

Weekly Column: EdTalk
Superintendent of Schools: Dr. David Leach
May 29, 2024

Thank you, Warwick Valley voters, for your participation on May 21 in support of the 2024-25 budget. The budget proposal received an unofficial approval on Tuesday night, with a vote of 961 to 361, reflecting approximately a 73% approval rating. Additionally, the bus proposition on the ballot also passed, and three community members were elected to our Board of Education.

The 2024-25 budget addresses prevailing economic concerns while preserving all current programs and staffing levels. This budget marks the ninth time in 12 years that the tax levy increase has remained below the tax cap, resulting in total savings of about \$3 million since 2012. The District has consistently stayed within the tax cap limits.

Our Board of Education President, Keith Parsons, expressed his gratitude, stating, "As Board President, I am deeply thankful to our community for their steadfast support. Your trust enables us to uphold our promise of educational excellence. Additionally, my heartfelt gratitude and appreciation go to my fellow board members and our outstanding district administration. Their diligence and hard work have resulted in a budget that is fiscally prudent while delivering top-tier learning experiences for every Warwick student."

The proposition to purchase five buses for the Transportation Department passed with a vote of 923 to 395, representing approximately a 70 percent approval rating. The purchase will include two 65-passenger propane buses, two 65-passenger gas buses, and one seven-passenger SUV at a maximum cost of \$780,000. The District will utilize \$280,000 from its bus reserve fund to help offset the cost. Of the total cost, \$506,220, or 64.9%, will be reimbursed to the District through state transportation aid. Therefore, no additional taxes will be required to purchase the buses, resulting in a net cost of approximately \$500,000.

The three candidates elected to the Board of Education are Tara Cruz, incumbent William Fanos, and Mandy Blanton. School board members oversee the education of the community's youth amidst challenging times for public education. Serving as stewards of the public school system, these volunteers collaborate to ensure schools remain adaptable and responsive to our students and community needs.

Here are some highlights from our schools this week:

Park Avenue Elementary

Members of the fourth-grade band and orchestra, under the direction of Ms. Blaikner and Mr. Muehlbauer, are preparing for two upcoming concerts. The first will be the Park Avenue Spring Concert (band and orchestra) on June 6 at 7:00 pm in the high school auditorium; the second will be the district-wide String Fling (orchestra) on June 12 at 7:00 pm in the new high school gym. These performances allow students to showcase everything they have learned this year,

from mastering the basics of their instruments to performing complex pieces of music together. We invite you to join us at one of these two remaining performances!

Mr. Muehlbauer, also a local beekeeper, recently educated each third-grade class about beekeeping. Students asked inquisitive questions about the queen bee, how to determine hive health, and how to begin beekeeping. Additionally, students explored the natural world on a field trip to the Hudson Highlands Nature Museum last week, where they hiked, learned about, and even spotted wildlife. During their hikes, students collaborated on bug catching, communicating their findings and problem-solving when the bugs proved elusive.

Sanfordville Elementary School

The Town of Warwick Police Department organized a Bike Rodeo at Sanfordville for 3rd and 4th graders from Park Avenue and Sanfordville. Sanfordville SRO Katie Oresto helped coordinate the event, where participants had their bikes inspected and adjusted as needed. Subsequently, they received a bike safety presentation from the police officers and learned about what the training officers undergo before joining the department's Bike Patrol. We extend our gratitude to Officers Mazzella, McNamara, Petrosky, Tretealt, and WVCSD SROs James, Dave, and Kat for their contributions to making this event enjoyable.

Kindergarten classes enjoyed a visit from the Warwick Rotary Club, which focused on water safety as the summer months approach. Each student received a copy of the story "Josh The Baby Otter," along with a coloring book and stickers. We are fortunate to have such a positive relationship with the Warwick Rotary Club!

Fourth-grade students relished their field trip to Sharpe Reservation in Fishkill, where they engaged in various team-building activities. These activities included constructing a go-kart from provided materials, navigating a rope swing between "islands" without touching the ground, and participating in a balancing challenge. Throughout these tasks, students collaborated, offering guidance and support to one another. Students and staff returned to Sanfordville with smiles and cherished memories from a memorable field trip.

Fourth-grade classes have been studying the Revolutionary War and recently participated in a Historical Walkabout Tour on the grounds of Sanfordville, thanks to our partnership with the Warwick Historical Society. During the tour, students experienced a map study, visited the site of the DeKay Homestead, completed a landscape and nature study, learned about Revolutionary History at Washington's Spring, visited the DeKay cemetery, and observed the Peace Wall.

Warwick Valley Middle School

Last week, we honored our March and April Students of the Month during a breakfast awards ceremony attended by proud family members. These students were not randomly selected; they were chosen by their teachers and administrators for embodying the traits outlined in our district's Portrait of a Graduate. From demonstrating exemplary problem-solving skills to exhibiting ethical and global citizenship, these students have consistently exceeded

expectations, setting a shining example for their peers. Congratulations to all the March and April honorees!

On Wednesday, the middle school hosted its annual *We Honor You Veterans Breakfast*. Veterans from the local VFW, the American Legion, and other community groups gathered to be honored for their selfless service and unwavering dedication to our country. On a beautiful spring morning, we assembled on the lawn to celebrate these brave men and women for the sacrifices they have made to protect the freedoms we hold dear. The event was a true display of community spirit, as Warwick Valley students and teachers joined forces with community leaders to express heartfelt gratitude to these local heroes. Middle school musicians provided melodies, setting the perfect tone for the occasion, while our Culinary Arts and Home and Careers classes served up a memorable culinary experience for our guests of honor.

The WVMS Wildcat Ambassadors served as hosts, embodying the values of service and compassion that we cherish at our school. Their dedication to ensuring that every veteran felt welcomed and appreciated is commendable. The significance of the event was further underscored by the presence of Orange County leaders, who took the opportunity to express their gratitude directly to the veterans in attendance. Their words of thanks served as a poignant reminder of the profound impact that our veterans have had on our community and our nation as a whole.

Warwick Valley High School

Warwick Valley High School recently hosted its annual WVHS Scholar-Athlete Breakfast, honoring the academic and athletic accomplishments of 346 Wildcats who attained the prestigious NYSPHSAA Scholar-Athlete status. These committed individuals showcased exceptional dedication by maintaining a remarkable grade average of 90 or higher throughout their competitive seasons. The event emphasized the significance of striking a balance between demanding academic pursuits and the rigors of athletic competition, highlighting the resilience and determination of these students.

Furthermore, the breakfast acknowledged students who attained US Army Academic All-American status. This distinction is bestowed upon students who demonstrate outstanding academic performance and leadership qualities, setting a lofty standard of excellence. The ceremony celebrated the multifaceted achievements of these students, recognizing not only their athletic abilities but also their intellectual capabilities and leadership potential. The Scholar-Athlete Breakfast served as a testament to the tireless efforts and unwavering dedication of these exceptional students, who excel both academically and athletically.