

Weekly column: EdTalk
Superintendent of Schools: Dr. David Leach
February 21, 2024

Last week, during our February 15, 2024 Board of Education meeting, our dedicated high school administrative team and guidance department collaborated on a presentation that provided an overview of New York State's graduation requirements. More specifically, the presentation outlined the ways in which WVHS counselors work with students to map out their high school careers with those requirements in mind. Guidance is critical to ensure our students understand the opportunities available to them.

It is a critical process and can seem daunting at first, considering our three main types of diplomas — Local, Regents, and Regents w/ Advanced Designation — with two additional credentials. These fit into five pathways: Arts, CDOS, CTE, Humanities, and STEM.

Of course, our counselors monitor NYS graduation requirements, so they can keep our students and their families informed.

Our counselors pointed out that they begin graduation pathway considerations during individual meetings with students in middle school, as early as grade six. When they reach grade eight, students meet with high school counselors, typically in March, to review their files. Around the same time of year, parents of eighth grade students attend an evening presentation with our counseling staff. This presentation is regarding their child's transition to high school and the requirements they will have to meet for graduation.

Then, beginning in their freshman year and continuing every year through graduation, students meet individually with their designated counselors to review their post-high school plans and graduation status, helping them select core courses, electives, and steering them toward additional educational opportunities that support their plan. Parents may meet with their students' counselors during junior year, as a vital part of this process.

The centerpiece of last Thursday's presentation was a hands-on learning activity, during which board members worked through sample transcript cases alongside a WVHS counselor. The activity deepened their understanding and appreciation of what goes into preparing a student to take the right classes. This is to graduate on time, with their preferred diploma. The process focuses on the specific needs, aspirations, and goals of each student.

Spending time with the sample transcript cases provided participants with a clear-cut look at how our counselors, as they put it, "assist students and families to navigate this process, to get to the finish line."

Counselors outlined the four major factors in NYS graduation requirements: 1. Total credits; 2. Core Courses 3. Exams 4. Community service.

The activity then walked them through the process of ensuring that a Warwick Valley graduate has completed 22 total credits. Of those 22 credits, 18.5 are earned in core areas of study. Counselors pointed out that required courses must be completed in English (4 credits), Social Studies (4 credits), Math (3 credits), Science (3 credits), Languages Other Than English (1 credit), Physical Education (2 credits), Health (.5 credits), and Art/Music (1 credit). The activity explained how counselors and students work together to align state requirements and student goals. This is done when deciding what courses to choose from each core area.

Next, counselors explained that in addition to 22 credits, students must pass five Regents exams. Regents exams are in various core areas, including Math, Science, English, Global History, US History, and Languages Other Than English.

The final consideration is community service. To graduate, students must complete 20 hours. We take much pride in our students' civic engagement. Our district website features all kinds of stories about students at every grade level finding or creating ways to give back to their community. As part of the graduation planning process, our counselors ensure students know about all of the opportunities available to them to reach the 20-hour mark. These opportunities include tutoring through organizations like the National Honor Society, volunteering for events through co-curricular clubs, and even identifying unique opportunities to lend a hand to community organizations and initiatives.

By providing the guidance they do, our counselors help prepare every Warwick Valley student to graduate on time and into a fulfilling future. This future, if they avail themselves of this support system, can be largely of their own design. Our guidance counselors go a long way toward instilling and reinforcing in our students the seven qualities of our district's *Portrait of a Graduate*.

Here are some highlights from our schools this week:

Park Avenue Elementary School

Kindergarteners participated in dental health lessons, Valentine's Day activities, and the 100th day of school. Ms. Marie visited students to talk about "teeth load" and overall dental care, including their biggest takeaway: apply a dab of toothpaste when brushing. They also prepared Valentine's to exchange with their classmates on Valentine's Day. To celebrate the 100th day of school, they dressed like 100. Students in Ms. White's class walked outside after reading *Snowflake Bentley*, to search for ice crystals in snowflakes, just like Wilson Bentley. The class used magnifying glasses and black felt to pick up delicate snowflakes with feathers! All had a great time with this part of their weather unit.

To coincide with the Super Bowl, the fourth grade band participated in a 'band room football' challenge. Students were divided into two teams, and had to “move the football” by playing a variety of musical etudes. The pieces aligned with skills the students are currently working on in band. Different etudes moved the football different distances depending on the difficulty level. It was an excellent way for students to sharpen their musical skills in a fun (and competitive) way.

Ms. Martimucci’s art class learned about Chris Uphues, a street artist from Brooklyn. His art is inspired by cartoons, pop art and bright, bold colors. Uphues’ art consists of hearts with fun and stylized expressions, and our artists created their own art using his inspiration.

Sanfordville Elementary School

In celebration of Safety Resource Officer Day, our Sanfordville students wanted to show their appreciation for our Officer Katie. She was greeted at her desk by signed artwork by all students. Also, each grade level created a book to show their appreciation for what she does daily. Thank you for greeting everyone with a warm smile each day, and for keeping our students and staff safe daily!

The school held its first Valentine's for Vets celebration. Students and staff invited family and community members who are US military veterans to be their valentines. This was to thank them for their sacrifice and service. Thank you to teachers Carla Overbey and Sue Havellfor, for coordinating such a wonderful event. A wonderful time was had by all and we look forward to next year!

Warwick Valley Middle School

Students in fifth through eighth grade were treated to a memorable experience, as we welcomed some esteemed guests, Veterans from the local American Legion and VFW. It was an exceptional opportunity for our students to engage with veterans. Many of the Veterans were deployed in Vietnam, while others served in Korea and, more recently, in Iraq and Afghanistan. Throughout the week, students heard firsthand accounts and personal stories from the Veterans. They gained unique insights into the experiences and sacrifices of those who served in the military.

From tales of courage on the battlefield to reflections on the importance of service and patriotism, the conversations left a lasting impression on our students. They fostered a deeper appreciation and gratitude for sacrifices. The visits brought history to life for students in a meaningful way. Students interacted with Veterans to learn history and significance of military service, but also forge personal connections with members of our community.

Students explored the values of honor, duty, and sacrifice integral to the military experience. These encounters served as a reminder of the importance of recognizing and honoring veterans' contributions, not just on designated holidays, but every day. We look forward to continuing our collaboration with local Veterans and their organizations, especially at our annual Veterans Breakfast on May 22.

Warwick Valley High School

AP English Literature students dive into Shakespeare's intricate literary legacy, immersing themselves in its richness and complexity. Taking a courageous leap towards active engagement, they eagerly embraced the mantle of leadership. They guided class discussions with finesse and insight, showcasing their burgeoning mastery of the material. Together, student groups embarked on the creative endeavor of creating thought-provoking prompts, meticulously designed to ignite their peers' exploration into Shakespeare's masterpieces.

This pioneering initiative, seamlessly aligned with our district's Portrait of a Graduate, transcended conventional academia, emerging as a potent catalyst for intellectual growth. As the vibrant discussions unfolded, the classroom pulsated with diverse perspectives and nuanced interpretations. Through these spirited exchanges, students not only deepened their comprehension of the texts but also nurtured a dynamic learning ecosystem where insights blossomed and perspectives converged harmoniously. By intertwining their academic endeavors with our district's Portrait of a Graduate, Ms. Slawinski's AP English Lit students exemplify their preparedness to navigate the intricate nuances of the modern world with confidence, integrity, and an enduring passion for learning. Their initiative stands as a luminous beacon, showcasing how our educational ethos thrives through the collective dedication and ingenuity of both students and educators alike.

Under Ms. Slawinski's expert stewardship, this transformative initiative transcended traditional education. It fostered an environment where curiosity flourished and intellectual growth became paramount. It underscored the transformative power of collaborative learning. It illuminated the boundless possibilities that unfold when students are empowered to steer their academic journey with autonomy and purpose.