

Weekly column: EdTalk
Superintendent of Schools: Dr. David Leach
March 20, 2024

The Warwick Valley Central School District has been working diligently on assembling a school district budget for the 2024-2025 school year. We have had public presentations at our school board meetings since February. The presentations may also be found by visiting <https://warwickvalleyschools.com/board-of-education/budget/> and clicking on the links to the meeting dates. Please check back periodically to see our budget progress.

Recently, Assistant Superintendent for Business Timothy Holmes updated the 2024-25 school district budget to the Board of Education. He said the district is currently considering a 3.49 percent or \$2,323,676 tax levy increase. The maximum tax cap for the next school year requiring a simple majority vote is 3.84 percent, or \$2,555,086. A tax levy increase of only 3.49 percent would reduce the tax levy by \$231,410. This budget takes into consideration rising contractual obligations, expenses related to pupil personnel and special education services, inflation affecting supply costs, utilities, and materials across all aspects of the District, as well as the heightened costs associated with enhancing safety and security measures. Furthermore, notable factors driving this budget include a decrease in New York State building aid, lower than anticipated New York State Foundation Aid, and an increase in debt service. For the ninth time in 12 years, the district will put before voters a proposed tax levy increase below the state's allowable tax cap. The district has never exceeded the tax cap.

The district is still waiting for the legislative budget from the state, before figuring out its final budget proposal. We anticipate a \$115,161,458 budget for the 2024-2025 school year, about a 5% increase over the current school year.

The district will analyze 2024-25 expenditures at the Board of Education work session at 7 p.m., March 21. This will be at the Dorothy C. Wilson Education Center. Other upcoming dates regarding the proposed budget for voters include:

- April 4: Revenue Update and Expenditures presentation
- April 18: Overview, Budget Adoption, & Property Tax Report Card presentation
- May 9: Public Hearing on the Proposed Budget

The public vote is scheduled for 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. on Tuesday, May 21.

Voters will also consider a second proposition on May 21 to purchase five buses for the Transportation Department at a maximum cost of \$780,000. The District would use \$280,000 of its bus reserve fund to offset the cost. Of the total cost, \$506,220, or 64.9%, would be returned to the District in New York state transportation aid. Therefore, no additional taxes would be needed to purchase the buses at a net cost of approximately \$274,000.

The proposed purchase includes two 65-passenger propane buses and two 65-passenger gas buses and one seven-passenger SUV. The district replaces five buses a year from its 76-vehicle

fleet. It is important to follow the district's bus vehicle replacement plan and replace buses annually that are older and have very high mileage. Of the buses in the fleet, 34 percent are over 10 years old, 45 percent have over 100,000 miles, and 28 percent have over 150,000 miles. There are currently fifteen vehicles 15 years old or older. Buses typically last approximately 13-15 years before repair costs outweigh owning the vehicles, as they suffer from internal engine wear (transmission, head gasket, pistons and bearings). Plus, older buses increase the likelihood of engine failure or breakdown on the road. The district buses students for over 105 square miles, so it is important to follow the district's bus vehicle replacement plan and replace buses annually that are older and have very high mileage.

Lastly, I would like to wish everyone a happy and safe spring break. Schools are closed next week and will reopen April 2.

Here are some highlights from our schools this week:

Park Avenue Elementary School: Fourth grade orchestra students have been working on combining bowing and finger placement skills. They are now layering those skills with another - reading music. The students have started working in their method book, reading music and "decoding" what the music on the written page means for their fingers and bow. They also received their first concert music selections and are very eager to learn how to play that music as an entire group in our ensemble rehearsals.

The whole student body marked the end of the second trimester with a PBIS celebration assembly. The PTA generously sponsored the "BrainWash: Mind Storm" game show program. Contestants competed with others at their grade level, answering questions aligned with their learning levels. A team of teachers joined in at the end.

On Monday, Lorie Ingber's kindergarten class visited Branson, a certified therapy dog. He was joined by his owner/handler and retired Park Avenue librarian Polly VanderKruik. The students read to Branson and received a bookmark with Branson's photograph.

Sanfordville Elementary School: Ever wonder how people washed or ironed their clothes before modern washers and irons were invented? Well, our Sanfordville first grade students experienced that thanks to our friends from the Warwick Historical Society's Traveling Trunks. They discussed Women's Work in Warwick 100 to 200 years ago. Thank you to all of the parents that came in to help run the stations. This was so students could experience what it was like to "do the laundry" and help with "making meals."

The PIE 3/4 classes celebrated Pi Day on 3/14 by creating their own pizza fractions. The students used classroom materials (construction paper, tissue paper, clay, etc.) to "create" a pizza for their pizza box. They made slices to show that fractions represent equal parts of a whole. Students also

chose several toppings to put on a "fractional" number of slices. Students even made tasty pizza bagels in the classroom to celebrate the end of our fraction unit, which ironically fell on Pi Day!

Students across grades had St. Patrick's Day fun this week. Some classes wrote about what they would do if they found a pot of gold. Others wrote about what they felt lucky to have in their lives. Some even designed and engineered leprechaun traps to catch those clever rascals before they steal the gold!

Warwick Valley Middle School: In William Zwart's eighth-grade social studies classes, the students have been honing in on the characteristics of a Portrait of a Graduate to celebrate Women's History Month. With much enthusiasm, they've been busy researching the lives and legacies of remarkable women who have left an indelible mark on the United States. From pioneers of social justice to trailblazers in science and politics, our eighth-grade students have explored the rich tapestry of female empowerment throughout American history. Through research and thoughtful analysis, they've uncovered stories of resilience, determination, and triumph. They've shed light on the invaluable contributions of women such as Sally Ride, Eleanor Roosevelt, Harriet Tubman, and Rosa Parks in United States history.

Meanwhile, in the vibrant atmosphere of the seventh grade Spanish classes, students have been immersing themselves in the exploration of women of Hispanic heritage. These women have made significant strides in the United States. With a focus on contributions to the United States, our students have unearthed tales of courage and achievement from Latina figures who have left an enduring impact on American society. Students were tasked with creating posters with images and writing analyses of the women they researched. Through language and culture, our students celebrate the multifaceted identities and achievements of Hispanic women. They recognize their pivotal role in shaping our nation. Some of the women researched in our Spanish classes were Paula Badosa, Gloria Estefan, and Ellen Ochoa.

Warwick Valley High School: Warwick Valley High School students delivered an extraordinary Cinderella performance over the weekend. They illuminated the stage with their talents and extended their magic far beyond the theater walls.

On Thursday, the school also welcomed local seniors for an afternoon tea party. The guests were treated to steaming cups of tea and delectable cookies, before a special early viewing of the show. The subsequent performance of Cinderella was a heartwarming celebration of intergenerational joy, filled with the transformative power of the arts, meaningful connections and lasting memories.

For the Warwick Valley Central School District, this annual tradition is more than just a performance - it's a testament to our dedication to building and nurturing community connections. Through our commitment to celebration and unity, the district unites students, seniors, and community members. This fosters a sense of belonging and camaraderie that extends beyond the stage. It's a beautiful reminder of the enduring bond between the school and

its community. It's also a testament to the profound joy that comes from coming together to create unforgettable moments.