

Weekly column: EdTalk
Superintendent of Schools: Dr. David Leach
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Last week, I shared some of the latest findings from our annual Long Range Planning Study. As I mentioned, the data collected and presented through this study is invaluable when informing decision-making related to staffing, funding, and program and facility planning.

To recap, our current study indicates that the district will experience overall enrollment stability between 2023 and 2033. In 2033, district enrollment is expected to peak at 3,842 students, 166 more than what we currently have enrolled. This type of planning is a dynamic process, with periodic updates allowing for changes in district trends. These trends include the number of families moving into the community, and the number of births, which we will look at in this column.

Provisional data released by the National Center for Health Statistics shows there were 3,661,220 births recorded in 2022; this represents an insignificant decline from 2021. Births in Orange County peaked in 2006 at 5,433 births, before dropping to a historical low of 4,724 births in 2012. Since then, contrary to national and state trends, births have increased 18.9 percent, with 5,617 births recorded in 2021. Orange County birth data has not been released for 2022.

Births in our district fluctuated between 2008 and 2021. There was an unusually low number of births (143) recorded in 2015, and a historically high number of births (223) in 2021. At this time, 2022 district birth data is also not released. The number of births in 2018 and 2020 (181) was among the highest of the period.

By closely tracking and analyzing birth rate trends, school districts can better plan for their student populations and allocate resources accordingly. As we reported last year, the latest available data indicates that the Chester population grew by 665 residents between 2010 and 2020. Over that same period, the Warwick population remained stable, with a loss of only 38 residents. Our district population also remained stable, with 23,453 residents in 2020.

New York State's ethnic composition has shifted between 2010 and 2020. According to 2020 *Census* data, White individuals comprised approximately 53 percent of the population in 2020, down from 58 percent in 2010. Racial/ethnic minorities comprise approximately 47 percent of State residents. Hispanic individuals represent the largest racial/ethnic minority group at nearly 20 percent. They are followed by Black individuals (13.7 percent), Asian/others (10.8 percent) and those identifying as two or more races (3.6 percent). There are six "majority-minority" states, including California, Hawaii, Maryland, New Mexico, Texas, and Nevada.

Our district's NYSED Report Card 2022-23 "enrollment by ethnicity" figures show that our student body's ethnic composition has changed. Warwick Valley enrollment according to ethnicity is:

- White: 70%
- Hispanic/Latino: 19%
- Black/African American: 4%
- Multiracial: 4%
- Asian/Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islanders: 2%
- American Indian/Alaska Native: <1%

Next week, I will review the housing market in Warwick. This will provide useful information for understanding the trends and conditions within the community that inform our school district decision-making. By staying informed about the housing market, the district can better understand its constituents' needs and preferences and plan accordingly.

Here are some highlights from our schools this week:

Park Avenue Elementary School

The staff of our student-run newspaper, The Paw Print, visited Straus News in Chester last week, for a first-hand experience of newspaper development. Straus News managing editor Lisa Reider visited Park Avenue for an interview earlier this year. This led to her inviting the Paw Print team to meet with her in the office. Students saw different jobs being done in the office. They got to talk with employees about what they do and how it contributes to the paper being published. Students were interviewed by Ms. Reider and Jeanne Straus. Thank you to Straus News for the visit and the generous pizza party that wrapped up the visit!

The Park Ave 2023-2024 LEGO League Jr. team presented its final build to Principal Biniaris and an audience of Park Avenue faculty. The team showcased the effort and work into this season's build theme, "*Masterpiece!*" Congratulations to team members Gavin Martin, Ewa Mazurek, Logan Reilly, Gianna Dunado, Mateo Rodriguez and Carmine Mele. The team researched various hobbies and decided which ones to include in their final LEGO build. The students took a divide and conquer approach, researching hobbies and making sure each component added up to a cohesive LEGO build. The students created a slideshow to explain each phase of their build, including detailed photos of individual components. Ms. Cangialosi shared how proud she is of all six LEGO League students, for their individual creative contributions and dedication to their teammates.

Sanfordville Elementary School

Ms. Tully's third grade class have been busy at work rewriting a traditional fairy tale and putting their own spin on it. This is part of their Adaptive Fairy Tale unit. The students enjoyed sharing their final projects with Ms. Tilton's kindergarten class.

Ms. Moren's class has been working hard on a new math unit about graphing. They learn how to organize data and use it to answer questions. Students are also finishing their "Learning About The World" nonfiction reading unit, during which they developed skills such as comparing/contrasting stories, asking questions to find out more, retelling information, and identifying text features. They love learning about animals, people, and places around the world.

We also celebrated Leap Day on February 29, and our students were really "hoppy" to celebrate the day! Teachers led students through themed activities all day. PE students could be seen leaping along our Sensory Hallway to see who could jump the furthest. They even took measurements and... you guessed it... graphed the results! Meanwhile, in third grade, students learn about fractions, and how to jump from one fraction to the next on a number line. And finally, some of our kindergarten students were particularly interested in how "leapsters" (people born on leap day) will celebrate their birthdays next year.

Warwick Valley Middle School

Students in Ms. Kaval's 6th grade Social Studies classes dived deep into ancient Mesopotamia history last week using project-based learning. Students collaborated in groups of three and four to conceptualize and construct their own board games, each encapsulating the essence of this ancient civilization. Students blended historical knowledge and creativity, crafting captivating games that included establishing trade routes and making strategic conquests. Groups had an enjoyable time playing one another's games to test their knowledge. The project showcased students' mastery of Mesopotamian history, as well as their abilities to communicate, collaborate and create. They combined their knowledge and skills to bring their games to life. Ms. Kaval's students proudly unveiled their creations. They celebrated their achievements but also enjoyed displaying their understanding in a fun and engaging way.

Warwick Valley High School

The library media center is the beating heart of any high school. It is a space where students congregate for various activities, from studying to leisurely reading. Despite its vibrant atmosphere, teachers often are entrenched in their hectic schedules. This makes them unable to fully explore the media center's wealth of resources. Recognizing this gap, our media center

specialist, Megan Davis, bridged the divide between faculty and this haven of knowledge through a thoughtful event: Books and Bagels.

In conceptualizing the event, meticulous planning became paramount. Ms. Davis curated a selection of books, handpicking titles that resonated with the diverse interests of the teaching staff. To aid in navigation, informative shelf-talkers accompany each featured book, providing concise summaries to entice potential readers. Additionally, genre signage facilitates swift identification of preferred topics, streamlining browsing for busy educators. Moreover, the inclusion of teaching guides alongside select titles empowers teachers with resources to seamlessly integrate literature into their curricula.

Surprisingly, literature transcended traditional genres, as culinary-themed books emerged as unexpected favorites among faculty. From enchanting literary-inspired recipes to practical guides for aspiring teen chefs, cookbooks ignited culinary passion within the academic community. More importantly, the event shed light on an overlooked aspect of the media center—its lending library. Many teachers, unaware of this resource, discovered a new avenue to enrich their professional and personal pursuits.

Reflecting on the event's success, Ms. Davis harbors aspirations for future endeavors aimed at fostering a literacy culture within the school community. While Books and Bagels served as a catalyst for faculty engagement, its impact reverberates beyond teacher-student dynamics. By extending similar initiatives to students, Ms. Davis hopes to instill curiosity and appreciation for literature. This will nurture a generation of avid readers and lifelong learners.