

Weekly Column: EdTalk
Superintendent of Schools: Dr. David Leach
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In last week's EdTalk, I focused on our elementary schools, and shared a comprehensive overview that included highlights of student and faculty accomplishments. I also looked at other areas of pride and our aspirations for 2024. This week, I will look at Warwick Valley Middle School.

The WVMS Student Senate had a banner fall, with a surge in interest from both students and community organizations. This work led to some incredible civic opportunities and successes! The Senate spearheaded a district-wide Pink Out Day this fall to raise awareness and donations for breast cancer research. And as the holiday season progressed, the Senate was instrumental in helping make the WTBQ Toys for Military Tots toy drive the resounding success that it was. The middle school senators organized their toy drop, from getting the physical boxes to marketing the drive and soliciting donations. The middle school donated over 300 toys to military children!

Another remarkable group, the Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD) Club, has its largest membership ever, 72 students! SADD promotes healthy decision-making and offers positive peer interaction. Recent events organized by the SADD Club, such as movie nights and a Taylor Swift Birthday Party, have provided students with safe and enjoyable social settings. The SADD Club also collaborates closely with the Warwick Valley Prevention Coalition to further both their missions.

Initiated by teachers Mark Botta and Warren Patafio, the WVMS Stocks Club has drawn 60 members with its catchy slogan, "You can't afford to miss it!" The club educates students about the stock market, stressing the importance of time and introducing them to the S&P 500. The club seeks to shed light on the market's historical successes and risks. The club has set a long-term goal to represent WVCSD by ringing the opening bell on Wall Street one day! Another significant highlight has been the implementation of the Middle School Civic Readiness Capstone Project in eighth grade. The capstone project will provide students with the opportunity to research local problems, propose solutions, and present their findings. As part of the program, middle school students can earn credit toward their Seal of Civic Readiness Seal, a formal recognition by NYSED that a student has attained a high level of proficiency in terms of civic knowledge, civic skills, civic mindset, and civic experiences.

Of course, I am able to share such great updates as the ones you just read (and there are so many more like them) because of the excellent educators who make up our faculty, and their commitment to identifying and applying the best instructional strategies. Lately, some middle school educators have been exploring kinesthetic approaches such as concentric circles and four corners, along with the "Who am I?" approach. These are innovative strategies that foster student engagement by encouraging active participation in the classroom. Several teachers have focused on Visible Thinking and John Hattie's leading research. Hattie holds that "Visible

Learning and Teaching occurs when teachers see learning through the eyes of students and help them become their own teachers.”

Hattie emphasizes the assessment of teaching impact on learning outcomes, and is committed to setting ambitious targets aimed at optimizing student achievement. His research includes the evaluation of staff members' influence on student learning, recognizing the invaluable contributions made by all members of the school community. Hattie's vision also extends to the importance of listening to students' and teachers' voices, valuing their insights as catalysts for improving educational practices. Ultimately, you could say he champions learning environments that foster learning from mistakes. This is so that everyone can grow and develop without fear of losing face when errors arise.

In conclusion, Warwick Valley Middle School has achieved remarkable milestones, fostered collaboration, and set ambitious goals for 2024. Our educational community's dedication, commitment, and passion shine brightly, ensuring a promising future for our students and our school.

Moreover, the middle school faculty applies its proven learning strategies to diverse areas of study and students at different grade levels. Effective practices are reinforced during post-observation meetings with teachers, underscoring the importance of ongoing improvement and professional development. All of this comes together to create classroom experiences that enhance student voice and engagement. These experiences reflect the seven tenets outlined in our district's Portrait of a Graduate.

We are all proud of the many achievements and advancements being made – and launched - every day at middle school. And that is particularly so for the way the middle school team continues to build upon its existing strengths. It also maintains an atmosphere where teachers are encouraged to keep intellectually engaging assignments, assessments, and projects coming! It is a proactive and collaborative approach to education, and we can see how it is preparing our students for real-life experiences in high school, and even the career and collegiate pathways that will be available to them after!