 1776, and served in the first and fourth congresses of the United States. We look forward to welcoming the Friends of Hathorn House back next year.

Seventh and 8th grade National Junior Honor Society (NJHS) students demonstrate exceptional leadership and community engagement by dedicating their time to tutoring their younger counterparts in the 5th and 6th grades. This collaboration fosters a supportive learning environment, but also promotes our school community. NJHS students, known for academic excellence, serve as role models for younger students. They offer guidance and assistance in various subjects every Tuesday after school. Through this mentoring relationship, the 7th and 8th graders not only contribute to the academic success of their peers. They also instill a spirit of camaraderie and commitment to educational excellence throughout the school. This initiative

exemplifies the values of service, leadership, and mentorship central to the NJHS mission. Mr. Justiana and the entire NJHS exemplify our Portrait of a Graduate.

Warwick Valley High School

Recently, the high school, in collaboration with the Warwick Valley High School PTSA, the Bon Secours Charity Health System and community members, organized a community forum. This was to address mental health. The forum focused on anxiety, addiction, and suicide prevention. This acknowledged the urgent need to initiate dialogue on these topics within the community. The panel consisted of mental health experts, medical clinicians, and suicide prevention advocates. They shared their insights, experiences and strategies for tackling these challenges. Throughout the forum, the professionals delved into the prevalence of anxiety and addiction among adolescents. They stressed the importance of early intervention and destigmatizing mental health issues. They offered valuable information on identifying warning signs, seeking help, and fostering a supportive environment for those struggling. Suicide prevention strategies, including community resources and support networks were also highlighted. The forum aimed to raise awareness and encourage a collaborative approach to addressing mental health challenges within our community. Overall, the event served as a crucial platform for education, discussion, and community engagement on these sensitive and vital topics. We look forward to hosting this event again in the spring.