

Weekly Column: EdTalk
Superintendent of Schools: Dr. David Leach
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Imagine a young student, passionate about her craft, who rises to the top in a statewide competition, bringing recognition not only to herself but also to her school's burgeoning program. This spring, that student is junior Zoey Crane, who shone brightly in the New York State SkillsUSA contest, clinching first place in the junior cosmetology competition. As we delve into Zoey's journey and her inspiring triumph, let's explore the engaging activities and achievements happening across our schools, celebrating the dedication and talent that define our district.

This spring, during a statewide competition, junior Zoey Crane earned well-deserved recognition. Among 41 high school juniors, Zoey won the junior cosmetology competition in the annual New York State SkillsUSA contest.

This is the first year Warwick Valley High School has had a chapter with the SkillsUSA organization, making Zoey's and WVHS's recognition a rare accomplishment. SkillsUSA is a workforce development organization that empowers students to become skilled professionals, career-ready leaders, and responsible community members. The organization represents nearly 400,000 career and technical education students and teachers with chapters in middle schools, high schools, and college/postsecondary institutions.

WVHS sent 14 students to the SkillsUSA competition, accompanied by teachers Eduardo Avila (Criminal Justice program), Kathleen Bettello (Cosmetology program), and Dan Cecconie (Video Production program).

Zoey credits her outstanding victory to the incredible support of her classmates, Ms. Bettello's instruction, and the hours spent in class learning and preparing for the competition and to be a cosmetologist.

She admits she had been anxious to join the program the last couple of years because it is only open to juniors and seniors. "I was really excited to learn that our school had a cosmetology program," Zoey said. When planning her junior year schedule, she made sure the cosmetology program was her priority. We love to hear that excitement, Zoey!

Every year, SkillsUSA students sharpen their skills through competitions — which are created and adjudicated by industry professionals — on the local, regional, and state levels.

"It was such a great trip; it was phenomenal," she said of her three-day competition in Syracuse. It was an experience that capped her year of learning soft people skills that will translate into any profession and technical skills that her teacher said will last her lifetime.

Once an education path for students only seeking vocational skills, CTE is now hailed as an opportunity for students looking to build career skills, get a start on their college education, or learn a skilled trade that will allow them to pay for college.

“She’s really committed to learning cosmetology, and it is something she’ll have forever,” said Ms. Bettello. “She’s professional. She’s mature. She’s helpful. And she works well with the other students in class.”

These are excellent skills a student can gain as a junior in high school. The CTE program targets the competencies of a Portrait of a Graduate, a representation of the district’s priority goals for teaching and learning to create graduates who are collaborators, communicators, creators and innovators, ethical and global citizens, resilient individuals, problem-solvers, and lifelong learners.

Zoey still has her senior year left and will return to WVHS in the fall to continue learning in the cosmetology program, which will also prepare her to sit for her state license exam in cosmetology. Congratulations, Zoey, and good luck in all that you do in the coming school year and beyond!

As we celebrate Zoey’s achievements and the many opportunities available to our students, let’s take a look at some of the other exciting events and accomplishments happening across our schools.

Here are some highlights from our schools this week:

Park Avenue Elementary School

On Flag Day, kindergarteners learned facts about the United States flag from members of the Nam Knights Orange County Chapter, including why the flag has 13 stripes and 50 stars. They also learned about different ways people can show respect for our flag:

- Always ensure the flag is properly lit.
- Never let the flag touch the ground.
- Raise the flag at sunrise and lower it at sunset each day.

Students also enjoyed a demonstration on properly folding the flag and participated in a great Q&A session.

Kindergarteners also had a great time observing their painted lady butterflies go through their life cycle. Students received a cup of caterpillars, observed the caterpillars eat and grow larger, form their chrysalises, and finally emerge as butterflies. As lifelong learners, students continue to learn new information about the world and their surroundings.

Second graders reflected on their school year by creating "year in review" memory books. The pages in the book included prompts such as:

- Adjectives that describe second grade
- Things they learned this year
- Favorite memories and friends
- A fun "find someone who will" page about the summer.

Students used a publishing app to share their ideas and understanding through their writing, art, voice, and video. The memory books also have an autograph page, so students can ask friends to sign as they get ready to say a temporary "good-bye" for the summer.

Sanfordville Elementary School

Students and staff were feeling their "Field Day Vibes." Students got outside and participated in some good old-fashioned fun activities. There were parachute activities, relay races, pirate's gold, a dance party, tag, kickball, human pinball, and soccer games. While it was a warm day, students and staff were mindful of the weather and took ample breaks throughout the day to come inside and beat the heat. Students were also treated to a BMX bike presentation in the bus parking lot. They lined up outside, cheering on the performers. Some staff members were invited to participate in the performance, which brought about numerous cheers from all students. A huge thank you to the staff, PTA, and parent volunteers for helping to make this event so enjoyable for the students.

Who is ready for summer camp? Well, the first graders at Sanfordville fully embraced the idea of summer camp. First-grade classrooms were converted into mini-campgrounds. While the students participated in camp-themed activities throughout the day, they were extremely excited to invite visitors to their campgrounds to see all of their exciting math and literacy skills being brought to the forefront. Rumor has it that they even had a chance to enjoy some s'mores around their tissue paper campfires.

The 158 fourth graders were recognized for completing their elementary school requirements before heading off to Middle School next year. Students, staff, and guests gathered in the auditorium at the High School for the ceremony. Principal Johnna Maraia opened the ceremony with her welcome address. Associate Principal William Ferraro introduced the Principal Leadership Awards as well as the NYS Attorney General's Triple C awards. The fourth-grade teachers introduced each of the fourth-grade students, who were presented with their moving-up certificates. A special thank you to the parents, Sanfordville PTA, teachers, staff members, Board of Education members, WVHS Principal Georgianna Diopoulos and her staff for accommodating us at the last minute, and everyone who helped make this event come together for the students. We would also like to extend our gratitude to the SES PTA for hosting an amazing bowling party celebration at Pin Streets following the ceremony.

Warwick Valley Middle School

Ms. Wendt's sixth-grade students wrapped up the year with a culminating performance-based investigation on weather and climate. Students collected and analyzed data on weather variables to determine how the motions and interactions of air masses cause changes in weather. The hands-on project deepened students' understanding of atmospheric science and helped develop their data collection and analysis skills.

Students examined weather maps over five consecutive days, collecting evidence of how the motions and interactions of air masses result in changes to regional weather conditions. The process involved observing patterns, noting the behaviors of different air masses, and understanding the impact of their interactions. Students correlated their findings with real-world weather events, enabling them to draw meaningful conclusions about the atmosphere, enhancing their grasp of the subject matter and its practical implications.

Fifth-grade science students have been busy learning about food webs and recently completed their own food web posters. The colorful and informative posters illustrate the relationships between various organisms in different ecosystems, each highlighting the connections between producers, consumers, and decomposers.

The food web posters showcase our students' understanding of complex ecological interactions as well as their creativity. Each poster uses vibrant colors and detailed diagrams to tell a unique story about how energy flows through an ecosystem, emphasizing the importance of biodiversity and the interdependence of all living things. The project has sparked a deeper interest in ecology and environmental science among the students, paving the way for future explorations and discoveries.

Warwick Valley High School

As another school year comes to a close, the Future Farmers of America (FFA) club at the high school is celebrating a year of accomplishments, growth, and community impact. Known for its dedication to agricultural education and leadership development, the FFA has once again demonstrated why it remains a cornerstone of the school's extracurricular offerings.

Founded on the principles of hands-on learning and practical skill development, the FFA provides students with unique opportunities to explore various aspects of agriculture. Members gain invaluable experience in animal science, horticulture, agronomy, and agribusiness through a blend of classroom instruction, field trips, and hands-on projects.

Warwick Valley High School's FFA members have immersed themselves in diverse activities throughout the year. Each endeavor serves as a building block for personal and professional growth, from raising livestock to cultivating crops. Under the guidance of dedicated advisors and

industry professionals, students learn not only about the technical aspects of farming but also about leadership, teamwork, and responsibility.

As the school year draws to a close, members of the FFA at WVHS are reflecting on their achievements with pride. The skills they have acquired, friendships they have forged, and memories they have made will undoubtedly leave a lasting impact on their lives.

Looking ahead, the FFA remains dedicated to nurturing the next generation of agricultural leaders. With continued support from the school administration, parents, and the local community, the club is poised to build upon its successes and explore new opportunities for growth and innovation.

As we close this week's column and celebrate all these incredible accomplishments, I would like to take a moment to briefly address our senior class:

Dear Seniors,

Congratulations to the Warwick Valley High School Class of 2024, arguably the most accomplished class to ever walk these halls. Your achievements in honors classes, sports, theater, music, leadership, and community service are truly remarkable. The pride we all feel right now is unparalleled, echoed by your parents, families, and loved ones.

This Saturday, you will graduate, and we should all keep our fingers crossed for a sunny and mild temperature day. I have three pieces of advice that revolve around your iPhone:

1. Phone home (or text) – Your loved ones will miss you.
2. Keep on your "Find My" app – Your parents worry about you and they pay the bill, so keep it on.
3. Experience life – Put your phones away and live in the moment.

Reflecting on my own graduation over 35 years ago, I understand the mix of excitement and anxiety you're feeling. Back then, I too grappled with uncertainty about the future and my place in the world. Over time, I learned that our talents and abilities are far more than just grades or test scores. True success comes from pursuing what brings you meaning and personal fulfillment.

As you celebrate Independence Day, remember Thomas Jefferson's words about the pursuit of happiness. It's not just about pleasure, but about personal fulfillment—achieving goals that matter deeply to you.

Embrace your individuality and unique talents. Don't let traditional measures of success limit your potential. By following your path to personal fulfillment, you'll find true success and happiness.

Congratulations once again, and best of luck in all your future endeavors. Celebrate your uniqueness and the bright futures ahead of you.