

SUPERINTENDENT'S BRIEF

Together, We are the Champions for Children in Poughkeepsie City School District

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VOLUME 6



2025-26 Budget Development

Investments in PK-5, transportation

The Poughkeepsie City School District will propose to residents a 2025-26 budget that would expand extended learning time and allow for the implementation of [school buses at the elementary level](#), while adding staff and remaining under the tax cap.

District officials at Wednesday's Board of Education meeting presented a preliminary \$147.45 million spending plan to put in front of voters for approval during the May 20 budget and board election vote. [Read the presentation here](#) and watch a [video of the meeting on the district's YouTube page here](#).

While the budget draft provides a clear picture of how the district will augment the services and support offered to promote student achievement, district officials noted it is based on preliminary school aid totals projected by the state in January and will be adjusted when the final school aid numbers are available in April when the state's 2025-26 budget is approved. Superintendent of Schools Dr. Eric Jay Rosser and Interim Assistant Superintendent for Business Margarita Lekaj said both the state Assembly and Senate are advocating for increased aid. They also stated they would continue to sift through each line of the budget to find where savings could be found before presenting a final budget draft.

While the preliminary draft would be a 5.9% increase over this year's spending plan, the tax levy would increase by just 1.247%, the lowest in Rosser's six years in the district. Rosser said the budget "reflects our commitment to sustain student progress and to make sure that we are continuing to work on equity, as it relates to equitable allocations to schools based upon student need," noting "every budget should be focused on ... improving student outcomes."

The budget would make investments in:

- Providing buses to all students grades pre-K through 5 who live at least a half-mile from their school.
- Instructional programming.
- Expanding extended learning time, or ELT, at all elementary schools from three days to five.
- Financing early college and career training programs, such as dual enrollment courses and [participation in the Dutchess BOCES CTI program](#).



An elementary bus expansion, career training programs and arts education are just three of the areas served in the 2025-26 preliminary budget draft.



and the general pre-K through 12 college and career readiness programming happening in each district school.

- Multi-language learning supports.
- Supports for students with exceptionalities.
- Arts and music education.
- Social and emotional learning, including adding an additional social worker for the middle school.
- Community Schools.
- Teacher and leader professional learning, in addition to resources allocated through the district's Title II budget.
- Right-sizing compensation for staff, a process that has been ongoing for six years.

Rosser noted the district plans to implement a system in which multi-language learners have access to a dedicated transition counselor throughout high school to help address the "high population" of such students who drop out prior to graduation.

The superintendent also noted the district is planning to expand ELT at the middle school to five days, though that would be financed through grant funding rather than the budget itself. And, he told the board officials are working with the Poughkeepsie Children's Cabinet to see how they could collaborate to expand the opportunities further.

Board President Fatimah Carmen Martinez Santiago praised the plan to expand ELT.

"I cannot say enough. That is like music to my ears," she said. "It's student-focused. It's an opportunity to have our students involved in very productive work in our district and out of the streets. Phenomenal."

The elementary ELT expansion would cost roughly \$1.86 million. It's the largest addition to next year's budget, followed by the \$1.8 million needed to begin the elementary school bus program. Lekaj reminded the board 90% of the transportation expenses would be offset by state aid beginning in 2026-27.

The bus program is [subject to voter approval](#) through a proposition on the May 20 ballot.

The board president called the transportation plan "huge. This is something that, since I've sat on this board, that I've heard continuously from the community is, 'How can we get our kids on buses and to school?' I don't know if our community yet realizes how major of a move that is."

The district's goal is to present a completed budget draft to the board at its April 2 meeting, pending the state hitting its own April 1 deadline for finalizing its budget.

In addition to the school budget and propositions, one Board of Education seat will be up for election; Trustee Andrew Rieser's term expires June 30. Polls will be open from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. May 20 at the following locations:

- **Wards 1 and 3:** Sojourner Truth Elementary (formerly Morse), 101 Mansion St.
- **Ward 5:** Warring Elementary School, 283 Mansion St.
- **Wards 2 and 4:** Roberto Clemente Elementary (formerly Clinton), 100 Montgomery St.
- **Wards 6 and 7:** Poughkeepsie Middle School, 55 College Ave.
- **Ward 8:** Krieger Elementary, 265 Hooker Ave. (Whittier Boulevard entrance)

Absentee, early mail and military voting will also be available. Visit [the district's voting page](#) to learn more.



PMS celebrates 310 students for 2nd quarter excellence

More than 300 Poughkeepsie Middle School students arrived at the school's cafeteria Friday morning ready to celebrate a great accomplishment.

While they did get that chance, they also were challenged to treat success as a launching point, rather than a finish line.

"You're no longer just students," Interim Principal Felicia Schinella told them. "You have graduated to distinguished scholars."



The middle school staff Friday morning held a breakfast to reward the students who made the Principal's Honor Roll (an average of 95-100), High Honor Roll (90-94.9), Honor Roll (85-89.9) or Merit Roll (80-84.9) in the second quarter and passed all their classes.

In all, that encompassed 310 students. It's a number that has nearly doubled from the first quarter.

The students enjoyed a breakfast of eggs, turkey sausage and bacon, hash browns, muffins and bagels, as they listened to music and hit balloons into the air. Each received a certificate recognizing the achievement from Schinella. Before that, though, they



listened to several speakers, including members of the National Junior Honor Society, discuss continued and increased excellence in the future.

"We're using that positive, high-expectation language so they keep aspiring to do better," Schinella said.

Grade 6 Counselor Rachel Birsner spoke for the school's guidance team in congratulating the students.

"We're so proud of you. We hope you are so proud of yourselves," she said. "We know you're making a thousand little decisions every day and that got you to this spot."

Birsner then explained middle school goes by fast and soon they would be high schoolers beginning to build future plans. She introduced Kelly Semexant, the college and workforce readiness counselor based predominantly in the high school, as someone they will want to know when they go across Forbus Street.

"Soon enough you'll be filling out college applications and, the most important thing, getting college acceptances," Semexant said, before reading a lengthy list of schools to which this year's group of graduating Pioneers have been accepted.

Interim Principal Felicia Schinella, above, was one of several speakers congratulating and challenging more than 300 Poughkeepsie Middle School students during a second-quarter celebratory breakfast Friday.

For the first quarter, 165 students made the Merit Roll or better and took a congratulatory trip to see "A Christmas Carol" at the Rhinebeck Performing Arts Center. The increase in the high-performing students, Schinella said, is a product of the school administration and faculty's consistency in their treatment of the kids and messaging.

"Right from September, we really homed in on how academics was going to be a strong focus of this school year, that attendance was very important and we compliment them and praise them regularly," she said.

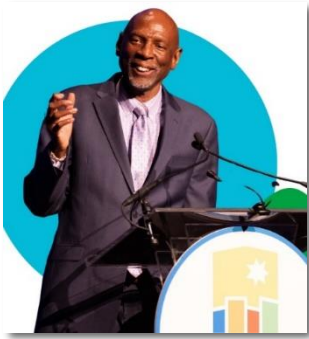
"We build this excitement up." The middle school, in fact, has the lowest percentage of students who are chronically absent, missing 10% or more of the school year, at 22.1% compared to the districtwide, 39.5% through February. Schinella said the school's attendance coordinator "stays on them," and every student has an adult they can go to for support.

After a show in the first quarter and a breakfast in the second, Assistant Principal of Climate and Culture Danielle Green said the third-quarter honorees will take a trip to Heritage Financial Park in Fishkill on April 30 to watch the Hudson Valley Renegades take on the Jersey Shore BlueClaws on Education Day.

"How many students are going to want to go on that trip?" she rhetorically asked. "There's a lot of us in here. The whole cafeteria's filled. I'll take it."



Presentation by cradle-to-career innovator April 9



Geoffrey Canada

An innovator, whose approach to addressing intergenerational poverty through holistic community support is helping to shape transformational opportunities for Poughkeepsie's youth, will speak at Sojourner Truth Elementary School next month. Geoffrey Canada, president and founder of Harlem Children's Zone and founder of William Julius Wilson Institute, is coming to Poughkeepsie for an April 9 event titled "Putting Kids First: Unlocking the Promise of Poughkeepsie," presented by the Poughkeepsie Children's Cabinet.

The free event was originally scheduled for Feb. 6 but postponed due to inclement weather. [RSVP at this link](#), as space in the auditorium at Sojourner Truth, formerly named Morse Elementary, is limited.

Visitors to the speech can expect Canada to discuss not only the philosophies his organizations take to bolster residents and address inequities but how they can be applied within Poughkeepsie. The Cabinet's approach to connecting students with cradle-to-career support by bringing together the city's schools, government and institutions is heavily influenced by the work done by Canada's programs. The William Julius Wilson Institute, an outgrowth of Harlem Children's Zone, is a national resource for place-based, people-focused solutions that open pathways to social and economic mobility. The Institute has also invested in the professional development of leaders in Poughkeepsie and supported the creation of the Children's Cabinet's [10-year strategic plan](#).

Canada himself has visited Poughkeepsie in recent years to observe the resources and institutions working within the city and with the Cabinet. During the trip, Cabinet Executive Director Jill Gomez said, "Canada and his team believe in the possibilities within Poughkeepsie."

The key to his approach – and the work of the Children's Cabinet – is "bringing together the school community and the overarching community," Gomez said. "No one group does it alone. It's an entire community system supporting students the whole way."

The doors to the school located at 101 Mansion St. will open at 5:30 p.m. in advance of the 6:15 start time.

Other newsletters to keep you informed:

Poughkeepsie City School District publishes a variety of newsletters throughout the year. Here are the available newsletters: [Curriculum & Instruction Weekly](#), March 21, 2025; [In the Spotlight](#), February 2025.

Upcoming events

- **March 21:** Spelling Bee for grades 3-5: 5-8 p.m. at Poughkeepsie Middle School, 55 College Ave.

Free suicide prevention training

The Krieger Elementary PTA and Community Schools are presenting free training in QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer), and evidence-based emergency mental health intervention for suicidal persons, **Saturday, March 22**, during Saturday Morning Lights at Poughkeepsie Middle School. The program runs 9 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Space is limited, so [RSVP at this link](#).

Participants will receive training in recognizing the warning signs of a suicidal person, increasing awareness of stigma and understanding suicide as a public health issue, knowing how to access local and national referral resources and how to offer the sort of hope that may help save a life. Email GWKriegerPTA@gmail.com for any questions or concerns.

**SUICIDE PREVENTION
FREE TRAINING**

Brought to you by KRIEGER PTA
in collaboration with COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

REGISTER NOW!

LIMITED TO 30
ADULT PARTICIPANTS

QPR: Question. Persuade. Refer.
Just as people trained in CPR increase the chance of survival in the event of a medical crisis, people trained in QPR learn how to recognize the warning signs of depression and that someone may be contemplating suicide. This free, evidence-based, training provides the tools to identify, interrupt, and direct a person experiencing a crisis to the proper care.

Participants will be able to:

- Recognize the warning signs of suicide.
- Increase awareness of stigma and understand suicide as a public health issue.
- Know how to offer hope.
- Know how to access local and national referral resources.
- Know how to get help and save a life.

WHEN: Saturday, March 22, 2025, 9:00-11:30 am
WHERE: Saturday Morning Lights
Poughkeepsie Middle School
55 College Avenue

**FREE. LIMITED TO 30 ADULT PARTICIPANTS.
REGISTRATION REQUIRED.**

KRIEGER PTA

COURSE INSTRUCTOR: Renee Pabst, LMHC
Renee is a Licensed Mental Health Counselor, Health Education Chair at Haverley School, a devoted Krieger parent and PTA member.

QUESTIONS?
Contact: gukriegerpta@gmail.com