

**Weekly column: EdTalk**  
**Superintendent of Schools: Dr. David Leach**  
**April 17, 2024**

The Warwick Valley Board of Education recently approved a resolution allowing a partial school property tax exemption for qualified volunteer firefighters and volunteer ambulance workers. The board was unanimous in passing the resolution for local first responders.

The decision affords eligible volunteer firefighters and ambulance workers who are homeowners residing in Warwick, and who have at least two years of volunteer service, a 10% school property tax exemption.

The Volunteer Firefighters and Volunteer Ambulance Workers' Tax Exemption has its roots in a law signed by Governor Kathy Hochul in December 2022. Officially titled Real Property Tax Law §466 – Chapter 670, the law creates an opt-in for all local governments to approve a partial property tax exemption of up to 10%, intended to help communities attract, retain, and reward community emergency services volunteers.

There are an estimated 106 qualified members enrolled with Warwick Community Ambulance, the Warwick Fire Department, the Pine Island Fire Department, and Sugar Loaf Engine & Hose – Chester Fire Department.

If the vital services that these volunteers provide to our community were to be monetized, it would impose an additional burden on property taxpayers. Offering a modest tax reduction is a sign of appreciation for these volunteers, who dedicate countless hours to training, diligently serving our community, and ensuring our safety. This tax incentive could also aid in attracting and retaining much-needed volunteers.

The board's action does not provide an automatic exemption for first responders. Applicants must meet certain criteria and provide documentation along with an application to the assessor's office by March 1 of any year. To meet qualification criteria, applicants must be certified, enrolled members of their organization with a minimum of two years of service, reside in the district, and must own and use the property subject to the exemption as their primary residence.

Additionally, the board approved three options with the primary resolution:

- A lifetime exemption extension to emergency volunteers with more than 20 years of active service;
- The continuation of regular exemptions for unmarried spouses of volunteers lost in the line of duty;

- A lifetime exemption for un-remarried spouses of volunteers lost in the line of duty who had met the 20-year service mark.

You can read the complete details of this resolution on our Board of Education's webpage. The related public presentation given during the February 15, 2024 board meeting is also posted on the Budget page of our website.

*Here are some highlights from our schools this week:*

### **Park Avenue Elementary School**

Two veterans connected to Warwick Valley – veteran and Warwick Police Officer Maureen Space and her father, veteran Kenneth Space – received expressions of gratitude with cards and letters from Park Avenue children on last weekend's Hudson Valley Honor Flight. Hudson Valley Honor Flight is a nonprofit organization that honors American veterans for all their sacrifices. The Honor Flight transports American veterans to Washington, D.C. to visit their memorials at no cost. Park Avenue students wrote about 200 cards and letters to the Spaces and the rest of the 90 veterans on the flight, who received them on the return flight from Washington, where a roll call was announced and the veterans were each presented with an envelope filled with cards and letters from family and friends.

In music class, fourth graders are beginning to prepare for their upcoming chorus concert in June. They are learning lyrics for two songs: *Pure Imagination* from Willy Wonka and *Just A Single Voice* by Sally Albrecht. Students are learning the similarities and differences between chorus, band, and orchestra and how their role as an individual will contribute to the ensemble when the entire fourth grade begins rehearsing together at the end of May. Everyone is learning the songs with each class separately working towards the goal of performing as a collective in the near future. Students are learning about blend, balance, and dynamics through these pieces and how to better listen to one another to make this the best performance possible.

### **Sanfordville Elementary School**

Mrs. Esserman and Mr. Hernandez's first grade class published their very own collaborative effort book. The teachers used a real world publishing company to write and publish a class book. After researching and writing their independent expert topic books on animals, students decided to make a class book on what animals eat. Students worked together to create the catchy title, "Munch, Munch, What is for Lunch?" The class then dedicated the book to their families. Students wrote about what their chosen animal eats using information learned using the app *Pebble Go* as well as classroom books. Students were expected to write in paragraph form, which included a topic sentence, two to three supporting sentences, and a concluding sentence. They then supported their writing with a diagram and some students chose to include labels (a text feature they learned within our unit) Once the work was complete, the teachers sent the

draft to the publishing company and they turned the students' writing into a hardcover book! Parents had the option of purchasing this book for their child. Bringing the students through the entire writing process was so exciting and motivating for our first graders. It's an experience they will hopefully never forget!

We are rolling into the gymnastics unit. Students will be asked to apply all of the concepts of body control they have learned throughout the year to gain an even deeper understanding of biomechanical principles related to their bodies and efficient movement. The initial challenges offer insight into their needs for self-regulation by slowing down to care for themselves to get the movement patterns correct, but also for one another as we introduce spotting techniques to increase their need to be involved and accountable for the success of our unit.

### **Warwick Valley Middle School**

In Ms. Rueckert's eighth-grade classroom, students have been diving deep into the historical landscape of FDR's New Deal, immersing themselves in the policies and programs that shaped America during the Great Depression. They have explored the significance of initiatives like the Works Progress Administration and Social Security, analyzing their impact on society. To further solidify their understanding and showcase their newfound knowledge, the students have embarked on a creative endeavor: crafting posters that not only illustrate the key components of the New Deal but also convey its importance in addressing economic hardships and fostering societal progress.

In Ms. Waters' seventh-grade science class, students went on a creative journey through the world of botany with their "Carrot Stories" project. Our student scientists have been diligently cultivating their understanding of plant growth and development, focusing specifically on the life cycle of carrots. Through hands-on experimentation, observation, and research, students went into the intricacies of seed germination, root formation, and leaf growth, documenting each stage of the carrot's journey with meticulous detail. Students are not only learning about the wonders of plant biology but also honing their storytelling skills as they weave narratives around the growth and transformation of their carrot plants.

Excitement is in the air as the Warwick Valley Middle School Drama Club immerses themselves in full dress rehearsals, fine-tuning every detail for their upcoming annual production. This year, they're bringing the beloved tale of "The Little Mermaid" to life on stage, promising an enchanting experience for all who attend. Set against the backdrop of the high school auditorium, the stage will be transformed into an underwater world filled with colorful characters and captivating melodies. Mark your calendars for 7 p.m. on Friday, April 19 and 1 p.m. or 7 p.m. on Saturday, April 20, as our talented students showcase their dedication and passion for the performing arts.

### **Warwick Valley High School**

The Warwick Orange County Academic League team culminated their season with an electrifying event: the inaugural student versus faculty match. Under the adept hosting of Nick DiLeo, the match was meticulously documented by Mr. Cecconie and a group of talented students from the Video Production classes.

The student squadron, comprising Conrad Wendell, Josh Cornelius, Chloe Jarrous, Astrid Kelly, Grace Cornelius, and Anthony Apuzzo, faced off against a formidable faculty lineup, featuring Mr. Mark, Mr. Warren, Ms. Persad, Mrs. Glover, Ms. Howard, Ms. Trovato, Mr. O'Connor, Mr. Ramjattan, and Mr. Arteaga.

Two, 15-minute rounds spanned an array of subjects including English, science, math, history, and the arts, the questions tested the breadth of knowledge and acumen of both teams. The intensity was palpable as each side showcased their prowess. In a neck-and-neck battle, the faculty team emerged victorious, showcasing their depth of knowledge and experience.