

Weekly Column: EdTalk
Superintendent of Schools: Dr. David Leach
September 11, 2024

On Friday, August 30, 2024, we welcomed our faculty to the district's annual Superintendent's Conference Day. It was once again my honor to join more than 300 dedicated educators, whose enthusiasm for the coming 2024-25 academic year was palpable in the high school auditorium. Among our gathered school community that morning were 15 new teachers, our new school psychologist, and three new administrators, all of whom are excited to begin their Warwick Valley careers.

My speech this year also touched on a number of important district initiatives, including some wonderful ongoing improvements around our buildings and grounds. We looked at our district's *Portrait of a Graduate*, and how it is similar to a similar model now being adopted by New York State. We've held our Portrait as the district's North Star for many years now, and made significant progress with our assessment plans in the district, making them more balanced, more authentic, while introducing more performance tasks, problem-based learning, et cetera, to achieve what we feel is an excellent blend of traditional measures and standardized measures, and also measures that truly assess the whole student.

I would have been remiss not to mention the tireless efforts of our Buildings and Grounds team, and how they have stayed on top of capital improvement projects in every building. We took a look at a number of security upgrades that have been made across our buildings, including enhanced classroom door locks at Park Avenue and Sanfordville, along with the "hardening" of points of entry. I also reviewed some of the safety training that has gone on with our faculty and staff, and the safety protocols that have been established for emergent situations. A big thank you to our district School Resource Officers for their role.

The gym at the middle school was repainted and its floor refinished, and six skylights were replaced. There was new HVAC installed to serve the locker room. Park Avenue also enjoyed a gym upgrade, with its refinished floor! The middle school's outdoor bathrooms are also just about done, as are the outdoor bathrooms at Sanfordville. The middle school has a new lunch line, and there was new flooring installed in the main office. These are just a handful of the projects that have been either completed or that are ongoing, of which we will keep you proudly updated.

During the assembly, I was joined by our Board of Education President Keith Parsons, who thanked some of our district's longtime faculty and staff. Commemorative pins were given to those who have reached significant service milestones, beginning with five years and reaching all

the way to 30. Congratulations to all, and thank you for your years of dedication to the students and families of the Warwick Valley Central School District.

Please join me in congratulating these Warwick Valley employees on their milestone.

5 YEARS

Bill Biniaris, Tina Bolich, Stacey Browne, Jordan Cangialosi, Gina Casale, Beverly Cavalieri, Jennifer Daubert, John DeBlasio, Sarah Decker, Danielle DeStaso, Christie Esserman, Paul Faliski, Christina Galow, Charlotte Garofalo, Mark Glasse, Than Harrington, Brittini Jaeckel, Katherine Johnson, Daria Justiniano, Amanda Knowles, Christine Krasinski, Belinda Mann, Melissa Miller, Christina O'Carroll, Kathrine O'Donnell, Shane Peters, Scott Pizanie, Christopher Radon, Christine Retcho, Linda Roman, Jereme Safier, Sayonara Samborski, Brianna Santander, Patricia Schaefer, Susan Kaptein, Scott Elizabeth Sklar, Ruth Shoenfeld Woods, Krystal Young

10 YEARS

Kira Hudson, Jeanne Kerrisk, Martha Langlitz, Jon Mausling, George McManus, Gina Scarpulla, Dawn Space, Amanda Undersinger

15 YEARS

Denis Barden, Julie-Anne Helmrich, Timothy Holmes, Kathleen Leahey, Diane Russo, Peter Scheuermann, Russell Vance

20 YEARS

Dawn Barber, Catherine Bloomer, Kristin Cronk, Melissa DiGiantommaso, Joelle Haggerty, Darcy Halbig, Stefanie Hawkins, Julie Hornbeck, Alexia Kaval, Kevin McGovern, Darren Morse, Ryan Muehlbauer, Maurizio Muscia, Nicole Rose, Julie Sekelsky, Kirk Thomas, Melissa Troup

25 YEARS

Jennifer Bengel, Johanna Fischer, Lorraine Giarratano, Alison Gray, Noreen Hanson, Catherine Lowry, James O'Brien, Rebecca Ranghelli, Jason Wickham

30 YEARS

Kathleen Flansburg, Pamela Gergley, Edward Mesic, Patricia Patterson, Gregory Sirico, Kathleen Smith

All in all, our final gathering before the school year was full of great energy that had everyone looking forward to a memorable academic year. That energy propelled us into an outstanding first week, and it's continued this week. I think everyone agrees, it is great to be back, and with

homecoming right around the corner, Wildcat Spirit is in the air. I look forward to another year of growth, learning, and success for all.

Here are some highlights from our schools this week:

Park Avenue Elementary School

The entire Park Avenue community, including parents and staff, came together to welcome our students on the first day of school on September 3rd. Our wonderful teachers and staff were positioned in various locations, such as the bus parking lot and all hallways, to greet both new and returning students. Our PTA came out in full force to spice things up with some color, including balloons, and the arrival of the Wildcat!

Also on September 3rd, Park Avenue's kindergarten students began the journey towards acclimating to our school. Whether taking the bus or being dropped off by parents, students met their teachers outside, by the bus parking lot, and were introduced to what will be their regular morning arrival routines. All students came prepared with a color coded paw print that matched the color of their teacher's attire. Principal Bill Biniaris and our kindergarten teachers are happy to report that our "little ones" demonstrated a great deal of maturity and responsibility by entering our building in an orderly fashion. Moreover, kindergarten teachers organized a team reading of *The Night Before Kindergarten* by Natasha Wing, which was shared with all parents by our Media Specialist, Mr. Spicehandler via a QR code.

On their part, other classroom teachers kicked off the year through a variety of "getting to know you" activities and learning. For example, first grade teachers shared that the first week of school was truly a wonderful one! Students and teachers alike had fun getting to know each other through a variety of interesting activities. Fun books were shared on making friends and children were tasked with using some of the strategies described to meet their peers. As well, each child brought two items from home that were important to them to share with the class, which helped students learn more about each other. Ms. Berghahn shares, "It was a lot of fun to make connections when someone shared something related to their classmates' interests. We also spent a good part of the week working on ROAR(Respect, Outstanding Choices, Acceptance, and Responsibility) behaviors in different areas of the school. Our classes hope to be great role models for others. Here's to a great year ahead!"

Third grade classes also started off the year by participating in "getting to know you" activities. Students worked on team building activities to build social relationships with one another. For example, children in Ms. Weller's class practiced some team building skills by building a paper chain out of a single piece of paper to see which team could make the longest chain. In Mrs. Kilbride's class, students worked independently to design a boat made out of clay in an effort to

hold the most pennies. These activities served as an opportunity for students to learn how encouraging one another helps make the classroom a safe place, to learn how to take risks, and persevere. Other activities included sharing the origins of names, teaching one another 'likes' and 'dislikes', and some writing assignments, as well. Mrs. Kilbride shared, "Third grade teachers can already tell that this is going to be a great school year!"

Sanfordville Elementary School

On Tuesday September 3, 2024, Sanfordville opened its doors and welcomed almost 800 students to the 2024-25 school year. Our Sanfordville staff was eager to welcome our students as they excitedly disembarked the buses or got dropped off by their parents. Our new kindergarten students were greeted by many staff members who were eager to help them navigate their way to their teachers who were there to greet them with open arms and warm smiles! It truly was an all hands on deck effort in order to help our newest students find their teachers.

Our fourth grade students proudly entered the building as new role models who were eager to show all of our younger students our PAWS expectations. Which include being **P**olite and **A**ccountable, making **W**ise Choices and acting with **S**afety first. While the first day of school can bring a wide variety of emotions for everyone, having a positive and supportive team here at Sanfordville certainly helps to alleviate some of the anxieties that new experiences may bring with them.

Over the first two days of school, our students were making new friends and learning or reviewing the daily procedures, such as how to find the nurse's office, how to buy lunch, what are our voice zones, and how to demonstrate our PAWS behaviors. Classes also reviewed how to exit the building in case there is a fire drill. We are proud to say that the students did an excellent job during their first fire drill on the second day of school. Overall, the first week of school could be summed up as an "energetic, optimistic week filled with smiles and new adventures!"

A special thank you to our PTA for a successful Ice Cream Social for our Sanfordville families and for the amazing Back to School Breakfast for our staff!

We can't wait to see all of the positive experiences that still await our students throughout the 2024-25 school year!

Warwick Valley Middle School

The long-awaited return to middle school kicked off as the halls were filled with the smiling faces of students eagerly beginning the new school year. Excitement buzzed as teachers and students reunited, ready to embark on another year of learning and growth. The day began with an extended homeroom session, during which teachers reviewed the essential "nuts and bolts" of

the school year, including schedules, expectations, and important reminders. To set the tone for the year ahead, students also participated in an engaging activity inspired by this year's theme, *The Sky's the Limit*. The theme encourages students to push themselves further in all aspects of their lives, both in and out of the classroom, focusing on perseverance and striving for excellence.

On Wednesday, our 5th graders received their Chromebooks, a significant milestone as they will use these devices through high school. The Chromebooks will serve as essential tools in fostering digital literacy and supporting the students' academic progress. Meanwhile, our 7th graders were filled with excitement as they moved into their lockers for the first time, marking a memorable moment in their middle school journey. Mr. Yapkowitz, led grade-level assemblies on Wednesday and Thursday, sharing important expectations and procedures for the year. He also gave students a preview of the fun events and opportunities that lie ahead, sparking enthusiasm and setting a positive tone for the school year.

As classes are now in full swing, students are already working toward embodying the characteristics of a *Portrait of a Graduate*. Through classroom activities, collaboration, and independent learning, students are being encouraged to develop the critical thinking, creativity, and communication skills essential for success. The entire school community is excited to witness the personal and academic growth of each student, and we eagerly anticipate all the exciting possibilities that this school year will bring!

Warwick Valley High School

The 2024-2025 school year at Warwick Valley High School is off to an exciting and energetic start! The first week of school saw students and staff returning to campus with renewed enthusiasm, ready to embrace the year ahead. Grade-level assemblies were held, providing an opportunity for school leaders to inspire students with messages about academic achievement, personal growth, and the importance of community. These assemblies helped set the tone for the school year, reminding everyone of the shared values and goals that make Warwick Valley a special place to learn and grow.

In addition to the strong academic start, school spirit is already in full swing. Fall sports are back, and the fields are buzzing with athletes and fans alike. Whether it's soccer, football, swimming, or cross country, students are showing their pride and dedication both on and off the field. Teams have already begun practices and competitions, and excitement is building for the season ahead.

Meanwhile, Homecoming is just around the corner, and preparations are well under way. Students are planning their floats for the highly anticipated Homecoming Parade, with each class working together to bring their unique ideas to life. The parade promises to be a colorful, creative celebration of school pride, and students are eagerly collaborating to make their floats stand out. From designing the themes to organizing materials, the excitement surrounding Homecoming is palpable, and it's sure to be a highlight of the fall.

With a strong start academically, an exciting sports season in progress, and Homecoming preparations in full swing, the year is shaping up to be one filled with energy, achievement, and school spirit at Warwick Valley High School!