

**Weekly Column: EdTalk**  
**Superintendent of Schools: Dr. David Leach**  
**June 5, 2024**

As the school year draws to a close, it's a perfect time to reflect on the incredible achievements of our students. This past week, we celebrated the hard work, dedication, and diverse talents of Warwick Valley High School students during the 51st Annual Awards Ceremony. This event, along with our ongoing Superintendent Spotlights, shines a light on the exceptional accomplishments of our students, highlighting their journeys and the bright futures they are carving out for themselves. From academic excellence and athletic prowess to artistic achievements and compassionate career aspirations, our students continue to make us proud. Their stories not only inspire us but also remind us of the potential and promise within our school community. Let's take a moment to celebrate these outstanding individuals and their remarkable contributions.

The 51st Annual Warwick Valley High School Awards Ceremony is a time for deserving high school students and their proud families to celebrate their hard work and achievements. I am proud to share that more than 140 awards and scholarships were handed out, including honors provided by our district, individual colleges and universities, local and state organizations, area businesses, families, private donors, and other generous sources.

I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to my fellow district administrators, teachers, staff, and community members who joined us to announce this year's honorees. Their presence always contributes to making it a special evening. One of the highlights of the evening every year is the presentation of medals to our valedictorian and salutatorian, Melina Garby and Ava Gell, respectively.

Melina Garby has been an active member of the National Honor Society and the Mu Alpha Theta Mathematics Honor Society. Melina has admirably balanced her stellar academics with an equally impressive athletics career. She played softball, soccer, and basketball for the Wildcats, and served as captain for her varsity softball team and varsity and junior varsity soccer teams. She is a 2023 New York State Public High School Athletics Association (NYSPHSAA) Scholar-Athlete, a United States Army Academic All-American, and a 2024 NYSPHSAA Student-Athlete of the Year. Melina will be attending the University of Michigan's College of Engineering in the fall, majoring in computer science with a minor in Spanish.

Ava Gell is also active in both the National Honor Society and the Mu Alpha Theta Mathematics Honor Society. During her four years at Warwick Valley, Ava explored many of our district's academic and extracurricular opportunities, including the French Club, the Mental Health Club, and the American Sign Language Club. Ava also completed the WVHS Science Research

Program, one of the most rigorous elective academic programs in our catalog. The three-year program focuses on a scientific area of study chosen by the student and requires collegiate- and professional-level research, writing, and presentation skills. Ava is also a proud 10-year Odyssey of the Mind participant, both as a competitor and coach. Ava will be attending Brown University in the fall and plans to study biology.

Congratulations, Melina and Ava! We are all looking forward to hearing you address your peers during this year's commencement ceremony on Saturday, June 29. And to all of our deserving 140-plus award winners this year, great job and continued success – whether next year takes you along a college path, a career path, or right back here to WVHS!

In my latest Superintendent's Spotlight and Artist of the Week, I am thrilled to introduce you to two remarkable Warwick Valley High School seniors whose dedication and achievements are truly inspiring. I encourage you to read the full stories which are available on our website and published in the newspaper.

Talia Hartigan has had a musical journey like no other. From her early days filled with the sounds of classic opera and Frank Sinatra, Talia has grown into a talented musician, mastering both the flute and the upright bass. Her dedication to music is evident in her achievements, including NYSSMA and OCMEA All-County honors. However, Talia's passion extends beyond music. This fall, she will be attending SUNY College of Environmental Science & Forestry to study forest ecosystem science, driven by her desire to combat climate change. I invite you to read more about Talia's remarkable story, her musical accomplishments, and her future aspirations in the full spotlight article. Let's celebrate the incredible talents and ambitions of our students!

Ariana Elias is another senior whose dedication to caring for others has shaped her future aspirations. With her mother being a nurse and her father an emergency medical technician, Ariana was exposed to the healthcare field from a young age. Her volunteer work at Montefiore St. Luke's Cornwall Hospital since 2018 and her recent recognition with the 17th annual nursing scholarship from Hudson Valley Magazine are testaments to her commitment and passion. Ariana's dedication goes beyond academics and volunteer work. She has been a National Honor Society member, a varsity cheerleader for three years, and a cosmetology student at WVHS. Her belief in pursuing multiple creative interests is truly inspiring. This fall, Ariana will attend Louisiana State University to pursue a Bachelor of Science in Nursing, with the goal of becoming a labor and delivery or neonatal intensive care unit nurse. Her story of resilience, compassion, and determination is one you don't want to miss. I encourage you to read the full spotlight article to learn more about Ariana's incredible journey and join me in celebrating her achievements and future endeavors!

These stories highlight the diverse talents and ambitions of our students, and I am proud to share their journeys with our community. They offer a quick glimpse into the vibrant life of our schools and serve as a reminder that our future is bright, thanks to the inspiring youth of today. Let's continue to support and celebrate the outstanding achievements of our students!

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

### **Park Avenue Elementary School**

The Village of Warwick was the first community in New York designated as a Monarch Village USA member. This honor is a direct result of our community's dedication to environmental conservation and multifaceted efforts to protect the monarch butterfly and other pollinators. Park Avenue and Sanfordville students showcased personal work connected to the pollinator projects they've been working on in class. Some highlights included:

- Artwork displayed in the gym
- Planting a pollinator garden in front of the school
- Safe honey bee display by Mr. Muehlbauer
- Orchestra performance

Park Avenue thanks our partners at Sanfordville, Mayor Newhard, Nancy Colgan, local Butterfly Project managers, Warwick gardeners, and the many community members who made this celebratory event possible.

Fourth-grade scientists are learning all about communication vis-a-vis wave energy. Did you know that waves travel through different materials and serve as energy transmitters? Students learned about the impact of wavelength and amplitude on the motion of objects, discovering that waves with shorter wavelengths move up and down quickly, while those with longer wavelengths move up and down more slowly. This knowledge about waves helps students better understand and appreciate how things like sound or earthquakes work. For example, think of how scientists learn about dolphins' use of sound for navigation and communication, or how seismologists study earthquakes, or how engineers use that knowledge to design safer buildings. We always love hearing our students' thoughts on the many ways the things they are learning in the classroom are applied every day in the real world.

### **Sanfordville Elementary School**

Sanfordville was honored to participate in the Warwick Monarch Butterfly Pollinator Project. Various community events took place to celebrate this distinguished achievement at Park Avenue Elementary and Stanley Deming Park. Our local schools have been working closely with the Butterfly Committee, gardening community organizations, high school agricultural teachers

and students, and FFA students to learn more about different types of pollinators and the pollination process.

Students of all grade levels researched and created projects for the festival, including artwork, "All About" books, poetry, dioramas, posters, clay sculptures, and more. Sanfordville will continue to collaborate with community partners to design and plant its very own pollinator garden with native plants by the Peace Wall.

Following the festival, Mrs. Cancel, SES's media specialist, organized a Library Pollinator Tour that will take place at Sanfordville in early June. The library will be beautifully decorated with monarch butterfly pictures hanging from the ceiling. At the end of the tour, she will share a newsletter for the students to take home and share with their parents.

### **Warwick Valley Middle School**

This week marked an exciting adventure for our fifth-grade students as they embarked on their annual field trip to Legoland. Beyond the thrill of riding the attractions and exploring the colorful landscapes, the journey also offered an enriching educational experience. As they encountered intricate constructions and engaged in hands-on activities, students seamlessly absorbed STEM principles. They learned about the mechanics behind the towering Lego structures and unraveled the science behind the rides' operations, blending fun with learning. These field trips sparked their creativity and ignited a passion for exploration and discovery.

Professional BMX athlete Mannie Noguera brought his inspiring skills to our school. With flips, spins, and tricks that defied gravity, Mr. Noguera wowed students and staff alike, showcasing the thrilling world of extreme sports. As part of a special event aimed at promoting athleticism, determination, and anti-bullying, Mr. Noguera shared his journey to success and offered words of encouragement to aspiring athletes. His visit left a lasting impression on students, inspiring them to pursue their passions with dedication and perseverance. Mr. Noguera's performance served as a reminder that with hard work and determination, anything is possible. We extend our sincere thanks to him for an unforgettable experience and to our PTA for sponsoring this event.

We kicked off an exciting annual initiative with the Warwick Valley Community Center as representatives began recruitment for their highly anticipated four-week Summer Youth Leadership Program. Targeting incoming seventh, eighth, and ninth graders, this program offers a unique opportunity for young minds to immerse themselves in leadership development. With a focus on engaging with local leaders and participating in various leadership activities, participants are poised to cultivate essential skills and insights over the summer break. The exclusivity of the program, accepting only 15 students through a rigorous application process, speaks to the caliber and dedication expected from its participants. As an added incentive, students completing the program will receive a \$100 stipend, underscoring the center's

commitment to nurturing future leaders while offering a tangible reward for their dedication and efforts.

### **Warwick Valley High School**

The high school held its much-anticipated junior prom at the picturesque Barn at the Villa Venezia. The event, impeccably organized by the class advisor, Ms. Murphy, in collaboration with the student council, proved to be an unforgettable evening for all attendees.

The prom commenced with a delightful cocktail hour, setting the tone for the night. Students enjoyed a wonderful meal followed by an indulgent buffet dessert table, satisfying every sweet tooth in attendance. The DJ kept the dance floor alive with a mix of popular hits that had students dancing the night away.

A photo booth added an extra layer of fun, capturing memories that will be cherished for years to come. However, the highlight of the evening was undoubtedly the announcement of the Prom Court and the crowning of the Prom King and Queen. Congratulations to Annika Geysen, Charlotte Gillen, Kevin Ginley, Olivia Martino, Sonny Miceli, and Nick Toscano for being named to the Prom Court. The night reached its peak with the announcement of Garrison Sobo and Charlotte Wendt as the Prom King and Queen, receiving enthusiastic applause and cheers from their peers.

It was a night to remember, marked by great music, delicious food, and the joy of celebrating with friends. Thanks to the dedicated efforts of the class advisor and student council, it was an event that truly embodied the spirit of the Warwick Valley High School community.

Warwick defeated Minisink Valley 17-7 to capture the 2024 Section 9 Class B boys lacrosse championship on May 25 at Middletown's Faller Field. This title marks the Wildcats' sixth consecutive championship and their 10th overall as a program. Leading the Warwick attack, Ryan Sullivan scored four goals and Dylan Sullivan added three. Kevin Ginley, Joey Finn, and Anthony Mazza each scored twice. Goalie Luke Solari was outstanding with 20 saves. On Saturday afternoon, the Wildcats faced South Side High School from Long Island in the state quarterfinals. Although the team fell just short in this contest, it was highly competitive and showcased the remarkable progress and competitiveness of the lacrosse program.