

**Weekly Column: EdTalk**  
**Superintendent of Schools: Dr. David Leach**  
**August 7, 2024**

As we transition into mid-August, it's a prime opportunity for reflection, recharging, and planning how best to support our teachers, staff, and, most importantly, our students. As Superintendent of Schools, my focus is on understanding and implementing effective teaching programs, sharing best practices, and pursuing continuous growth both personally and professionally. This ensures that our main goal — student achievement — remains our top priority.

Our commitment to improving student success is reflected in our budget, which supports both short- and long-term district goals. We align resources to meet these objectives, and our staff development programs are designed to enhance student achievement. Regular curriculum reviews help us maintain high standards, promote quality instruction, and set clear expectations for student outcomes.

In 2022, I posed an essential question to our administrators and teacher leaders: *To what extent do the K-12 reading and writing competencies foster the skills described in Warwick's Portrait of a Graduate?* This work focuses on the competencies our stakeholders identified years ago as essential for ensuring our students are fully prepared for their future. The findings of our audit highlighted the consistent integration, prominent display, effective communication, and strong initiatives supporting this vision. However, the report also identified areas for improvement, particularly in phonics instruction, content area literacy, and literacy academic intervention services.

In 2023, Warwick Schools successfully piloted the University of Florida Literacy Institute (UFLI) and Institute for Multi-Sensory Education (IMSE) phonics programs in Kindergarten and first-grade classrooms. This initiative was implemented with fidelity, leading to positive outcomes for students. Teachers received extensive training and ongoing professional development, enhancing their ability to provide high-quality phonics instruction. This structured approach has equipped teachers with robust strategies and resources, boosting their confidence in teaching foundational literacy skills. I am incredibly proud of our teachers and their commitment to continuous improvement.

This past year, high school department chairs initiated a program to enhance content literacy across all subject areas, aligning with the district's vision of literacy for all. This new approach for secondary education includes professional learning sessions tailored to the specific needs of each subject area. These sessions aim to integrate literacy skills within the contexts of science, history, mathematics, and the arts. Addressing these skills in a meaningful context serves as an

engaging way for students to hone these skills and understand their importance. Each subject has its key literacy skills. For instance, in a history class, students learn to interpret primary and secondary sources, identify bias, think sequentially, compare and contrast events, accounts, maps, infographics, documents, photos, and visuals, determine the meanings of words within historical contexts, evaluate the credibility of sources, and seek a wide variety of texts to gain deeper understandings. I commend the high school's efforts and our teachers' dedication to engaging in this challenging work.

As we move into the 2024-25 school year, we will consider the following essential question: *To what extent are Academic Intervention Services (AIS) providers prepared, supported, and appropriately deployed across the K-8 continuum?* Our district offers AIS to supplement general curriculum instruction, helping students meet learning standards. Students identified as at risk of not achieving the required performance levels qualify for AIS. In grades K-8, this support includes remedial instruction in reading and math. At the high school level, it assists students who have not yet passed required Regents-level courses in social studies and science. This additional support can occur during the regular school day or before and after school.

By emphasizing instructional leadership, focusing on student achievement, and continuously seeking improvement, we remain dedicated to maintaining and enhancing the quality of education in our district. Our collective efforts ensure that every student receives the support they need to succeed, fostering a bright future for all.

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

#### **Park Avenue Elementary School**

Later this summer, Park Avenue families will be receiving a summer packet that will include welcome letters and other important information. Please be on the lookout for this mailing, as well as for some of the following consistent themes that our teachers want to emphasize:

- Supporting children with the necessary sleep and other shifts as we approach the start of the school year.
- Knowing the name of your child's teacher and other information, such as their email address and classroom number.
- Reviewing the supplies list for the 2024-2025 school year.

In addition, we will be including a list of important dates for the year, including dates when school will be closed and early dismissal days. We encourage everyone to display this in a prominent place in your homes as an easy-access reference for the coming year.

#### **Sanfordville Elementary School**

The Extended School Year (ESY) Program theme for Week 4 was *Sports Theme Week*. The ESY Middle School and High School students started the week off learning about the history of the Olympics. They then transitioned into poetry writing. The students were visited by the poet, Mr. Larkin, and had the opportunity to “Look Through a Poet’s Eyes,” and used classroom objects to inspire their poetry. Toward the end of the week, students had the wonderful opportunity to work with aspiring art teacher, Ms. Sforza, who led them in a class about making their own pottery! Students created their own hand-made pinch pots and ring dishes.

In keeping with this week’s sports theme, the students in Ms. King’s class wrote about their favorite sport. The students practiced filling in a graphic organizer, editing a rough draft, and writing a final copy as well. Students also had a celebration for the novel they’ve been reading.

While the gym floors at Sanfordville are getting a new facelift, Physical Education teachers have adapted their plans in order to help provide our students with a variety of stimulating activities in their temporary location in the cafeteria. During one particular lesson, our students were working on their dance moves and fitness during their dance party. Our students definitely have some impressive moves. At the end of the dance party, the students worked on refocusing mindfulness techniques to get their bodies and minds set to return to the classroom.

### **Warwick Valley Middle School**

Learning continues for Middle School teachers during the summer. Recently, some of the special education ELA teachers completed a one-week course on Morphology Plus Training, offered by the Institute for Multi-Sensory Education. This professional development focused on the Orton-Gillingham approach, which equips educators with techniques to break down words into their fundamental components. The aim is to deepen students’ understanding of word structures and enhance their reading abilities. Mastering this approach will allow teachers to provide more individualized support to students with varying learning needs.

The skills and techniques gained from this training will be applied in the classroom this fall, enhancing literacy instruction and promoting a more profound grasp of language among students. This systematic approach to word analysis addresses diverse learning challenges and supports academic growth. By implementing these strategies, teachers will offer a more personalized and effective educational experience. Our commitment to such professional development highlights our dedication to continually improving educational outcomes at the Middle School and ensuring the success for all students.

### **Warwick Valley High School**

Our dedicated pre-calculus math teachers have been hard at work, passionately revitalizing our course to enhance student learning and preparedness for higher education. Our dedicated math teachers have collaborated tirelessly to enrich the pre-calculus curriculum. Their efforts have

focused on integrating innovative teaching methodologies and interactive learning experiences that foster deeper understanding and mastery of advanced mathematical concepts.

We are thrilled to announce an exciting opportunity for our students: starting this fall, pre-calculus will be offered for college credit through Mount Saint Mary College. Partnering with Mount Saint Mary College, we are proud to offer our students the opportunity to earn three college credits for pre-calculus. This initiative not only recognizes their academic achievements but also prepares them for the rigors of higher education.

As we look ahead to the upcoming academic year, we are confident that these enhancements will empower our students to thrive academically and pursue their future aspirations with confidence. Our commitment to excellence in education remains unwavering, and we are excited to embark on this journey of academic growth and achievement alongside our students.