

**Weekly Column: EdTalk**  
**Superintendent of Schools: Dr. David Leach**  
**October 23, 2024**

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Just a little over a month and a half into the 2024-25 school year, we have already written profile articles on a number of our talented Warwick Valley students in our weekly Superintendent's Spotlight and Superintendent's Artist of the Week features. These articles highlight our students' remarkable academic, artistic, athletic, civic, and social achievements, and it is my pleasure every year to shine a light on Warwick students who achieve their goals, take on tough projects, win awards, create exceptional pieces of art, perform acts of kindness for their community, and are helpers and role models for their peers. As I've said before, there's a lot to be proud of when I look at all of the incredible things our 3,700-plus students are accomplishing day to day.

We kicked off the Superintendent's Spotlight this year by congratulating Warwick Valley High School senior Evan Grundfast, a semifinalist in the 70th annual National Merit Scholarship Program. The honor means that Evan is one of just 16,000 semifinalists nationwide, placing him among the highest-scoring entrants from each state and less than 1 percent of U.S. high school seniors. We talked to Violet Ross, a student whose hard work in the OU BOCES dental program has already landed her a job in the field as a dental assistant. There's Joe Sanzone and A.J. Kobrick, who both study in the high school's Agricultural Technology program and participate in the Future Farmers of America. Joe and AJ won team and individual blue ribbons at the Orange County Fair and the Otisville Country Fair this past summer. Most recently, we put the spotlight on the high school's Crochet Club and their fundraiser for Breast Cancer Awareness Month!

Our Artists of the Week have come from all disciplines in our performing and visual arts programs. Naomi Valentino and AbigailJoan Dunn are standouts in the WVHS Drama Club. Both Naomi and AbigailJoan are proud to have appeared in nearly every school production made available to them since they were part of the Sanfordville Drama Club! Naomi is also part of the high school's unique career-focused cosmetology program and works in the Wildcuts Salon. Art students Esme Gilley, Aubrey Grigalunas, and Kayla McCormick were recognized for the excellent job they did painting a brand new mural at Park Avenue Elementary School. We also got to know violinist Andrew Redling, who is co-concertmaster of the WVHS Chamber Orchestra and the concertmaster of the Symphony Orchestra this year. He is also an Area All State and All County first chair violinist.

I encourage you to visit our website to read each of these profiles, as well as the others we've already shared. Keep an eye out for more throughout the year, as there is never any shortage of amazing news to share about our students and their accomplishments.

And by the way, Naomi and AbigailJoan want you to mark your calendars for the upcoming WVHS Drama Club production of *Puffs*, which has three performances over the weekend of November 8th and 9th. Our drama club troupe always delivers stellar performances, and this one is shaping up to be the same – a must-see for all you Harry Potter fans out there!

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

### **Park Avenue Elementary School**

Student Council members were invited to take part in a tree planting ceremony at Stanley Deming Park. The Shade Tree Commission partnered with the Warwick Valley Gardeners for this tree planting ceremony to celebrate the village's 40th year as a Tree City. A maple tree was planted near the "tot lot" to give much needed shade to that area. Despite taking place on one of the chillier mornings of the season, the Student Council was so excited to participate and we are honored and grateful to Mayor Newhard for including Park Avenue in this special celebration!

In art class, fourth graders are working through their first self portrait project. Students started with defining a self portrait and looking at different types of self portraits. Ms. Fasano wanted this project to be a mixed media project that used all different types of materials. Students practiced mixing paint to match their own skin tones, used oil pastel and watercolor to add vibrancy to their work, and their last step was to use descriptive words to describe themselves as an individual.

### **Sanfordville Elementary School**

Sanfordville City is going to be a school-wide project that each grade level will contribute to throughout all the Encore classes as a way to demonstrate techniques and topics learned in each specialty through a collaborative project-based design. It will feature three different community settings: rural, urban, and suburban; to show an understanding of how each community is created and structured differently.

Through STEM classes, students will be focusing on the planning and engineering aspects of the project to make the community come to life as a 3D model. Fourth grade will be making the buildings and homes, third grade will create transportation, second grade will create the vegetation, first grade will be adding in community details and kindergarten will be constructing the bridges.

During library classes, the third and fourth graders will be conducting research, breaking down the needed structures that make up a community that makes it a functioning unit as a whole. Through their research they will focus on energy sources, iconic buildings around the world, as well as staple buildings found within a community to apply to their builds in the city.

Art classes will be creating an urban pop up gallery with Mrs. Gil, consisting of artwork and sculptures one would see at a gallery in the city. During physical education classes, the students will discuss and record videos explaining the importance of having access to fitness in the community. During music classes, students will record songs to include in the community based on locations (example: kindergarten – *Old MacDonald Had a Farm* for the farmland). These songs and videos will be accessible through QR codes all throughout Sanfordville City.

In this collaborative all-grade level Encore project students can walk away understanding key concepts in all these specialty fields as well as how they interweave and make up all types of communities.

### **Warwick Valley Middle School**

Warwick Valley Middle School students were treated on Tuesday to an assembly titled *My Life Online*. Two assemblies, one for fifth and sixth grade and one for seventh and eighth grade students, were dedicated to promoting digital safety, responsible online behavior, and positive social media interactions. Joe Fingerhut, the presenter, acknowledged the unique challenges this generation faces, being the first to grow up with constant access to social media and texting, and emphasized that the assembly would equip them with essential values and skills to navigate the digital world responsibly.

Joe Fingerhut, the presenter, captivated students with a dynamic discussion on the impact of their online actions. He explained the dual nature of social media, pointing out that while it can be overwhelming, it also presents opportunities to highlight the best aspects of their character. Fingerhut shared the permanence of online posts, urging students to think critically about the message they want to communicate. He encouraged students to reflect on the long-term consequences of their digital footprint, asking, “What do I want to say to the world?”

Fingerhut’s presentation emphasized the power of spreading positivity through thoughtful online engagement. He explained that their digital presence influences how others perceive them and could shape future opportunities. To conclude, Fingerhut led students through the *My Life Online Manifesto*, reinforcing the importance of making safe, smart, and kind choices online. His message resonated with students, leaving them with a deeper understanding of their responsibility in creating a positive and responsible digital presence. Thank you to the WVMS PTA for sponsoring this event.

### **Warwick Valley High School**

At Warwick Valley High School, Ms. Debella’s English students are delving into the timeless archetypes of heroes and villains, analyzing the traits that define these compelling figures. To elevate this literary exploration, they’ve teamed up with Ms. Bettello’s cosmetology students, creating a dynamic partnership that combines academic analysis with practical artistry.

This unique collaboration provides English students the opportunity to work closely with their cosmetology peers to design the facial features and appearances of the characters they've studied. As they explore the themes of good and evil, they are also learning the transformative power of makeup application – discovering how physical attributes can reveal deeper insights into a character's personality and role in a narrative. Cosmetology students, in turn, are not only honing their craft but are also gaining valuable experience in character design, demonstrating their skill in turning literary descriptions into visual reality.

This partnership showcases the power of interdisciplinary learning. Teachers from different fields have come together to offer students a truly immersive educational experience that promotes critical thinking, creativity, and hands-on learning. By bridging literature and the arts, students gain a richer understanding of both subjects and the ways in which different forms of expression can complement one another. It's a collaborative effort that exemplifies the innovative approach Warwick Valley High School takes in fostering well-rounded, engaged learners.