

Weekly column: EdTalk
Superintendent of Schools: Dr. David Leach
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Warwick Valley Schools is a member of the Tri-State Consortium, a coalition of public school districts dedicated to embracing systems thinking and collaborative inquiry as a means to achieve ongoing excellence. By uniting as peers and critical friends, member districts employ the Tri-State model principles to gauge teaching and learning advancement. Within the Consortium, members extend mutual support through external peer evaluations of programs and practices. They also participate in study groups, attend conferences, and engage in topic-focused seminars aimed at fostering continuous professional growth.

In the spirit of lifelong learning and for the benefit of our students and school community, our WVCSD principals actively engage in Tri-State Consortium's activities designed to enrich their leadership skills, and give them opportunities to share best practices and collaborate with like-minded educational leaders. The principal programs have been an excellent way for our Warwick Valley administrators to enhance their knowledge and drive positive change within their schools.

At the elementary level, Sanfordville and Park Avenue Principals Johnna Maraia and Bill Biniaris have attended Elementary Principal Meetings. These meetings explore professional literature, resources and protocols. Their discussions cover topics such as principles for leading adaptive change, distinguishing technical problems from adaptive challenges, and exploring Simon Sinek's inspirational leadership model. Simon Sinek's inspirational leadership model, known as the "Golden Circle," emphasizes starting with the "why" (purpose or belief) as the core driver for organizations, followed by the "how" (unique approach) and "what" (products or services). By prioritizing the "why," leaders and organizations can engage and connect more deeply with others, fostering trust and sustainable success.

Ms. Maraia and Mr. Biniaris have put their learning into action at their schools by implementing strategies such as Life's 5 Essential Questions (shared during the program by James Ryan, Dean of Harvard's School of Education). It is a collaborative model that encourages curiosity and guides discussions using an I wonder why? I wonder if?; framework to generate meaningful questions. They also addressed topics like supporting diverse learning needs, designing curriculum, managing parent relationships, and fostering a supportive faculty environment.

Warwick Valley Middle School Principal Jared Yapkowitz has participated in a similar series, led by Dr. Peter Giarrizzo. These sessions focus on collecting, analyzing, and disseminating student performance data, and using multiple measures to gauge student performance. Discussions delve into assessment tools, methodologies, and how data informs curriculum and instruction, fostering a dynamic environment for educational leaders.

The high school administrative team, Principal Georgianna Diopoulos and Associate Principals Christopher Firoentino, Erin Hill-Lewis and Nicholas Emanuele, have also participated in TriState Consortium study groups. In their programs, specialized for high school leaders, they addressed practical challenges, exchanged strategies, and learned to evaluate leadership styles through case studies. For example, Mr. Fiorentino underwent training that will enable him to participate in a critical friend's visit. He will visit Edgemont Schools, where our Tri-States group will examine student engagement. These types of visits offer significant benefits for the hosting district and visitors.

In summary, WVCSD principals actively participate in Tri-State Consortium meetings, leveraging collaborative efforts, professional development, and shared resources to enhance their leadership skills and improve educational practices within our schools. This is part of our ongoing role in the Tri-State Consortium, of which we are proud to be a part. The consortium provides its member schools with a platform for ongoing dialogue, which fosters a culture of continuous improvement and lifelong learning among our administrators.

Here are some highlights from our schools this week:

Park Avenue Elementary School

Fourth grade band students are making huge strides, preparing for their first concert in March! They have spent weeks learning and practicing their song, *March of the Rookies*. Playing a full-length song on a wind instrument requires intense focus and endurance, both mentally and physically. Students have found it helpful to "think" through the music, then "sing" through the music, and finally, "play" through the music. During the first two stages, students focus on different elements of the music, and then combine them all in the play stage. Our young musicians set small goals, and work to reach them through repetition and reflection. Instead of focusing on 'instant success', the students see joy in modest musical victories. They also see how those small victories lead to something more significant.

We held a PTA Read-a-Thon Dance Party, during which this year's reading winners were celebrated. It was a fun way to acknowledge the dedicated work students put into reading during the Read-a-Thon, and to honor the school's top readers. Students had a fantastic time dancing around the gym, followed by a short award ceremony for the top readers at each grade level. The PTA provided prizes and certificates, including gift cards to The Book and Nook for the highest three readers in each grade. In addition, the PTA provided brand new KINDLES for both the top reader and earner on Park Ave!

Sanfordville Elementary School

Sanfordville had its PTA-sponsored PARP (Pick A Reading Partner) kickoff on Monday, for all grades. This year's title is *Frindle*, by Andrew Clements. During the kickoff students signed our

Frindle banner, since we all know that everyone has the power to create change. Teachers were given their *Frindle* books, as well as the activities for the week. Students were given a copy of their blank dictionary to keep. They were encouraged to add any vocabulary words they learned or were interested in to their dictionary. Students finished the kickoff with a scavenger hunt. This was where they had to find their own reading sticker to add to their dictionary. Thank you to Ms. Danielle Cancel for all of her planning, and to our PTA for sponsoring the three-week reading challenge with families.

Third grade students were delighted to welcome a guest speaker from the Warwick Historical Society on January 22 and 29. John Johansen brought his “Coming to America/Barn Raising” lesson to our school. This gave students the opportunity to learn about the different types of tools and techniques used during a barn raising. Students learned why certain structures have supports to keep them structurally sound, along with many other fascinating facts about barn building.

Warwick Valley Middle School

We look forward to the exciting academic challenge of the Scripps National Spelling Bee. In our commitment to scholastic excellence, the school is organizing its spelling bee for the first time in many years. We encourage students to get involved and showcase their orthography prowess. Scheduled for February 15, the Warwick Valley Middle School spelling bee promises to be a day filled with suspense, camaraderie, and intellectual rigor. Students from grades 7 and 8 vie for the spelling champion title. The stakes are high as the winners of the school spelling bee will represent Warwick Valley Middle School at the regional level on March 21, at OU BOCES.

Leading up to its big show on Friday night, February 2, the Guitar Club performed an in-school showcase for classmates, rocking through a small sampling of the tunes they've been diligently preparing. They have dedicated countless hours to tuning their basses and guitars, fine-tuning their vocal cords, and perfecting their performances for a night of musical celebration, talent and passion. The diverse repertoire includes punk rockers Rancid and Green Day, timeless classics – The Clash – and contemporary hits – Olivia Rodrigo!

Warwick Valley High School

The High School and Middle School joined forces with the Warwick Prevention Group to launch a proactive initiative entitled *Under Your Radar*. The program aims to heighten awareness about drug use dangers through engaging guest speakers and presentations. Ray Donovan was the keynote speaker, a distinguished retired DEA agent renowned for his leadership and successful apprehension of numerous drug dealers. Donovan’s presence added credibility and authority to the event. His firsthand experiences and insights provided invaluable perspectives on drug enforcement realities and the profound impact of drug-related activities on communities.

Throughout the program, parents were enlightened on various facets of drug prevention, including crucial information on the evolving landscape of drug packaging. With the emergence of the latest trends and techniques utilized by drug manufacturers to sell these substances, understanding the nuances of these deceptive practices becomes imperative in safeguarding against inadvertent exposure and consumption.

Under Your Radar served as a beacon of knowledge and empowerment. It fostered a collaborative environment where community members could equip themselves with the tools and insights necessary to combat drug abuse's pervasive threat. The event exemplified a collective commitment of stakeholders to nurture a safe and drug-free environment, by fostering dialogue, raising awareness, and providing practical guidance.

Our School Counselors visited history classes during the first week of February to review graduation requirements, share the upcoming course selection process and discuss post-high school planning. Counselors will begin their individual meetings with juniors on March 1st. We welcome parents and guardians to attend this meeting so that we can work collaboratively and map out the best plan to meet your student's needs.