

Weekly column: EdTalk
Superintendent of Schools: Dr. David Leach
May 1, 2024

Residents of Warwick Valley Central School District will vote on a proposed budget of \$115,161,458 for the 2024-2025 school year. The budget includes a tax levy increase, which – for the ninth time in the last 12 years – remains below the state’s allowable tax cap. The District has never exceeded the tax cap. The vote is scheduled from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. on Tuesday, May 21.

This budget addresses the continuing rise in prices for goods and services that are essential for our students’ success. Our students receive a quality education, and we are thankful for the support of our community members every year.

The District has worked to reduce the maximum allowable tax levy increase for the 2024-25 proposed budget, lowering it to 3.49% from the 3.84% tax cap, saving taxpayers \$231,410 next school year. Over the nine years the District has remained under the maximum tax cap, which saved taxpayers a total of \$2,910,639.

We will continue to sustain high-quality teaching, maintain appropriate class sizes, support vibrant school programs, and allocate additional resources for school safety, mental health, and special education.

Our district provides unmatched educational value in the region. The District ranks at or near the top in several statistical performance categories reflecting both academics and cost savings:

- We are ranked first among 43 school districts in the Mid-Hudson region with at least 77 graduates in terms of graduation rate and post-secondary enrollment rate.
- Warwick Valley ranks first or second in the county in seven key New York test scores: ELA (grades 3-8), Math (grades 3-8), English (9-12), Geometry (9-12), Algebra 2 (9-12), Chemistry (9-12), and Global History (9-12).
- The percentage of students who took an Advanced Placement exam and scored 3 or higher on at least one exam was 79.9%, ranking us as the top district out of 32 total districts in the Mid-Hudson region.

In this budget, we are balancing the District’s budgetary goals to preserve student opportunities while also staying below the tax cap threshold. The proposed budget increases spending by \$6,021,279 over the current year, mostly from increases in salaries and benefits (\$2,298,430), BOCES costs (\$2,774,159), debt service (\$425,780), and inflation of products and services (\$329,443).

Voters will also consider a proposition to purchase five buses for the Transportation Department at a maximum cost of \$780,000. This proposition includes two 65-passenger propane buses, two 65-passenger gas buses, and one seven-passenger SUV. The District would use \$280,000 of its bus reserve fund to help offset the cost. Of the total cost, \$506,220, or 64.9%, would return to the District in state transportation aid, meaning no additional taxes would be needed to purchase the buses at a net cost of approximately \$500,000.

It should be noted that our district is more reliant on local taxpayers than other school districts across the state. Due to the state's wealth ratio calculations, Warwick is allowed fewer state resources than most other local school districts.

While there are always uncontrollable external factors, such as changes in state aid, unexpected expenses, or rising costs, the District is committed to planning for the future. We are optimistic that we can continue to provide high-quality education while maintaining a reasonable tax levy increase for residents.

For more information on the district's budget, please visit <https://warwickvalleyschools.com/board-of-education/budget/>

Here are some highlights from our schools this week:

Park Avenue Elementary School

Mrs. Colgan's high school Agricultural Technology class came to Park Avenue to read the story from 'Caterpillar to Butterfly' to the kindergarten students and their third grade buddies. The high schoolers discussed the butterfly's life cycle and the essential milkweed needed for their survival. Afterward, they discussed a process known as cold stratification. Cold stratification is the term for a simple procedure that improves a seed's germination rate. The process mimics the winter season's chilly, moist weather that triggers a seed sprouting from its dormant state. The high school students modeled how to stratify milkweed seeds by using a ziplock bag. They took the bags back to the high school where they will keep them cold for 21 days. The students will reconvene to observe the growth. When ready, the milkweed will be planted for the butterflies to enjoy.

Furthermore, third grade musicians are currently learning about a story called 'Peter and the Wolf.' Peter and the Wolf is a symphonic tale for children meant to teach them about the symphony orchestra and all of its instruments. In this unit, students are learning the history of the composer Sergei Prokofiev, the four different instrument families, and the similarities and differences between the instruments in these families. Students are also learning about character

themes and why different instruments were chosen to represent specific characters in the story. All of this learning is preparing students for their instrument assembly next month and selecting an instrument to learn to play in fourth grade. Third graders will be attending an assembly where the current Fourth Grade Band and Orchestra will perform and showcase each of the instruments that students will be able to choose from to start their instrument journey.

Sanfordville Elementary School

PIE students honored and celebrated Earth Day with a variety of activities. Children planted sunflower seeds in recycled cardboard tubes and newspaper pots. They also used the tubes to make bird feeders with sun butter and birdseed. Using the sun's energy, students made sun prints with nature cutouts. Some of the PIE classes made kindness rocks with inspiring messages, which were placed in the PIE garden for all to enjoy. Others played games made from recycled materials. All PIE students learned that it's so important to take care of the Earth. If enough of us do small things like picking up trash, recycling, composting, saving water, turning off lights, and planting a garden, we can make a huge difference.

The fourth-grade students in Ms. DeTorres' class worked with their K-Buddies from Ms. Tilton's class on Earth Day. Together, they collaborated on creating an Earth Day coffee filter project and worked on creating their Earth Day books. It's always nice to see our fourth graders working so well with their kindergarten buddies and being such positive examples for them.

On April 24, Sanfordville celebrated Administrative Assistant's Day. We are so grateful for all of the hard work that Ms. Scheuermann and Mrs. Young do for our students at Sanfordville. They are such an integral part of our school community. They have a profound impact on our students, their families, our faculty, and staff members. Thank you for everything they do.

Warwick Valley Middle School

In a hands-on project based on the celebration of Earth Day, Ms. Shook's sixth grade science class spent their Monday building bug hotels to promote biodiversity and environmental awareness. The project, aimed at teaching students about the importance of beneficial insects in ecosystems, was both educational and fun. The students gathered materials such as bamboo, wood, straw, pine cones, and bricks to construct bug hotels. These structures, designed to house various beneficial insects like bees, ladybugs, and spiders, are intended to promote natural pest control and support local ecosystems. This project taught students about the role insects play in pollination and pest control, and it fostered a sense of responsibility toward our planet. Once completed, the bug hotels were placed in the fifth- and sixth-grade courtyard, a space that is already home to various plants and flowers. The students hope that these new structures will attract a variety of beneficial insects, enhancing the courtyard's ecosystem and serving as a living science experiment.

April is National Poetry Month, and at Warwick Valley Middle School, our ELA classes are embracing the theme by immersing students in the world of poetry. Students are reading, writing, and analyzing a diverse array of poets and their works. From classic sonnets to contemporary free verse, the month is designated to celebrate the rich tradition of poetry and inspire creativity among students. Teachers have been guiding students through the exploration of poetic techniques, themes, and symbolism, encouraging them to find their own voices through writing and expression. This collective celebration not only fosters an appreciation for the art of poetry but also strengthens the school's community of budding poets and literary enthusiasts.

Warwick Valley High School

This year marks a monumental milestone for our esteemed high school as we proudly joined the prestigious ranks of SkillsUSA, a respected United States career and technical student organization committed to empowering students engaged in trade training programs; with a resolute mission to foster excellence and professionalism, SkillsUSA serves as an invaluable platform, allowing students not only to refine their skills but also to shine on a broader stage. Recently, we embraced the opportunity to partake in the statewide competition held in Syracuse, where we dispatched a passionate team representing a diverse array of disciplines.

From the artistic finesse of our cosmetology students to the meticulous precision of our criminal justice enthusiasts and the boundless creativity of our video production aficionados, each member epitomizes the dedication and steadfast commitment that hallmark our school's Career and Technical Education program. As they step into the arena of competition, they carry not only their individual aspirations but also our entire school community's collective pride and unwavering support.

In anticipation of this monumental event, Ms. Brozycki played a crucial role by guiding our students through the intricate process of resume writing, equipping them with the necessary tools to excel and leave an indelible mark in the realm of SkillsUSA.

We are immensely proud of our students and staff for embarking on this endeavor, which will undoubtedly enhance their experience within our CTE program.