

Weekly Column: EdTalk
Superintendent of Schools: Dr. David Leach
August 14, 2024

During the August 1, 2024, Warwick Valley Board of Education meeting, we provided key updates for the Warwick Valley Central School District that highlighted our ongoing efforts to enhance academic support, improve district resources, and ensure the safety and security of our students and staff. I am pleased to provide a summary of those updates here:

Academic Intervention Services (AIS)

The New York State Education Department (NYSED) requires all schools to provide Academic Intervention Services (AIS) to help students meet state learning standards. We are dedicated to enhancing our AIS to better support our students. To achieve this, we are assessing our approach by addressing the essential question: “To what extent are AIS providers prepared, supported, and appropriately deployed across the K-8 continuum?” This review will help us refine our strategies and ensure our students receive the support they need to reach their full potential.

Website Redesign

We are excited to announce a comprehensive redesign of the District website. This initiative aims to create a more user-friendly and intuitive online experience. The updated design will enhance accessibility and engagement, ensuring that all visitors can easily find the information they need. We are targeting a February 1, 2024, timeframe to launch the new site.

Capital Project 2024

NYSED requires public school districts and BOCES to perform a Building Condition Survey (BCS) every five years. Conducted by engineers and architects, this survey assesses the building’s condition and infrastructure to identify necessary repairs and prioritize projects. As we approach the capital project vote in December 2024, the facilities committee refers to the BCS for necessary maintenance and upgrading our schools. Significant planning has taken place in early 2024, and we eagerly anticipate the community’s support for this crucial project.

Transportation

Our transportation initiatives continue to evolve, focusing on sustainability and student safety. Despite a challenging timeline from the state, we are taking the necessary planning steps to electrify our bus garage and fleet as required by the state. Starting in 2027, the District will no longer be permitted to purchase gas-fueled school buses, making this planning essential for long-term fiscal sustainability of the District.

Additionally, we are moving forward with a proposal to install school bus stop-arm cameras, sponsored and led by Orange County. These cameras will capture the license plates of vehicles that fail to stop for school buses, enhancing the safety of students getting on and off the buses.

The program utilizes cloud computing to send data to trained safety experts, who review the footage and prepare evidence packages for municipalities. This violator-funded program, which includes the procurement, installation, management, and maintenance of the safety technology, along with access to cloud-connected internal cameras and BusPatrol's AlertBus platform for live-stream video and emergency alerts, comes at no cost to the district. Before full implementation, there will be a 30-day warning period during which warning letters, without monetary penalties, will be issued to drivers who fail to stop for school buses.

Safety and Security

Ensuring the safety and security of our school community remains a top priority. Throughout the 2023-24 school year, we have made several enhancements to our safety plans. At this meeting, we held a public hearing, and the Board approved the school district wide and building safety plans. As we transition into the 2024-2025 school year, we will continue these efforts through completed tasks, ongoing training, and meticulous project management. We have also completed planning for a parent reunification event, further strengthening our preparedness and response capabilities.

Student Conduct

At the Board meeting, I spent considerable time discussing the student Code of Conduct as it relates to participation in extracurricular and co-curricular activities, including interscholastic sports.

I began by highlighting that our students are generally well-behaved, and our families are very supportive. I emphasized that our student-athletes and participants in extracurricular activities are highly visible and respected, and thus must conduct themselves appropriately, representing the school and community with dignity. They are expected to maintain high academic standards, good attendance, and exemplary behavior both in and out of school. And I reminded all that any violations will result in disciplinary actions, which may include suspension or removal from activities. Students and their parents/guardians must sign an agreement to abide by rules prohibiting the use of alcohol, tobacco, drugs, and participation in prohibited activities.

As we move into the 2024-25 school year, we plan to be even more proactive by forming a Student Leadership Council composed of team captains and club leaders. We expect our student leaders to support high standards of behavior and help convey this message to underclassmen, including middle school students. Additionally, we will hold mandatory JV/varsity coaches/players meetings each season, with the first meeting scheduled for August 27th at 8 a.m. At these meetings, we will emphasize the Warwick PACT: Pride, Accountability, Commitment, and Trust. The District will proactively discuss appropriate conduct and foster student leadership, which goes beyond merely adhering to the Code of Conduct. To complement these efforts, we

will introduce and reinforce the PACT Factors – Pride, Accountability, Commitment, and Trust. Our staff will spend time reviewing what each means on and off the field.

During the mandatory student meeting, we will recognize the many accomplishments of our students, of which we are very proud. However, we will also review some of the misconduct we have witnessed and addressed over the years, including the inappropriate use of social media, improper student spectator behavior, and the use of alcohol and drugs. Additionally, we will remind the students of our commitment to steadfastly condemn and continue to assertively address any behavior rooted in hate or bias, including the use of racial epithets.

Our commitment to the development of our students extends beyond academic achievements. By emphasizing the importance of the Code of Conduct and fostering leadership through the PACT Factors we are dedicated to nurturing well-rounded individuals who represent the district with dignity and integrity. As we prepare for the upcoming school year, we look forward to working together with our students, parents, and community to uphold these values and ensure a positive and supportive environment for all.

In conclusion, the updates discussed at the August 1, 2024, school board meeting reflect our commitment to academic excellence and the safety and security of our Warwick Valley Central School District community. By enhancing our Academic Intervention Services, embarking on a comprehensive website redesign, planning for critical capital projects, and advancing our transportation department, we are laying a strong foundation for the future. Our proactive approach to safety and student conduct underscores our dedication to fostering a positive and supportive environment for all. As we transition into the 2024-2025 school year, we look forward to the continued collaboration and support of our students, parents, staff, and community. Together, we will uphold the values of Pride, Accountability, Commitment, and Trust, ensuring that the school district remains a place where every student can thrive. Thank you for your continued support and dedication to our district's success.

Here are some highlights from our schools this week:

Park Avenue Elementary School

As teachers continue to engage in ongoing professional learning this summer, Park Avenue Elementary School is excited to welcome new members to its faculty. This upcoming September, the following teachers will begin an exciting journey as they work with their respective students:

- **Amanda Kowalczyk** is an incoming fourth grade teacher who will be teaching English Language Arts (ELA) and Social Studies.
- **Isabella Zayas** will be teaching all core subjects to her third graders.

Both of the aforementioned teachers have taken part in this summer's learning and will also dive deeper into our new teacher preparation program in late August. On behalf of the entire Park Avenue staff, welcome aboard!

Sanfordville Elementary School

The Elementary Extended School Year classes participated in the Potato Olympics this week and all academic, reading, writing and math lessons were Olympic themed. To kick off the week, the Olympics in Paris were discussed as a current event to make sure students were familiar. Students also chose a potato, decorated it, gave it a name, and completed its potato profile writing activity. Students' potatoes competed in different Olympic sports each day. For example, running (students created a ramp and rolled the potato down and measured how far it went), gymnastics (students balanced the potato on six pencils, then removed one at a time to see how many pencils it could balance on, as well as students balanced the potato on a yardstick and walked to see how far the potato could remain in balance), weightlifting (students placed and balanced gram hexagon pieces on their potato while younger students weighed their potatoes and compared weights of items lighter and heavier than their potato), as well as diving, spinning, and archery to name a few others. Students used their creativity and problem-solving skills to complete these tasks. These science-based activities gave students the opportunity to work independently and collaboratively to complete each event. One of the speech teachers also organized students in making a mini baked potato at a potato bar with various toppings and enjoyed eating them and played Hot Potato. Students focused on multi-step directions and communication during this activity.

The students enjoyed a Fun Friday event where they participated in various activities in celebration for this week's Potato Olympics. Students rotated through different stations in the gym, including a potato toss with partners, playing the game Hot Potato to music, hopping along in potato sack races, and showing off their artistic abilities in an Olympic poster contest. It was a fun-filled week of learning!

Warwick Valley Middle School

As summer progresses and we approach the exciting start of the 2024-2025 school year, our middle school staff is busy with behind-the-scenes preparations designed to make the upcoming year extraordinary. Each year, we select a theme to inspire and guide our students, and this year's theme, "The Sky is the Limit," promises to elevate our educational experience to new heights. Teachers and staff will consistently refer to this theme and integrate it into lessons aligned with the Portrait of a Graduate framework, ensuring it resonates with our students. By weaving the theme into various aspects of our curriculum, we aim to create a positive tone for the year that motivates students to embrace their potential and strive for excellence in both academic and personal pursuits. This enriches students' learning experiences and fosters a growth mindset, encouraging them to view challenges as opportunities to reach new heights.

On the first day of school, students across grades 5-8 will participate in a special activity centered around our “The Sky is the Limit” theme, which is designed to ignite our students’ imagination and enthusiasm for the year ahead. We’re thrilled to capture and share these moments on our social media and website, tagging our photos with #theskyisthelimit to celebrate the collective spirit and ambition of our school community. This year, we’re not just aiming for the sky at the Warwick Valley Middle School – we’re reaching for the stars.

Warwick Valley High School

Warwick Valley High School is committed to supporting its seniors with a series of College Application Workshops, taking place every Wednesday throughout August. These workshops, facilitated by the school’s dedicated guidance department, are designed to equip high school seniors with the essential tools and insights needed to successfully navigate the college application process.

Students will start with an overview of the entire application journey, gaining a clear understanding of what to expect and how to approach it. The guidance department will provide detailed instruction on using Naviance, a crucial tool for managing college applications. The workshops will also cover the intricacies of widely used platforms such as the Common Application, ensuring seniors are well-prepared to tackle the process.

A key component of the workshops will involve guiding students through the process of creating their Common Application accounts, an essential step for applying to multiple colleges efficiently. Additionally, the guidance team along with our Media Center specialist will offer expert advice on writing personal essays, helping students craft compelling narratives that highlight their unique strengths and aspirations.

These workshops are not just about demystifying the application process; they are about empowering seniors to begin their college application journey with confidence. By offering structured support and professional guidance, the Warwick Valley High School Guidance Department is ensuring that every student has the knowledge and resources needed to succeed in this critical phase of their academic journey.

High school seniors are encouraged to check their email so they can register for this valuable workshop, where they will lay the groundwork for a successful college application season.