

**Weekly Column: EdTalk**  
**Superintendent of Schools: Dr. David Leach**  
**May 22, 2024**

At the core of the Warwick Valley Central School District's mission is the cultivation of students as ethical and globally aware citizens. This begins with a commitment to community service. At Warwick Valley High School, students are tasked with dedicating their time and skills to support those in need within our local community. This obligation commences in their freshman year and extends through the third marking period of their senior year. Students are required to fulfill the following hour quotas: the Class of 2024 with 15 hours, and the Class of 2025 and beyond with 20 hours. Exceptional dedication is recognized through the Principal's Award for 50 or more hours and the Superintendent's Award for 100 or more hours of service. The district is committed to facilitating opportunities and providing support to ensure students meet this essential component of their educational journey.

In recent news, you may have heard about the recent passage of the Annual Professional Performance Reviews Legislation in both the Assembly and Senate, with unanimous support, marking a significant shift in how school districts conduct performance reviews for teachers and principals. Governor Kathy Hochul's final approval is awaited. Starting in the 2024-25 school year, districts will have more autonomy in crafting evaluation plans, negotiating them with local teacher and principal unions. These plans must align with state standards and include classroom observations or school visits. While probationary employees will undergo yearly evaluations on all standards, tenured staff may not require annual assessments on each standard. Ratings, ranging from Level 4 to Level 1, indicate performance levels, emphasizing professional growth, rather than punitive measures. Notably, plans are not required to include student testing performance metrics. Although districts must report ratings annually to the State Education Department, legislation aims to streamline data reporting. This legislation also removes the threat of NYS withholding aid tied to evaluations. Plans will undergo state review, with districts able to retain previous evaluation systems until 2031-32, but must transition to the proposed framework thereafter, focusing on fostering educators' ongoing professional development.

It's been an eventful week across our district, with enriching experiences and exciting opportunities for our students at every level. From captivating author visits to musical performances and hands-on learning adventures, there's no shortage of inspiration and discovery.

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

### **Park Avenue Elementary School**

Park Ave had a visit from Alan Katz, author of more than 50 highly acclaimed children's books, including *Take Me Out of the Bathtub and Other Silly Dilly Songs*, *OOPS!*, *Poems I Wrote When No One Was Looking*, and *Really Stupid Stories for Really Smart Kids*. His presentation garnered many laughs, and energized students about reading and writing. They were encouraged to unleash their poetic voices and creativity. Mr. Katz discussed his love of words, reviewed the development and execution of creative ideas. He shared the steps of writing a book from concept to completion, and stressed the importance of writing every day.

Fourth grade musicians performed on the instruments they have been learning all year, finally performing for third graders last week. Now, it's time for those third graders to select the instruments they want to learn to play during the 2024-2025 school year. It was an exciting day for the performers and the audience, as they enjoyed this annual symbolic "passing of the torch"!

On May 16, all K-4 students tested their speed and skills alongside a favorite adult in the annual Wildcat Warrior Dash. This was sponsored by the Park Avenue PTA. Students ran with their parents, uncles, aunts, and a beloved teacher! The cool and exciting obstacles included hay bales, a balance beam, and a tire hop station, to name a few. Many families sponsored an obstacle, donated equipment, and brought water and snacks for the runners. Thank you to the Warwick Valley Cross Country Team and parent volunteers who helped supervise the course and assisted with setup and cleanup. Thank you to all!

### **Sanfordville Elementary School**

Fourth grade musicians at Sanfordville also performed for their third grade schoolmates. Mr. Muehlbauer and Ms. Blaikner introduced the third graders to some musical options for fourth grade. The third graders heard the instruments individually and in an ensemble in a live setting. Fourth grade students shared their reasons for choosing their instruments, as well as why they recommended others choose them, too. Fun fact: this was the first time orchestra students performed for an audience. Great job everyone!

In Ms. Marotta's kindergarten class, mystery guest Mr. Finelli presented about his job at Warwick DPW. He even had some heavy machinery for show-and-tell! Students got behind the wheel of a real dump truck and a front loader! Don't worry, they enjoyed getting into all the necessary safety equipment, too – from brightly colored shirts to safety hats. Thank you, Mr. Finelli and the Warwick DPW, for affording our students this experience.

Good news! Many students have been anxiously awaiting to see if their "spring chickens" hatch. Students have been monitoring the process and learning about the chicks' development

throughout. Students and teachers alike spread the word whenever a baby chick emerges from its shell. Our students and staff express excitement and joy!

### **Warwick Valley Middle School**

Field trip season kicked off last week, as eager sixth graders embarked on a journey to the Liberty Science Center in Jersey City. The students enjoyed a STEAM-focused day of immersive learning experiences and hands-on exploration. The students were captivated by a presentation about the solar system at the planetarium, and excited to engage in hands-on STEAM activities. From designing and building their own structures in the Engineering Lab, to experimenting with robotics and coding in the Technology Zone, the students had an enjoyable time applying their knowledge and skills in a real-world context.

The field trip provided sixth graders with a memorable day of learning. It reinforced the importance of STEAM education in preparing students for success in an increasingly interconnected world. As they return to the classroom, they carry with them the excitement and enthusiasm to continue exploring, questioning, and innovating - traits that will undoubtedly serve them well in the years to come; the traits of our district's Portrait of a Graduate.

Our students are encouraged to embrace a lifelong learning mindset; it is critical for educators to model that same commitment. This philosophy was on full display during this month's faculty meeting, where teachers workshopped instructional strategies to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes. One such strategy is the use of "the one-minute paper" in classrooms. This simple yet powerful technique involves asking students to reflect on their learning. They are asked to jot down their thoughts on paper. These reflections can range from summarizing key concepts learned to posing questions or expressing areas of confusion.

Through lively discussion and activities, teachers looked at how this strategy could be implemented across different subject areas and grade levels. With a commitment to continuous improvement, teachers are eager to implement the one-minute paper strategy. They want to harness its potential to deepen student learning and promote academic growth. By embracing creative ideas and strategies, our teachers are dedicated to creating dynamic and engaging learning experiences. This empowers students to thrive academically and beyond.

### **Warwick Valley High School**

Having a student speaker at graduation is a cherished tradition that adds a deeply personal and relatable touch to the ceremony. It provides an invaluable opportunity for the graduating class to be represented by one of their own. This is someone who shares their experiences, challenges, and triumphs. A student speaker can uniquely encapsulate the collective memories and emotions of the class, offering a perspective that deeply resonates with fellow graduates. Their speeches often reflect the shared hopes, dreams, and aspirations of the entire class. It serves both as a poignant farewell to the past and an inspiring call to the future. This personal connection

significantly enhances the emotional impact of the graduation ceremony, making it an unforgettable milestone for everyone involved.

To select our student speaker, we held auditions that allowed five enthusiastic students to showcase their oratory skills and share their unique narratives. In a room filled with teachers, each candidate delivered a prepared speech. This included highlighting their high school memories, expressing their visions for the future, and offering a message to their peers. This process was not merely a selection mechanism but also a celebration of our graduating class' diverse experiences and talents. Listening to these speeches was a delightful experience for the faculty, as it provided a poignant glimpse into the students' journeys and aspirations. The auditions demonstrated students' creativity and reflective thinking. This ensured that our chosen speaker would represent the class with authenticity and heartfelt sentiment. From the initial five students, the faculty narrowed the selection down to two finalists, who will now refine their speeches. The ultimate winner will be announced at senior prom, adding an extra layer of excitement and anticipation to the culmination of their high school experience.