

**Weekly Column: EdTalk**  
**Superintendent of Schools: Dr. David Leach**  
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In January, individual wellness becomes a common goal. New Year's resolutions gain a lot of attention, with numerous newly published studies and articles on the subject. It's a period when many of us take proactive steps to enhance our own well-being.

The 2024 Forbes Health/OnePoll survey indicates that we're all motivated and united toward common wellness goals. They include improved fitness (48% of us), improved finances (38%), losing weight (34%), and eating better (32%). But, the survey also shows that the average New Year's resolution doesn't make it through April.

It's almost February, but we need to remember that wellness is an important topic all year round. It's well documented that student wellness equates to better school success and higher academic achievement. Student wellness means being healthy mentally and physically. Healthy students are better at social integration, behave better, and are more resilient. The Warwick Valley Central School District offers students many opportunities to learn and grow in various aspects of wellness.

A recent professional development session in the district led by our Health & Wellness team reflected on the importance of wellness for our teachers and staff. They discussed the Wellness Wheel, which has various forms online. You can even find assessment tools to measure your own health. At this professional development session, our team privately assessed their own individual wellness based on eight categories defined by Headspace that encompass wellness:

Social Wellness – Developing a sense of connection, belonging, and a well-developed support system.

Emotional Wellness – Coping effectively with life and creating satisfying relationships.

Spiritual Wellness – Expanding our sense of purpose and meaning in life.

Intellectual Wellness – Recognizing creative abilities and finding ways to expand knowledge and skills.

Physical Wellness – Recognizing the need for physical activity, diet, sleep and nutrition.

Environmental Wellness – Good health by occupying pleasant, stimulating environments that support well-being.

Financial Wellness – Satisfaction with current and future financial situations.

Occupational Wellness – Personal satisfaction and enrichment derived from one's work.

They discussed developing their own goals based on the acronym SMART (Specific, Measureable, Attainable, Relevant and Timely). Having goals that are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and timely will increase your chances of succeeding in meeting them.

What does your Wellness Wheel look like? Healthy adults who surround a child's life will help a child live a healthy life and succeed at school.

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

### **Park Avenue Elementary School**

First graders were introduced to virtual reality headsets during STEM activities. After learning safety rules, each student explored some winter scenes and objects. Students stood on a frozen lake in Russia, analyzed a 3D image of an emperor penguin, and even watched a polar bear come right up to them. After the tour, students drew a picture of something they saw and wrote a sentence summarizing it. Third graders began their magnet exploration, which is part of the school's current unit called, "Designing Maglev Transportation Systems." Students learned how magnets work by solving the mystery of the Magnetic Sailing activity. Students were challenged to figure out how to use magnets to get their magnetic 'sailboat' across a water basin. They learned key vocabulary words, including attract, repel and the north and south poles.

Thirty projects were displayed and celebrated during this year's STEM Fair. Parents and judges circulated throughout our gym and cafeteria to hear all about friction and volcanic eruptions. This year, we also incorporated a hobby and collection portion of the fair. Students showed off their personal interests with LEGO bricks, a garbage pail for kids, and various rocks and minerals. Overall, the evening was a huge success thanks to the PTA. We would also like to thank our teachers who volunteered their time to ensure this year's STEM Fair went off without a hitch: Amanda Cangialosi, Katlyn Chester, Julie Hornbeck, Lorie Ingber, Denise Kipp, RoseAnne Kuzmiak, Lisa Martimucci, Gabe Perez, Jennie Theologis, Aimee Urvater, and Carolyn Weller.

### **Sanfordville Elementary School**

Fourth graders participate in the 100 Acts of Kindness Project. They kicked off this experience by reading Ordinary Mary's Extraordinary Deed by Emily Pearson. This book is about the importance of paying it forward with kindness and the impact that can have. There was a packet explaining to parents the school's goal to achieve 100 acts of kindness and how they can help at home. Each week the classes incorporate another piece of literature to read to the students about kindness. During the second week of the project the students will read The Invisible Boy by Trudy Ludwig. As a special treat this year, author Christina Dankert who wrote the picture book The Kindness Machine, will do a Google Meet with the fourth graders on World Read Aloud Day, which is on February 7, which is during the fourth week of our kindness challenge. The classes are excited about this upcoming meeting with the author.

Sanfordville was transformed into a carnival for its STEM Fair. Students were tasked with designing a STEM project that uses the Engineering Design Process to create their own carnival/arcade game. The students embraced that task fully and lined the hallways with 96 entries for this year's STEM Fair. Ms. Besimer and Ms. Cancel served as the master of ceremonies. As always, we are so grateful for the help and support from everyone (students, parents, teachers and staff, PTA, and all of the volunteers) who helped make this event a success. A special shout out to Allendale Machinery Systems, who set up an awesome 3D Printing science display, gifting students with Wildcat keychains. Also, thank you to Jim Hall with his NASA Demonstration, WVHS Robotics Club, and Pixie Pop for its balloon animals and face painting.

### **Warwick Valley Middle School**

In Mr. Rauschenbach's eighth-grade social studies classes, students emerged as true communicators and ethical global citizens during their insightful presentations on United States Imperialism. These students not only demonstrated a deep understanding of historical events but also a commitment to ethical research practices. Students displayed awareness of imperialism's global implications. The eighth graders engaged in thoughtful discussions about the impact of U.S. policies on other nations from the late 1800s-1950s. Through fostering an environment that encouraged critical thinking and empathy, Mr. Rauschenbach empowered his students to approach history with a nuanced perspective. As they confidently presented their findings in front of their classmates, the students demonstrated responsible and informed citizens. This left a lasting impression on their classmates.

We held another fantastic collaborative event between the middle school and high school SADD (Students Against Destructive Decisions) clubs, in partnership with the Warwick Valley Prevention Coalition. The event featured former DEA drug task force agent Ray Donovan. He engaged students and parents in a comprehensive discussion about the opioid crisis gripping the United States. Mr. Donovan's presentation shed light on the potential impact of this crisis on students nationwide. Following the informative session, attendees participated in two insightful breakout sessions. Students collaborated with the Warwick Valley Prevention Coalition to gain firsthand experience of the dangers associated with alcohol and drug impairment. They tried out some visual goggles in the process. Meanwhile, parents worked with National Guard Sgt. Fernandez, delving into what happens "under the radar." Sergeant. Fernandez shared valuable insights, revealing various hidden accessories for alcohol and drugs. She also offered guidance on how to support their children in making positive choices. The event not only served as an educational platform but also fostered a sense of community and cooperation between the SADD clubs, parents, and local organizations committed to promoting students' well-being.

### **Warwick Valley High School**

The University of Albany's Science Research program stands as a beacon of academic excellence. It nurtures young minds' scientific curiosity and fosters a culture of inquiry and innovation. The high school hosted a vibrant recruitment day. This was where the enthusiasm of our ninth-grade classes met the seasoned insights of our upperclassmen immersed in the

program. Throughout the day, students engaged in dynamic discussions, gaining firsthand knowledge about the program's structure, objectives, and the transformative journey it offers. The highlight of the event was the illuminating poster presentation, where wide-eyed ninth-graders dug into the diverse array of research projects undertaken by their peers, igniting sparks of inspiration and ambition.

The Science Research program is sponsored by the University of Albany. It is a testament to our collective commitment to empowering the next generation of scientists, thinkers, and leaders. Spanning a rigorous three-year science sequence, the program equips students with the tools and skills necessary to embark on their scientific odyssey. From conceiving compelling research questions to formulating hypotheses, designing experiments, and interpreting results, students traverse the intricate landscape of scientific inquiry with confidence and acumen. Beyond academia, the program cultivates essential life skills such as independence, critical thinking, and effective communication, developing students into well-rounded individuals poised for success in an ever-evolving world. Moreover, the opportunity to earn college credit underscores the program's commitment to academic excellence. It provides a tangible pathway for students to transcend boundaries and realize their full potential.