

SUPERINTENDENT'S BRIEF

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

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March Madness at PHS

The last time Nathaniel Franco played musical chairs was likely in kindergarten.

Yet, there he was Friday afternoon, a high school freshman, running with everything he had to take the lone open chair left.

Franco was among dozens of Poughkeepsie High School students Friday who took part in a March Madness pep rally with numerous competitions, some of which pitted students against faculty.

"It was fun," he said after competing not only in basketball-themed versions of musical chairs and head, shoulders, knees and toes, winning the former. Both proved more competitive than he thought they would be. "I didn't think I had to do that much running!"

The pep rally capped the winter sports season and, of course, coincides with the NCAA men's and women's basketball tournaments, both of which began last week. The Poughkeepsie High School version of March Madness at the gymnasium began during the final hour of the school day with all winter sports teams and school clubs being announced and welcomed



Top: Tazjir Gary soars during the dunk contest. Middle, left: student groups and teams were announced. Middle, right: Musical chairs required students to charge to a basket to make a layup. Bottom: Winter sports seniors posed for a group photo.



onto the floor, before the AFJROTC presented the flag and Cadet 2nd Lt. Adel Rogers sang the national anthem. After a slam dunk contest in which several Pioneers – led by contest winner Tazjir Gary – brought the crowd to their feet, musical chairs began. Competitors dribbled in a circle around a group of chairs until the music stopped, then had to make a layup and run back to the ever-shrinking number of seats. Finally, the head, shoulders, knees and toes competition, which included several rounds of one-on-one games – each round began when, instead of naming a body part the announcer called out the word “ball” – until ultimately the top competitors took on faculty members. Though the final rounds were interrupted when the bell rang ending the school day and students filtered out of the gym, that didn’t end the fun. After school, the grade levels – first freshmen versus sophomores, then juniors against seniors – played a pair of contests, and the winners faced each other. Finally, the student champion – the junior class – took on a team of faculty members and members of the city’s police and fire departments. All the while, attendees enjoyed a jovial atmosphere complete with concessions and bags of popcorn. The faculty team ultimately won, 42-40. The important part of having such events, though, is the camaraderie built with the students, Math teacher Rick VanScoyk said.



Faculty got into the mix with several of the competitions, including Math teacher Rick VanScoyk.

“Playing sports together brings out a different level of the relationship between faculty and students,” the teacher said, noting also the importance of doing the same with firefighters and police officers. “We like to build relationships with the community. We invite them to build relationships with the students on a positive level.” Franco was happy he took part. “I love basketball,” he said.

Community Schools return ‘Lights,’ spelling bee



Spelling Bee competitors pose with Sojourner Truth Elementary teacher aide Carol Melton, back left, and Community Schools Executive Director Natasha Brown, back right.

Schools successfully revived the spelling bee for our elementary learners. Take a look at how that event went, and what’s coming next from Community Schools, below.

The Community Schools Department serves a critical role for the Poughkeepsie City School District, providing enriching programs that connect students and families with resources. That includes a slew of events after school, on weekends and during the summer that not only are fun but reinforce education throughout the year. Each year, the depth and quantity of their offerings, and subsequently their impact on our students, have grown. Lately, the department has been hard at work plotting spring and summer programming, including the return this Friday of its signature Friday Night Lights program. Last Friday, Community

Spelling Bee includes 36

After several years without a broad district spelling bee, Community Schools held a competition for students in grades 3-5 Friday at Poughkeepsie Middle School.

In all, 36 students competed, nearly twice as many as was expected when the event was initially planned. Moderated by Sojourner Truth Elementary Teacher Assistant Carol Melton, a champion was crowned for each grade level before the winners took part in a final round. In the end, Krieger fourth grade student Nyah Fitz-Henley won the bee and the accompanying trophy, while other students earned medals. The event, which was well attended by families, friends and school principals, encourages literacy and parental engagement, Community Schools Executive Director Natasha Brown said, noting the goal was for "parents to be the ones helping their children practice and learn the words." And, it isn't ending with one event.

"Ms. Melton is working with us and Friday Night Lights to create a spelling club," Jessica Ortiz, interim Community Schools administrator, said. "Hopefully from there we can have more spelling bees." The ultimate goal, she said, is to take part in the Scripps National Spelling Bee qualification process.

Results:

Third grade: First Lucas Gutierrez, Krieger; Second Kendriel Gonzalez, Roberto Clemente; Third Christopher Green, Warring.

Fourth: First Nyah Fitz-Henley, Krieger; Second Marilyn Florencio, Roberto Clemente; Third Alani Oliver, Roberto Clemente.

Fifth: First Tafarel Baxter, Sojourner Truth; Second Shengyun Wei, Sojourner Truth; Third Ariella Alvarez, Krieger.



Community Schools Executive Director Natasha Brown, left, and moderator Carol Melton, pose with spelling bee champion Nyah Fitz-Henley.

Friday Night Lights returns, grades expanded

This Friday marks the return of Friday Night Lights, a weekly program at Poughkeepsie Middle School that gives students a place for activities, games, enrichment opportunities and meals.

Due to the high demand in the program, Brown said it was recently expanded to invite students in grades 3 and 4 to sign up; initially it was opened only to grades 5-9.

Each installment will begin with dinner offered from 3:30-4:30 p.m. The proper program runs from 4-7 p.m., facilitated by Community Schools staff, teacher aides and middle school social-emotional learning, or SEL, teachers. The gymnasium will be open and various games will be available. There will also be enrichment educational opportunities in various areas like art, cooking and music facilitated by community business organizations.

Friday Night Lights will end each week at 7 p.m. to coincide with the county bus schedule to make returning home easy for participants. The program is scheduled to run through June 21. To preregister, [visit this link](#).

Student financial literacy course Fridays

Community Schools and Habitat for Humanity of Dutchess County are teaming up to offer students a financial literacy course called "Building a Pathway to Homeownership," beginning this Friday.

The program, a "Junior Homebuying University," will be held each week during Friday Night Lights from 5:30-7 p.m. at Poughkeepsie Middle School. Ortiz said the program is intended for high school and older middle school students. The program will cover such topics as budgeting, understanding property and school taxes, the dangers of debt, saving versus investing, insurance and others. Expert instructors are scheduled to include Michelle Rawl, investment advisor, Yaritza Ruiz, owner of Absolutely Clear Title Agency, Melina Zambrano, financial development center counselor with Heritage Financial Credit Union, and Maria McCree-Arellano, MBA account executive with Ulster Insurance Services.

"It just talks about budgeting, what is debt, and what it entails to buy a house, if they're interested in doing that in their future," Ortiz said. "Just juggling money."



The junior program is an offshoot of a previous program offered at the middle school by Habitat for adults in February. "Quite a few adults signed up for it, they had a workshop with us, and we started talking about doing one for the kids," Ortiz said. "A lot of parents are requesting financial literacy workshops for their kids. They need to know how to budget, how to save. When they get a job – how to deposit the check." The program concludes with graduation June 14 at 10 a.m. Those who participate in all the classes will receive a gift and a Habitat for Humanity of Dutchess County Certificate of Completion. To sign up for the program, [visit this link](#).



Last year's spring festival featured inflatable slides, face painting and mascots.

Spring Festival planned for May 17

Community Schools' fifth annual Spring Family Festival is set for noon to 3 p.m. Saturday, May 17 at Poughkeepsie High School's track and field.

"It's our yearly event for students and families to just gather and celebrate the ending of the school year," Ortiz said. The event each year features activities, games, entertainment, food and raffles, all free to district families. Last year's festival featured a petting zoo, giant inflatable slides and attractions, a DJ and face painting. Food options ranged from bagged popcorn and burgers to cotton candy, snow cones and ice cream, to a food truck of Mexican snacks and drinks.

It's also an opportunity, Ortiz said, for families "to familiarize themselves with resources available to them. There will be anywhere from 30-40 CBOs (community-based organizations) participating."

Register for the festival [using this online form](#).

Bright Lights Summer Program registration open

Registration is open for Community Schools' Bright Lights Summer Program, which is scheduled to run from July 8 to Aug. 15.

The program is free but space is limited; [register at this link](#).

The six-week program runs Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. It's open to children in grades K-8. Breakfast and lunch are provided.

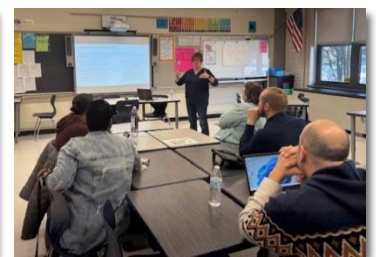
Just like Friday and Saturday Night Lights, the Summer Lights program partners district staff and community-based organizations to offer a wide array of enrichment learning in areas of cooking, music, robotics, music, dance, basketball, swimming, soccer, performing arts and others.

Superintendent's Conference Day emphasizes wellness

As part of Superintendent's Conference Day on March 14, Poughkeepsie City School District teachers, staff and administrators engaged in activities intended to encourage well-being. The idea was not only to help faculty establish a healthy mindset and activities for themselves, but to be able to pass along some of those tools to their students.

Informational sessions ranged from a lecture from Dr. Ebony Green on having a mindset based in kindness, to workshops on financial literacy and money management, to seminars on managing everyday stress, emotional intelligence, leadership and healthy eating habits.

There were also more physical opportunities, such as sessions teaching yoga and foot golf to artistic endeavors like painting and learning to make "stressless bath bombs."



Seminars and activities encouraging wellness encompassed the afternoon sessions Superintendent's Conference Day.