

Weekly Column: EdTalk
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As we enter October, I'm excited to reflect on the energy and enthusiasm that filled our schools this past week. From the outstanding achievements of our Wildcats in athletics and the arts to the collaborative spirit fostered in classrooms throughout the district, there is much to celebrate here in Warwick Valley.

In our district, both our Athletics and Performing Arts programs serve as central pillars of our educational philosophy, and they connect us in meaningful ways to the larger Warwick community. Whether it's cheering on the Wildcats at A.C. Morgan Field or enjoying a stunning musical performance, these moments highlight the talent, dedication, and pride of our students. This week, I want to shine a spotlight on some recent achievements in both athletics and the arts, alongside other updates from across our schools. From kindergarteners discovering the joys of the local library to middle school students diving into character education, we are proud to see our students thriving in so many areas.

In the Warwick Valley Central School District, we take great pride in both our Wildcats Athletics and Performing Arts Departments. These programs are not just central to our educational philosophy, but they also serve as vital links between our school and the wider Warwick community.

This was most recently on full display during our annual homecoming festivities. These connections also occur when our neighbors cheer on the Wildcats football team at A.C. Morgan Field on Fridays or Saturdays, as well as at other sporting events throughout the week. They also happen when residents attend one of our lavishly produced spring musicals or concerts for an afternoon or evening of entertainment.

The talent displayed by our student-athletes and performers is second only to the dedication and hard work they bring to their preparations. We are also deeply grateful to the teachers and coaches whose devoted efforts foster an environment of excellence and inspiration, guiding them to success.

This week, it is my pleasure to shine a spotlight on some of our district's most recent and outstanding achievements in the arts and athletics.

First, congratulations to the Athletics Department for receiving the 2023-2024 School of Distinction Award, presented by the New York State Public High School Athletic Association (NYSPHSAA). To qualify for this award, 100% of our Wildcats varsity teams had to first qualify for the scholar-athlete team award during their respective sports seasons.

Thanks to the studious efforts of our individual players, we continued our tradition of athletic-academic excellence and achieved this goal. Great job Wildcats, on being one of only 114 schools across the entire state to earn this honor!

In the Performing Arts Department, six of our high school musicians were chosen as principal performers or alternates for multiple 2024 New York State School Music Association (NYSSMA) ensembles. Anthony Gomez and Abigail Yurchuck will perform with the NYSSMA Jazz Choir and NYSSMA Treble Choir, respectively, at the 88th Annual NYSSMA All-State Winter Conference in December. Shi Wu Lee was named a NYSSMA Concert Band alternate, and Addison O'Donnell, Conner Price, and Olivia Samberg were named alternates for the NYSSMA Jazz Choir.

To be chosen as a NYSSMA performer is a prestigious statewide honor, awarded to students who earn a perfect score on their NYSSMA solos. Preparing for a NYSSMA audition not only requires musicians to select and perfect their solo pieces, but they must also be able to sight-read a piece of music on the spot and demonstrate mastery of scales. To give you an idea of the scope of this competition: there are five All-State ensembles, 7,000 students audition, and fewer than 600 are selected to participate. Congratulations to all for hitting this high note in your musical careers!

Finally, I would like to recognize Warwick Valley High School senior Evan Grundfast for being named a semifinalist in the 70th Annual National Merit Scholarship Program! The National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC) established the program to recognize our country's top scholars, encourage the pursuit of academic excellence, and provide financial awards in the form of undergraduate scholarships.

To become a semifinalist, a student must have an outstanding high school academic record, earn the endorsement of a high school administrator, submit an essay, and achieve SAT or ACT scores that confirm their earlier performance on an NMSC qualifying test. Evan is one of New York's highest-scoring entrants, and his NMSC qualification places him among a select group of students representing less than 1 percent of U.S. high school seniors.

I would be remiss not to mention that Evan is also president of the Warwick Valley chapter of the National Honor Society, an active participant in both the WVHS Model UN and Orange County Academic League teams, and is currently in his third year of our rigorous Science Research Program. This is also his third year as team captain of the Wildcats varsity boys' tennis team.

Evan plans to attend college next year, majoring in pre-med and minoring in business. His top school choices are the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, Brown University, and Cornell University. Please join me in congratulating Evan on this outstanding achievement and wishing him all the best with his college acceptances!

Here are some highlights from our schools this week:

Park Avenue Elementary School

Kindergarteners had a great time walking to the Albert Wisner Public Library. They listened to an interactive reading of *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* and learned that the local library belongs to all of us—all we need is a library card! Each student also got to pick out a book they can keep forever. A huge thank you to the Albert Wisner librarians for introducing our kindergartners to the joys of the public library! As lifelong learners, students noticed people of all ages learning at the library, making the obvious connection that we can all keep learning as we grow older, too.

In art class, second graders are working on their painted paper project, incorporating inspiration from two artists. These include Andy Warhol, known for his use of bold colors and stencils to create repeated images without redrawing, and Eric Carle, famous for using painted paper to create various textures. This week's session focused on adding more layers of texture and color using different mediums. Second graders used oil pastels, studied plenty of imagery, and tapped into their imaginations to create unique textures and designs on their painted paper. Our district's vision for teaching and learning is visually summarized by the *Portrait of a Graduate*, which outlines several important skills we want all Warwick students to acquire by the time they graduate high school. Some of these include being strong communicators, ethical and global citizens, and learning resilience. Park Avenue's Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports system (PBIS) aims to cultivate these skills—and all the skills on the list—in our young learners. One way we support this effort is by acknowledging our students' successes when they ROAR during the school week. Students have the opportunity to earn golden tickets for demonstrating the desired behaviors outlined in the ROAR Matrix. For those who may not know, ROAR stands for demonstrating Respect for all, making Outstanding Choices, showing Acceptance, and being Responsible. Each week, we honor students who have proven their commitment to these school-wide expectations. This week, we want to publicly thank the following students for their efforts:

Kindergarten: Hadley Mc Sweeney, Johnny Farley, Charlotte Zikoyanis, Matthew Mersincavage, Sylvie Contino

First Grade: Logan Karameros, Sydney Class, Emiola Ilori, Jordan Dolis, Grayson Palmieri

Second Grade: Mason Gribbin, Conor Grauerholz, Kyle Cosmillo, Roman Carillo, Alessandra Rivera

Third Grade: Cassidy Hurtado, Paolo Petersen, CJ Spadaccini, Aliana Normandia, Mila Hayek

Fourth Grade: Jonathan Cohn, Keira Sandfort, Valentina DeJesus, Maggie McKnight, Harlow Monahan

As well, we want to thank first and second grade teachers Aimee Urvater and Shannon Kennedy for leading our school's PBIS efforts. In addition to serving as liaisons between the school and our PTA, Ms. Urvater and Ms. Kennedy shared a comprehensive presentation about our PBIS/ROAR efforts at the most recent PTA meeting. Thank you!

Sanfordville Elementary School

First-grade students have been hard at work over the past few weeks. They've been sharing information about themselves through their "All About Me" projects and learning how to become resilient learners through the "Magical Yet." Students were prompted with the saying, "You can do hard things!" They also shared what they "...want to learn how to" as part of their growth mindset activities.

Fourth-grade students wrote several personal narrative entries in their writers' notebooks, selecting one favorite piece to publish. Students used the writing process to revise and edit their work, adding figurative language and dialogue. They then edited for spelling and punctuation. The students proudly displayed their finished pieces, now hanging on the bulletin board in the fourth-grade hallway!

Sanfordville held an in-person PIE Community Meeting with a warm welcome from the APPLE team, Ms. Maraia, Mr. Ferraro, and the PIE teachers. After the brief introductions, the meeting continued with an icebreaker for all attendees. Families were informed about the various committees (Social Events, Community Connections, and Garden/Outdoor Spaces) they could join throughout the year. Thank you to everyone who attended our first meeting and to everyone who helps make our PIE community special.

Sanfordville also hosted the first in-person PTA Meeting of the school year. The meeting began with a welcome from our PTA President, Kim Privitera, who introduced the rest of the PTA Board members and PTA teacher liaison Amanda Undersinger. There was also a presentation for parents about joining SEPTA. Mrs. Maraia welcomed everyone and gave an opening statement about the many exciting things the PTA has already sponsored this school year. The meeting continued with a treasury report, an event recap, and information about how to register for the PTA. Attendees were reminded to be on the lookout for upcoming PTA events such as "Touch-A-Truck" on October 10, the "First Responders Lunch" on October 11, and "Spooktacular" on October 31. The meeting concluded with an open forum for questions and suggestions. Thank you to everyone who came out for our first meeting, and to our amazing PTA!

Warwick Valley Middle School

The middle school kicked off its first ROAR lesson of the academic year, introducing students to the essential characteristic of being a "collaborator." This initiative is part of the school's commitment to character education, with each month dedicated to exploring one of the seven attributes of the district's Portrait of a Graduate. Students in all grades participated in the 30-minute lesson, fostering a sense of community and shared learning.

Each lesson begins with a calming mindfulness moment, during which students practice deep breathing techniques to center themselves. Following this, they engage with the Mood Meter, a tool developed by Yale's Center for Emotional Intelligence, which helps students reflect on their

emotional states. This practice sets a supportive tone for discussions and encourages self-awareness among our students.

After establishing their emotional baseline, students watched a brief video introducing the month's focus on collaboration. This visual engagement was followed by interactive discussion activities, giving students the opportunity to share their thoughts and experiences related to the monthly trait. These activities aim to deepen student understanding of the Portrait of a Graduate and its significance in both academic and social settings.

To wrap up each lesson, students revisit the Mood Meter, allowing them to reflect on any changes in their emotional states after the engaging discussions. This reflective practice not only reinforces the lesson's themes but also cultivates a culture of emotional intelligence within the school community. As the school year unfolds, students eagerly anticipate exploring new traits each month, further enriching their personal and academic growth through the ROAR program.

Warwick Valley High School

The high school gymnasium came alive for the annual homecoming dance, a night filled with excitement, music, and celebration. More than 800 students attended the much-anticipated event, which took on extra significance as it marked the triumphant return of the coveted Spirit Trophy following a thrilling victory over long-time rival Goshen.

The Warwick-Goshen rivalry, one of the oldest and most storied in New York State, made this year's homecoming win especially sweet for the Warwick community. At the dance, students, dressed to impress in their finest attire, spent the evening under dazzling lights, celebrating not just their personal style but their school's athletic triumph as well.

The return of the Spirit Trophy added an electric buzz to the evening, serving as a powerful reminder of the unity, pride, and competitive spirit that defines Warwick Valley High School. This year's homecoming dance was more than just a dance – it was a night of school pride, celebration, and memories that will be cherished for years to come.

As we wrap up another exciting week in the Warwick Valley Central School District, it's clear that our students are thriving both inside and outside the classroom. From the achievements of our athletes and performers to the collaborative learning experiences in our classrooms, the dedication and hard work of our students, staff, and community members are evident.

Whether it's through school spirit at the homecoming dance, the exploration of new artistic techniques, or the development of key character traits through the ROAR program, we are building a strong foundation for future success. I am incredibly proud of the efforts of our students, the guidance of our teachers, and the continued support of our families and community.

I look forward to the many achievements and milestones that lie ahead this school year. Let's continue to celebrate our Wildcats' accomplishments and foster an environment where every student can grow and shine. Thank you for being part of this journey with us!