

Weekly Column: EdTalk
Superintendent of Schools: Dr. David Leach
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At Warwick Valley Central Schools, we are committed to cultivating well-rounded students who possess the essential traits needed to thrive in an ever-evolving world. Our vision, encapsulated in the Portrait of a Graduate, outlines the key characteristics we aim for our students to develop: Collaborator, Communicator, Creator/Innovator, Global and Ethical Citizen, Resilient Individual, Problem Solver, and Life-long Learner.

Last week, William Zwart's seventh-grade social studies class presented their projects for the "Portrait of a History Graduate Project." While many students might view history as a tedious exercise in memorizing dates, people, and places, the lesson I observed demonstrated the subject's true vibrancy and engagement.

In this innovative Portrait of a History Graduate project, seventh-graders explored how notable historical figures exemplified these traits. Every prominent figure was once a student, and their journeys to greatness often involved demonstrating some, if not all, of these characteristics. Through this project, students took a deep dive into history to draw connections between their assigned historical figure and the Portrait of a Graduate traits, supported by relevant evidence.

Each student was randomly assigned a historical figure to study. The goal was to connect their assigned historical figure to two specific characteristics from the Portrait of a Graduate list. For example, a student might claim, "Thomas Jefferson was a communicator." The project involved several key tasks:

Students began by identifying and gathering evidence from at least two articles or documents to support each of their two claims about their historical figure, ensuring all sources were properly cited using the Modern Language Association format. They then compiled their findings and evidence into a Google Slides presentation, using a provided template to help structure their slides. Finally, students presented their findings in a 3-5 minute oral presentation to the class, effectively communicating their claims and supporting evidence.

The students' presentations confirmed that the project not only deepened historical knowledge but also enhanced critical skills such as research, analysis, and public speaking. By drawing parallels between historical figures and the Portrait of a Graduate traits, students gained a greater appreciation for the enduring relevance of these characteristics in shaping influential leaders.

The dramatic and engaging nature of history captivated students through the compelling narratives of notable figures. This assignment, combined with class discussions, fostered an

enthusiasm for exploring the past and understanding its profound effects on today's world and beyond. I commend Mr. Zwart, the teacher, for designing such an impactful task and using it to truly assess the students' strengths and areas for growth. This project highlights our dedication to fostering well-rounded individuals ready to make meaningful contributions to society.

Here are some highlights from our schools this week:

Park Avenue Elementary School

The weather was perfect for a walk to town, as the kindergarteners set off on a fun journey to the Warwick Post Office. Beforehand, in class, each student wrote a letter to a special someone and then dropped it into a special mailbox when they arrived at the Post Office. The tour taught us about how mail is sorted and delivered to our homes. We visited the loading dock to see how mail is packed in a unique vehicle, with its driver's seat on the right side, unlike most vehicles in the US. Further, kindergarteners used postal routes as a way to learn the difference between "rural" and "city." The postal staff and carriers were very generous with their time, and everyone left with a swag bag of goodies.

The band and orchestra students had some wonderful opportunities to reflect on this year's work and to showcase their musical skills. For example, one of the activities in Mr. Muehlbauer's fourth grade band classes engaged students in reflecting on their experiences of year one in a band, and to come up with advice they might share with the incoming class of band students (this year's third-graders). They came up with so many pearls of wisdom, but Mr. Muehlbauer's favorite was: "You are going to squeak. You are going to play the wrong notes. But, you are not going to fail. You are not going to be perfect, you are going to be just right!"

Our fourth grade orchestra students also had the opportunity to play alongside peers from all of our district's schools on June 11, during this year's String Fling. Our participating fourth graders demonstrated what they've learned as they made their contribution to the performance, and also got to witness firsthand the potential trajectory of a Warwick orchestra student! A huge thanks to both Ms. Blaikner and Mr. Muehlbauer!

Sanfordville Elementary School

Summer reading started early for some of our third grade students and their families. Mrs. Sirico, Mrs. Tully, and Mrs. Agro invited parents to join their students for a Reading Picnic this past week. Families were able to enjoy some of Sanfordville's beautiful grounds as they gathered around the Peace Wall to spend some quiet time together reading some of the favorite books students read this past school year. The afternoon concluded with some of our students enjoying a healthy snack at the end of the day. What a wonderful way for our students to end their school week.

Our fourth grade students went on their historical building tours. Our students were able to look at artifacts found on site from the 1700s and 1800s. After that they got to see how they sift through the dirt to find artifacts and the students were able to see where they did the dig. The students explored inside the Shingle House and the Train Caboose. On the other side of the village, students explored the attic, the ballroom and the exterior of Baird's Tavern. The students even got to see the bedroom Martha Washington stayed in for a night. Behind Baird's Tavern the students explored the Hasbrouck Barn. They learned about the tools, medicines, and equipment used during the Revolutionary period. Thank you to the Warwick Historical Society for another great day of learning about our Warwick History!

Last week our students were able to participate in a Pollinator Tour at the Sanfordville library. As the students entered the library they followed the path of the Monarch butterflies, which took them from station to station. At each station, our students were able to learn more about the different types of pollinators, and how they are important to the students' everyday lives. Some of the stations that the students visited were the nocturnal pollinators, beetles and others, butterflies, and honey bees. A special thank you to Ms. Cancel for creating such a wonderful experience for our students.

The fourth grade orchestra students performed at the String Fling Concert. Students performed the following songs *We Have Grown* and *Salamander Samba*. Sanfordville students also participated in the finale which included all of the students from the WVCSD Orchestra Program. We are so proud of all of our students and we are looking forward to seeing them continue to grow as musicians throughout their years at WVCSD. A special thank you to Ms. Blaikner for guiding our orchestra students throughout this school year!

Congratulations to all of the OM teams that competed at Worlds. We are especially proud of our Sanfordville students that competed and those that took home the second place trophy! Well done!

Warwick Valley Middle School

Congratulations to the middle school's May and June Students of the Month, who were celebrated during a breakfast ceremony. Also recognized were three students who received Sojourner Truth Awards. The award, presented by SUNY Orange, honors the memory and legacy of Isabella Baumfree, known as Sojourner Truth, an American abolitionist and women's rights activist who was born into slavery in New York and escaped to freedom in 1826. The program encourages college attendance as an option for students from groups traditionally under-represented in the collegiate population. Congratulations, Aaron Hernandez Espinoza, Yadira Martinez and Delilah Sanchez. Additionally, our Odyssey of the Mind World Finalists were recognized for their success this year in traveling to World's in Iowa. All finalists received certificates from State Senator James Skofous.

During the final faculty meeting of the 2023-2024 school year staff reflected on the collective efforts and achievements of both staff and students over the past year. It was a time to celebrate the dedication, resilience and innovation that have defined this year's journey, and the discussions centered around milestones reached, challenges overcome and the collaborative work that has driven progress. We recognized the gains students have made by recognizing and commending their growth in alignment with the characteristics of the district's Portrait of a Graduate. This framework emphasizes attributes such as problem-solving, collaboration, communication and ethical citizenship, and guides our educational endeavors. Students' accomplishments reflect not only their hard work, but also the nurturing and guidance provided by all of the staff. As a staff, they know the shared vision and collaborative spirit will continue to inspire and shape the school district's educational mission in the years to come.

Finally, the eighth grade class enjoyed their annual field trip to Lake Compounce. Lake Compounce is one of the oldest amusement parks in the Northeast. The weather was perfect for students to enjoy thrills on roller coasters and on water slides. This celebratory trip truly was the perfect end to what has been another awesome year at the middle school. We look forward to recognizing these eighth graders at moving up!

Warwick Valley High School

This year's Science Symposium saw remarkable presentations from three of our high school students, showcasing their rigorous research conducted through the esteemed Science Research class offered in collaboration with the University of Albany. The event highlighted the dedication and intellectual curiosity of our students, as they tackled complex scientific questions and contributed to ongoing discussions in their respective fields.

Charlotte Wendt: Investigating Myelination in Infants Post-Esophageal Atresia Repair. Charlotte's research focused on the neurological development in infants who have undergone long-gap esophageal atresia (LGEA) repair. Her study, titled "Is Myelination in Infancy Delayed Following Long-Gap Esophageal Atresia Repair," aimed to determine whether the surgical intervention impacts the process of myelination – a critical aspect of brain development. Charlotte's meticulous analysis and insightful conclusions provide valuable data that could influence future medical approaches and post-operative care for infants with LGEA, potentially improving long-term outcomes for these young patients.

Ava Gell: Linking Dietary Tryptophan to Mood and Well-being. Ava's research delved into the biochemical connections between diet and mental health. Her project, "Determining a Correlation Between Dietary Tryptophan Content and Mood and Well-being," explored how varying levels of tryptophan – a precursor to serotonin – might affect an individual's mood and overall sense of well-being. Through detailed dietary assessments and psychological evaluations,

Ava was able to identify significant trends, contributing to a better understanding of how nutrition can influence mental health. Her work underscores the importance of dietary considerations in holistic approaches to mental wellness.

Zachary Johnston: Analyzing the Impact of Footwear on Running Gait. Zachary's investigation centered on biomechanics, specifically how different types of shoes affect running gait. His study, "The Effect of Different Types of Shoes on Running Gait," involved comprehensive analyses of runners' movements while wearing various footwear. By examining parameters such as stride length, foot strike patterns, and joint angles, Zachary provided valuable insights that could help athletes, trainers, and shoe manufacturers optimize performance and reduce injury risks. His findings contribute to the ongoing conversation about the role of footwear in athletic training and performance.

The presentations by Charlotte, Ava, and Zachary are a testament to the high level of academic excellence fostered within our Science Research class. Offered through a unique partnership with the University of Albany, this course provides students with the opportunity to engage in authentic scientific research, develop critical thinking skills, and contribute to meaningful scientific discourse.