

WVCSD EdTalk: August 31, 2022
Dr. David Leach, Superintendent of Schools

An extraordinary sense of excitement and possibility always builds around the start of every new school year. As the final weeks of summer wind down and anticipation builds up, there is always one particular day in August that heightens everyone's eagerness and adds unique electricity to the atmosphere around the district.

It is the first day of training camps for fall sports in Wildcats Country! This year, that day was last Monday, August 22. From first thing in the morning until late afternoon, Warwick Valley Wildcats athletes returned to the pool, practice fields, track, courts, and gym. They were all focused and happy to be back with their teammates as the 2022-2023 season began.

We were proud of our athletics program's banner year in 2021–2022. Among the many accomplishments in all sports last year, we celebrated our Section IX Class AA Championships with our varsity girls' basketball team and varsity boys' soccer team. The varsity girls' and varsity boys' lacrosse teams won their respective Section IX Class B Championships. The WVHS crew competed against 30-plus teams at the NYS High School Championships and medaled in three events. Alex Greco captured the 118 lb. Section IX Wrestling Championship. We cheered our varsity girls' softball team on to a stellar season that took them to the Section IX championship game.

With all last year's outstanding athletic accomplishments, I am even more proud of the academic determination and achievements of so many Wildcats. Last spring, we honored 327 students who had achieved NYSPHSAA Scholar-Athletes status. That means they not only trained and competed at the varsity level; they also carried an academic average of 90 or better throughout their season. So, every time a Wildcat signed a letter of commitment last year to attend and compete in college (and there were quite a few of them), it was a huge point of pride; I cannot say it was ever a surprise.

A University of Kansas study showed that high school students who participated in sports had "better GPA outcomes than non-athletes did" and that "97% of student-athletes graduated high school – 10% higher than their non-athlete peers." There are many reasons why athletics can help a student do better in school. Physical benefits, like the increased cognitive ability that comes with physical activity, and emotional benefits, like the increased social support and sense of community that come from being on a team, are just two examples.

Of course, positive outcomes do not happen accidentally. Our coaches, assistants, and trainers, all under the leadership of our Director of Athletics, Coach Greg Sirico, play enormous roles in the lives of our athletes. They create a safe and supportive culture that encourages and rewards a

growth mindset. They help their players develop lifelong habits that extend well beyond high school. It is always special to see the mentorship that begins between students and coaches evolve into upper-level students mentoring players younger than them. Again, the evidence suggests that young players with positive role models are more likely to seek out those kinds of role models throughout life.

I could go on for an entire page, listing all the documented ways participation in athletics can benefit academic outcomes. The list would read like a how-to for developing excellent lifelong habits. Sports increase self-confidence, help students better understand themselves and their actions, teach collaboration and leadership through teamwork, help young people build care and empathy, and encourage them to see things from other perspectives. Sports teach students to recognize and surpass their limitations, set achievable goals and actionable strategies, manage their time wisely, and be respectful, selfless, adaptable, and resilient. Student-athletes learn to have good relationships, communicate verbally and nonverbally, and make critical decisions.

Lastly, research shows that students who play sports are more likely to stay in school. They want to maintain a healthy body and mind throughout their lifetimes. The longer you move, the longer you learn.

If this all sounds familiar, it is because everything we are talking about here parallels the district's Portrait of a Graduate, our shared aspirations for Warwick students, and represents our priority goals for teaching and learning. Our athletics program is a vital part of preparing students to hit the ground running after graduation, whether they are entering the workforce, beginning a collegiate career, or following another path. We believe that being a Wildcat can contribute to a well-rounded education that leads to well-rounded adults by giving students experiences that help them succeed outside of school.

The Wildcats have already begun pre-season and non-league competitions, and the regular season schedule kicks off this weekend! Our fall sports are Girls' and Boys' Cross Country, Girls' Tennis, Girls' Volleyball, Cheer, Girls' and Boys' Soccer, Girls' Swimming and Diving, Girls' and Boys' Crew, and Football. The WVHS crew team begins training in September. The varsity football team will play their first two games on the road before their home opener on Friday, September 16.

Of course, everyone is already anticipating this year's homecoming festivities on Saturday, September 24. No event better represents the convergence of Warwick Valley residents' school and civic pride. It's always a treat to see the entire community-people and buildings alike-decked out in purple and gold, lining the streets in support of our students.

I look forward to being there and to the season of incredible feats and fun ahead for our many extraordinary student-athletes.

I'll see you in the stands! Go, Wildcats!

Here are some highlights from our schools this week:

Park Avenue Elementary School

The staff is finishing the "welcome mat" for our students' return on September 6. We are incredibly excited to greet our incoming kindergarten and first-grade students, new to the Park Avenue building! Our preparation to make their arrival seamless includes using color-coded "paws" for each class. Parents with children in these specific grades check their welcome package to ensure it consists of a "paw" tag for their child. Please send them to school with it on the first day. Staff members will be positioned outdoors and everywhere inside our building to ensure students have the necessary support starting on day one. Once again, we are so excited to see everyone on September 6. Here's to a great 2022–2023 school year!

Sanfordville Elementary School

We have been working hard to get the building cleaned up and ready for September while considering the summer school programs happening here this summer. Our custodians and maintenance staff are finishing the cleaning and minor repairs throughout the building. They cleaned and prepared the classrooms in hallway 400 for the return of our kindergarten teachers! They moved equipment and furniture back out of storage, mopped floors and shampooed carpets, assembled new furniture, and handled other projects, including UVC lighting upgrades to the ventilation system, masonry repairs, courtyard clean-ups, new clocks, new public address systems, new parking lot striping, and the installation of a new water pump. Our office staff has been busy updating files, preparing student assignments and schedules, organizing the summer mailing, ordering and distributing new supplies, materials, and resources, and planning for the upcoming school year. Thank you to all of our teams for their efforts to ensure a smooth school opening. Remember, SES students and families are welcome to drop by for the "Meet Your Teacher" Open House on September 1, between 2:00 and 3:00 pm. Say hello to your new teacher and drop off your school supplies. Don't forget that school supply lists are posted on the district website. Enjoy the last few days of summer. We are excited to welcome all of our students back to Sanfordville on September 6!

Warwick Valley Middle School

We look forward to the start of the school year and are excited to welcome all our new and returning students to the middle school. On Tuesday, August 30, WVMS will host an orientation for students who are new to the district. Our Wildcat Ambassadors will facilitate the event and give our new families valuable insight into middle school life.

Warwick Valley High School

The first summer rain didn't stop student-athletes from arriving early on Monday for their first practice and tryouts for fall sports. Football, girls' swimming, cross country, soccer, girls' tennis, and volleyball players were excited to see their teammates and get back into their groove on the courts, fields, and pool. WVHS will host its annual Driver Awareness Forum on August 30 at 1:00 pm. School administration and SRO Sircable will discuss the dangers of distracted and impaired driving and review the rules for student drivers parking on campus. New Student Orientation is on August 31 at 9:00 a.m. All freshmen and new students are invited to attend. Tour the building. Write out schedules. Find your locker. Meet your counselor, school administrators, and class advisor. Get an overview of school protocols and procedures.