

WVCSD EdTalk: February 15, 2023
Dr. David Leach, Superintendent of Schools

Let's update you on the budget development process for the 2023-24 fiscal year, which was thoroughly reviewed in the most recent meeting of the Board of Education. Our goal is to provide a comprehensive analysis of programs and offerings for the upcoming school year, while carefully examining projected expenses and revenues. The focus remains on ensuring the best outcome for our students and the community.

Governor Hochul's proposal of the executive budget has brought good news, with its call for the full funding of state foundation aid. The estimated increase of approximately \$4.3 million in foundation aid will be a huge help in tackling the current financial challenges posed by inflation. However, it's important to keep in mind that this is only the restoration of the foundation aid that we should have received in previous years.

Approximately 30% of our revenue comes from state aid, and while the increase in aid is helpful, our foundation aid is still much lower compared to other area similarly-sized school districts due to the state's wealth ratio calculation. In addition to state aid, we also receive revenue from appropriated reserves and non-tax sources such as tuition and building rentals, which have been critical during financial difficulties. However, I must warn that we need to exercise caution when using reserves to balance the budget. It is important to balance short-term needs with long-term financial sustainability when considering the use of reserves.

The majority of our revenue, 63%, comes from the school tax levy. Over the past seven years, the average annual increase in the tax levy has been 1.38%, but with no increase in 2021-22 and a decrease of 0.37% (-0.37%) in 2022-23. Given the current inflationary climate, it is unlikely that we can maintain this trend without making substantial budget reductions.

When making budget reductions, we must take into account various constraints, including legal requirements, funding sources, and collective bargaining agreements, while also considering the priorities of the community and preserving basic operations, legal requirements, and important programs and services. I want to emphasize that school closures or declining enrollment are no longer viable options for budget reduction, as enrollment projections for the next decade are strong. In fact, we currently have about 1,000 more students than anticipated a decade ago.

I appreciate your support as we work to provide the best education possible for our students while also maintaining financial stability.

Here are some highlights from our schools this week:

Park Avenue Elementary School

Park Avenue Elementary School celebrated the launch of its annual One Book, One School program, sponsored by the Park Avenue PTA. One Book, One School is a reading program that strives to provide a fun, engaging, and insightful book that will spark a love for reading in students, facilitate a sense of community, and further involve families in student learning. One of our goals with One Book, One School is for families to engage in stimulating conversations with their children about topics in the book, which may introduce everyone to new experiences or realizations. Families are encouraged to participate in reading together for at least 15-20 minutes a day to model for children how enjoyable reading can be and demonstrate good reading habits.

This year we are reading *A Bear Called Paddington*, a classic story about an extraordinary bear who travels from Peru to London and changes the lives of his new family, the Browns. To motivate students to engage in the work, our faculty organized an assembly program incorporating a Jeopardy game between two teams composed of staff and parents. The game was designed to give students the necessary background knowledge for reading. Students loved watching their teachers compete in the game and walked away with valuable information about the book and its author. We are grateful to the PTA for sponsoring this special event!

Sanfordville Elementary School

Sanfordville also started its One School, One Book program, and students will also be reading *A Bear Called Paddington*. The event is part of the National PTA Pick A Reading Partner program (PARP). Media specialist Mrs. Danielle Cancel has collaborated with the Sanfordville PTA and classroom teachers to create fun activities to add to the family reading over the next two weeks. The week began with classes visiting the library to learn more about PARP and to watch the book reveal video. PTA volunteers visited classrooms to drop off a gift from Paddington. Each student received a bag of Paddington's favorite treat, marmalade (jelly) and toast (crackers). During the next three weeks, students will continue to read with a reading partner at home and in the classrooms and engage in themed activities. Classrooms will be encouraged to decorate a poster themed for PARP/Paddington that will be displayed around the building. Students will decorate suitcases just like Paddington's, three stuffed Paddington bears will be traveling around to classrooms throughout PARP. Every classroom will get Paddington for a day, write a letter to the next class, and take a fun picture with Paddington to remember the day. There will also be themed dress-up days such as Rain Boot Day, Dress Like Paddington Day, and Pajama Day.

Warwick Valley Middle School

The Warwick Valley Middle School Guitar Club performed its annual concert. Approximately 50 students participated in the club this year, serving more than a dozen songs. Auditions were held in October, and students met after School to practice their songs. During the concert, students played songs from Nirvana, No Doubt, Journey, Guns N' Roses, and Metallica, to name a few. Our Wire Choir Club also performed in the show joining the Guitar Club on a Green Day song, a Nirvana song, a piece from Phantom of the Opera, and an original piece written by Warwick Valley High School teacher Elissa Maynard. We were excited to hear the staff perform "The Middle" by Jimmy Eat World and "Separate Ways" by Journey. Guitar Club is open to students in grades 5-8, with some participating yearly. Brett Algera, the current Guitar Club advisor, would like to thank eighth graders Danellen Bussell, Zoe Harkness, Madison Lijoi, and Camden Tracy for being dedicated members of the club for four years.

The Guitar Club has a 28-year history at Warwick Valley Middle School. Retired ELA teacher Darryl Wilbur started it. Mr. Wilbur began the club in 1995 to share his love of music with his students. He taught students how to play acoustic guitar after School and during their free periods. The club grew, and science teacher John Gouveia began assisting Mr. Wilbur, teaching students how to play the guitar while learning how to play himself. Eventually, science teacher Ed Mesic joined the charge, teaching students to play the guitar, bass guitar, keyboard, and drums. In 2019, fifth-grade teacher Mr. Algera became a significant contributor to the maintenance of the club. The Guitar Club concerts unite our school community through music and performance.

Warwick Valley High School

Warwick Valley High School has been celebrating the performances of many students involved in academic and extracurricular activities. Music students performed in the annual Pop Concert. Members of the Symphony and Chamber Orchestras, Treble and Wire Choirs, Meistersingers, Concert Band, and Wind Ensemble came out to perform an hour and a half of music representing decades of pop culture from the '60s to the present day. The Jazz Choir and Band came together to perform "It Don't Mean a Thing," and it proved to be a great collaboration within the music program. The concert was directed by music teachers Noreen Hanson (Choirs), Elissa Maynard (Orchestras), and Megan Shafer (Bands). Over 300 students participated in the concert, some of whom performed in multiple ensembles in front of a packed house!

Four student-athletes signed National Letters of Intent to attend Division I colleges and commit to their athletic programs. The official signing was held during a ceremony in the auditorium and arranged by Athletic Director Greg Sirico. The students' families, coaches, teammates, and friends were there to cheer them on as they committed to top college programs. Congratulations to the following students: Jesse Abramson (Fordham University, Swimming), Drew Borner (Wagner College, Football), Julia Singh (University at Buffalo, Track and Field), Shelby Spencer (Campbell University, Cross Country/Track and Field).