

Weekly Column: EdTalk
Superintendent of Schools: Dr. David Leach
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As the new school year begins successfully, I want to shine a spotlight on a cornerstone of student success: school attendance. September recognized as Attendance Awareness Month, is a perfect time to remind ourselves of the critical role that being present in school plays in shaping bright futures for our students.

The lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic continue to impact school attendance nationwide. Last year, roughly one in four students across the country was chronically absent. That's about 12 million children missing 10% or more of the school year, an alarming figure. In New York State, the numbers are even more alarming. More than a quarter of elementary and middle school students, and more than a third of high school students were chronically absent.

While Warwick Valley Schools aren't currently experiencing absenteeism at those levels, it is a challenge. We are committed to ensuring that every student has the support they need to succeed. Our mission is to go beyond meeting state and national standards. We aim to excel and inspire our students to reach for the stars. Regular attendance is key to unlocking their potential, as it enhances academic performance, emotional well-being, and long-term success. This effort, like most, requires the collaboration between school and parents.

To make school a place where students want to be, we are focusing on several key areas. We have expanded extracurricular offerings, including more sports, clubs, and engaging programs that keep students connected and excited about school. We are also fostering a positive school culture by creating classrooms where students feel they belong, using positive reinforcement, community-building activities, and engaging lessons to keep students motivated and engaged.

Another priority is clear communication to ensure that every student, parent, and staff member understands the crucial link between attendance and academic success. Additionally, we are implementing recognition and reward programs to celebrate good attendance, using school-wide initiatives and personal recognition to acknowledge and encourage the efforts of our students.

We understand that families face unique challenges that can impact attendance. By working together, we can identify barriers and provide the support needed to keep students in class and on the path to success. Open communication between parents and the school is key to this effort.

Parents play a crucial role in promoting good attendance habits. Please encourage your child to develop a positive attitude toward school. It is important to avoid unexcused absences. By staying informed about their child's school performance and any challenges, parents can help us

address any barriers to attendance. Together, we can create a community that values education and supports every student in reaching their full potential.

Thank you for being a vital part of this partnership. Let's make this year one of growth, learning, and, most importantly, attendance – because when our students show up, they shine.

Here are some highlights from our schools this week:

Park Avenue Elementary School

Friday marked the end of Spirit Week, with this year's theme revolving around board games. Kindergarten through 4th grade students came to school each day very excited to participate in the week's schedule of theme events, including:

- Monday: the Game of Life was celebrated by wearing attire associated with professions such as law enforcement, nurse, or doctor.
- Tuesday: students dressed up as their favorite athlete, and friends and staff were asked to "Guess Who?"
- Wednesday: on Uno Reverse day students wore something backwards or inside out.
- Thursday: students came to school dressed like a board game piece to celebrate the idea of "game night."
- Friday: students dressed in Warwick purple and gold!

On Saturday, fourth graders participated in the annual homecoming parade. Students met at Park Avenue before heading to the parade's starting point to march. A huge thank you to the 4th graders on our Student Council, advisors Amy Buliung and Theresa Canfield, and our PTA for helping organize this wonderful tradition.

K-2 parents joined us for this year's first Back to School Night on September 19. Parents met classroom teachers, as well as other teachers, during the kick-off in the gym. Our 4th grade Student Council was the star of that show, helping to escort parents to the gym and then introducing themselves and their individual roles on the council.

Sanfordville Elementary School

Sanfordville students in Ms. Harrington's PIE 3/4 class have been raising monarch butterflies since the first day of school, when Dorothy Ansley-Smith gave the class jars with six monarch caterpillars for the classroom. The butterfly cage became a focal point in the classroom, as the students witnessed the transformation of caterpillars to chrysalis and then butterflies. Every morning, the first thing the students do is check the cage to see if any monarchs have emerged. We are proud to report that we have released four out of six monarch butterflies on the zinnias in the PIE garden. The children watched in awe as the butterflies drank nectar from the flowers. Fun fact: the zinnias are also home to bees and a hummingbird!

Students in 4th grade are learning “Where in the World is New York State,” and have zoomed in from the world, to the North American continent, to our country, in order to learn about the geography of New York State. They color coded maps to identify important landforms, waterways, and places in our state, and how they affect the climate.

On Thursday, Sanfordville held its first of two Back to School Nights. Sanfordville opened its doors to our K-2, PIE K, and PIE 1/2 families, who learned all about the PTA, SEPTA, and the PIE community. Parents gathered in the cafetorium for an informative presentation led by Principal Johnna Maraia. During her welcome address, Principal Maraia also introduced Associate Principal Mr. Ferraro, the Encore teachers, support staff, and grade level teams, and discussed the attributes of Warwick's *Portrait of a Graduate*. Parents then visited classrooms, where they gained an understanding of what a typical day looks like for their children, learned more about curriculum, and instructions and expectations. The second Back to School Night, for Grades 3-4, will be on September 25. Grade 3, 6:00 pm. Grade 4, 6:30 pm. PIE 3&4, 7:00 pm. Please meet in the cafeteria.

Warwick Valley High School invited the elementary schools and the middle school to participate in this year's homecoming Spirit Week and parade. Our students and staff were so excited to participate in the district-wide fun, and everyone at Sanfordville thanks the high school for including us in Spirit Week. Go Wildcats!

Warwick Valley Middle School

Last week was the middle school's annual Spirit Week, and students showed off their school pride in full force. The week featured fun and creative themed days, such as Staff vs. Student Swap Day, Favorite Team Day, Guess Who I Am, Celebrity Day, and Twister Board Game Day. The festivities culminated in Spirit Day on Friday, when students wore school colors, filling the halls with excitement and camaraderie. The highlight was Friday's Fall Pep Rally, where over 1,100 students and staff packed the gym.

The event kicked off with a performance by Coach Sullivan's junior varsity and varsity cheerleaders, who wowed the crowd with their competition routines. The highly anticipated grade-level relay race was next, and the energy stayed high as students competed in events such as the potato sack race, crab walk, egg-on-a-spoon, and sprint. In a close competition, the 8th grade came out victorious. Other exciting contests included the push-up challenge, where Coach Patafio set a record of 72 pushups in one minute, while the top student achieved an impressive 52 pushups.

The pep rally also featured an Extreme Rock Paper Scissors challenge, with a 5th grader triumphing over 60 competitors. In the traditional tug-o-war, the 8th graders claimed victory over the other grades. And, in the final showdown, the 8th grade team faced off against the staff

in a hard-fought pull, but the teachers prevailed once again. The week wrapped up on Saturday, with students participating in the homecoming parade. It was an unforgettable Spirit Week filled with school pride and fun. Go Wildcats!

Warwick Valley High School

The annual homecoming parade was, once again, a wonderful time. Leading up to the parade last week, students enjoyed the cherished tradition of building their class floats. Annually, students from each class collaborate to create unique floats that capture the spirit of homecoming. The parade just wouldn't be complete without these vibrant student designs.

This year's theme, Board Games, saw the students bring beloved classics to life in exciting and unexpected ways. The students were hard at work from Tuesday through Thursday nights, gathering every evening at the district Transportation Garage, where they turned their creative visions into reality, from giant Monopoly boards to life-size Candy Land scenes!

The homecoming parade is one of the highlights of the school year, and brings together students, staff, and the community to celebrate school spirit. The floats that roll down Main Street in style every year continue a tradition that showcases the talent and teamwork of Warwick Valley's students.