

Weekly column: EdTalk
Superintendent of Schools: Dr. David Leach
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Monday's solar eclipse, a rare phenomenon, excited our students. It piqued their curiosity on many levels. Moreover, the eclipse provided Warwick teachers with invaluable learning opportunities across all grade levels and subject matter. Of course, our science classes were buzzing with excitement, but you could also feel the anticipation and wonder leading up to – and during – the eclipse in classes from language arts to visual arts to music, physical education and beyond. Our faculty seized the cross-curricular opportunity to help our students develop a holistic understanding of this celestial event through hands-on activities, immersive experiences and collaborative projects.

Our youngest learners at Sanfordville and Park Elementary Schools devoured eclipse-related reading, including articles in the popular Scholastic News magazine and other books and online resources. They applied that knowledge, as well as some art supplies, to create their own original representations of the eclipse. Students in third grade collaborated on informational posters to enhance their and their peers' understanding through visual aids.

The eclipse provided an excellent opportunity for STEM learning. Leading up to the event, classes engaged in immersive activities utilizing VR goggles for a simulated total solar eclipse experience. Our kindergarten students combined STEM and literacy for integrated science and reading lessons, which they followed up with complementary craft projects. Our elementary art teachers used the event to explore representational art, applying painting techniques to depict spatial composition inspired by the eclipse.

At middle school, there was a sense of excitement in Earth Science classes. Students eagerly engaged in discussions surrounding the scientific principles behind the eclipse. Middle school students likewise enjoyed themed library sessions that introduced them to eclipse-related literature available in the library. Middle school teachers also presented interactive lectures and group research activities that fostered a deeper understanding of the science at work. WVMS students also received eclipse safety glasses, a precautionary measure to help students and their families enjoy safe eclipse observation.

At the high school, more than two dozen students and a handful of adults stayed after school to watch the eclipse. They used one of our many covered outdoor classrooms for viewing. Students learned that except during the brief total phase of a total solar eclipse, when the Moon completely blocks the Sun's bright face, it is not safe to look directly at the Sun without specialized eye protection for solar viewing. Our outdoor spaces provided that protection.

Above all else, student safety was our biggest focus in the days leading up to Monday's eclipse. Students from kindergarten to the Class of 2024 received the knowledge and tools to safely experience the eclipse firsthand. It has been fun watching how this unique educational opportunity has captivated young minds with the wonders of the universe. They embarked on

exciting learning journeys into this celestial phenomenon. If you keep an eye on our website and social media channels this week, you will see some of the specific ways in which our teachers helped students grasp the scientific concepts behind the eclipse, while also developing essential skills such as teamwork, creativity and critical thinking.

This has truly been a stellar education moment for us; a memorable and enriching educational experience that won't happen again until 2044!

Here are some highlights from our schools this week:

Park Avenue Elementary School

Second grade students have been working on poems with repeated words and sounds. The goal: to give their poems a musical feel and make their meanings clearer. They have also practiced revision, examining ways to add more descriptive words to their poems. There's been even more language fun in Ms. Gilmore's third grade class. Students have learned different types of figurative language commonly seen in poems. They then wrote original poems using that type of language. Ms. Weller's class also began a poetry unit, using a matching game to learn different rhyming techniques. At the end of this unit, students will have a portfolio of their own original poems!

Meanwhile, in second grade Social Studies students have been practicing map skills such as reading map keys, understanding cardinal directions, and recognizing their home state on a US map. They also enjoyed creating their own maps of realistic places. They added keys and came up with three questions about their map for classmates to answer as an added activity.

Sanfordville Elementary School

Our PIE 1/2 students participated in a "treecycle workshop" with Melissa Shaw-Smith and Beth Laule, learning about fabric waste. The presenters talked about quilting and fabric collage, and showed the students research photos. The presenters also brought long lengths of fabric and pre-cut fabric scraps, mesh pieces and yarn so students could create their own collages.

Our Encore class supported the week's most popular theme - the eclipse! Art classes learned how to draw an eclipse in chalk. PE classes split into teams to play Solar Eclipse Ball, creating planets or suns using hula hoops. New solar eclipse books were added to the library. Teachers also used a powerpoint lecture to teach what constitutes a solar eclipse. They had students break into small groups for research and answering key facts on an eclipse worksheet. Students also picked three facts about the eclipse that interested them, and shared them with the class.

And finally, April is Autism Acceptance Month, and visitors to Sanfordville will see the myriad ways our students and staff embrace it. Students have been reading books on the subject, and have been encouraged to engage in discussions about how autism affects their friends and classmates.

Warwick Valley Middle School

The Warwick Wee Wildcats are gearing up for a day of sportsmanship and camaraderie at Orange County's 8th Annual Special Olympics. The event will take place at Presidential Park Elementary School in Middletown on Saturday, April 13, 2024. Our five enthusiastic fifth grade athletes are poised to showcase their skills on the basketball court. Together, they embody the spirit of teamwork and determination at the core of the Special Olympics. We look forward to cheering on our team as they hit the hardwood! The day promises to celebrate inclusivity and athleticism. It underlines the importance of fostering inclusive communities where everyone can thrive. Mark your calendar and come out on Saturday, April 13 to support the Wildcats!

Warwick Valley High School

Juniors and seniors experienced a mock crash last Friday. This was a meticulously orchestrated demonstration that vividly, and with significant impact, showed the devastating aftermath of impaired driving. The somber scene was a collaboration between our WVHS SADD club, local EMS, fire and police departments. It also included students from our cosmetology, video production, and criminal justice programs.

In a carefully staged production, the simulated crash site was brought to life. This was complete with wrecked vehicles, emergency responders rushing to the scene, and actors portraying injured victims trapped amidst the wreckage. The palpable tension in the air mirrored the urgency and chaos of a real-life accident scene, a stark reminder of the serious consequences of irresponsible behavior behind the wheel.

As the demonstration unfolded, students witnessed firsthand the swift and coordinated response of emergency personnel. These personnel worked tirelessly to extricate the injured, administer life-saving medical care, and restore order to the chaotic scene. Meanwhile, the harrowing accounts of survivors and firsthand testimonies from emergency responders provided a sobering glimpse into the human toll of impaired driving.

Throughout the event, students were encouraged to reflect on the choices they make behind the wheel and the ripple effects that a single moment of recklessness can have on their lives and others' lives. By immersing themselves in this immersive and thought-provoking experience, attendees gained a deeper understanding of the importance of responsible decision-making and the imperative of preventing impaired driving in their communities.

Ultimately, the mock crash event served as a powerful catalyst for change. It inspired students to pledge themselves to safer driving practices and become advocates for positive change within their peer groups and beyond.