

SUPERINTENDENT'S BRIEF

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

ISSUE NO. 63 | April 10, 2024

VOLUME 5



Committee to inspect building names

The Poughkeepsie City School District Board of Education is establishing an ad hoc committee, the Building Name Study Group, to "make recommendations and act in an advisory capacity" to the board on the renaming process for several of its buildings. The reasoning was stated in a proposal recently passed by the board: The board and district "believe that the name chosen for a school facility is a powerful expression of community values. Our school buildings received their current

names between 1890 and 1930. Because communities change over time, we believe that the district should periodically review building and facility names to ensure that they are in alignment with the district's mission and the community's values."

Last school year a resolution was passed authorizing Dr. Eric Jay Rosser, superintendent of schools, to lead the effort in the district to acquire a better understanding of the people whom each of the district buildings are named after. The board expressed interest in ensuring any potential concerns a name may present from a historical/cultural/equity perspective are addressed through community conversations regarding any future decisions about naming, renaming or denaming a school (see [Superintendent's Brief Issue 40 Vol. 4](#)).

Rosser's exploration resulted in the board receiving two reports, one from the Poughkeepsie Public Library System and another from Vassar College. After reviewing the reports and discussing at several board convenings, the best approach to addressing this issue, the board decided to establish the ad hoc committee, which will include two board members, three city residents, a staff member and a principal.



The Building Name Study Group is tasked with researching and evaluating the names of the Poughkeepsie City School District's buildings, including the Jane Bolin and Columbus administration buildings, and its five current elementary schools, left to right from top row: Samuel F.B. Morse, Governor George Clinton, William W. Smith, George W. Krieger and Charles B. Warring.



The process is intended to educate and elevate community voice in recommending names that would reflect the board's commitment to community engagement. Specifically, the Building Name Study Group is tasked to:

- reach out to community groups to engage them in conversation about school building names;
- compile and review information on the history of the district's current building and facilities names;
- identify the viewpoints, accomplishments and legacies of each building's namesake;
- assess whether these viewpoints, accomplishments and legacies align with the current district mission and community values.

If the study group determines that namesake legacies are not aligned with current mission and values, the group shall:

- identify alternative ways of honoring the accomplishments and learning about the legacy of a current building namesake;
- compile a list of alternative building names for the board's consideration; and
- advise the board on how to engage and include the whole city community in this process through presentations, further outreach, public hearings and/or other activities.

Dr. Andrew Rieser, a board member who volunteered his services to serve as chair of the committee, stated, "This committee is not a committee to bury something, it is a committee to take action."

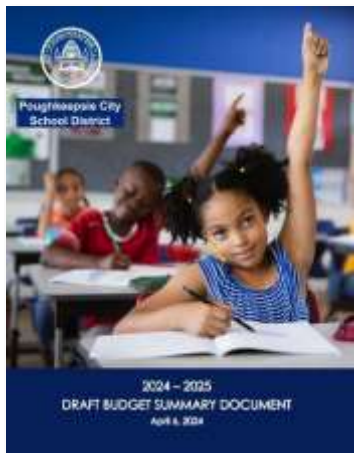
The committee is tasked with providing a report to the board by Jan. 1, 2025. This will provide the district with ample time to submit the required paperwork to the New York State Education Department (NYSED) by the March 1 deadline date set by the state.

"I am obviously thrilled that this is happening. Under this Board (the community) will see action," said Fatimah Carmen Martinez Santiago, a board member who will also serve as a committee member. "We are committed to this work!"

Rosser called it a "great moment in the Poughkeepsie City School District, to be able to form a committee, represented by members of our community, to address some things that had made people very uncomfortable for quite some time. The Morse building was established in 1899, so for over a hundred years this name has been a part of the vernacular of children who have attended the school, staff who have worked in the school, parents who have had children in the school, etc. This committee will provide an opportunity for us to correct the wrongs that were established in the past. This is a historical moment for the district."

Previous to the Board's action on April 3, the superintendent, board President Tom O'Neill Esq. and board member Dr. Felicia Watson, met with City of Poughkeepsie Mayor Yvonne Flowers, executive director of [Dutchess County Historical Society](#) Bill Jeffway, city 5th Ward Common Council member Ondie James, and members of Celebrating The African Spirit, to discuss the district's intent in establishing the ad hoc committee, the importance of community participation, and the timeline for NYSED approval.

The district plans to announce who will serve on the ad hoc committee and publicize the committee's future meeting dates and public engagement timeline.



PCSD presents revised budget draft with reduced tax increase

The latest draft of the Poughkeepsie City School District's proposed 2024-25 budget reduces the amount taxes would be increased to half that of the tax cap. The revisions to the proposal come as the district continues to wait for the state budget process to be completed, determining how much state aid it will receive.

Dr. Eric Jay Rosser, superintendent of schools, and Ken Silver, assistant superintendent of business, presented the latest draft of the budget, at the



Budget resources online

- [Complete proposed budget](#)
- [Budget summary](#)
- [April 3 budget presentation slides](#)
- [Video detailing school district budgeting process in NY](#)

April 3 regular board meeting, highlighting that a tremendous amount of work had resulted in significant updates to the proposed \$140.1 million budget. Most significant is the once 4.75 percent proposed tax increase has been decreased to 3.5 percent, which represents half of the 7 percent tax cap the district is authorized to raise taxes. "This adjustment was made as we seek to strike a respectful balance between the community's investment in the success of

Poughkeepsie City School District students and taxpayers' finances. For Poughkeepsie, this is more challenging than surrounding school districts given the size of our community, which reduces the tax base," Rosser said. "We will continue to be mindful of our community in this respect as the national economy has not alleviated what is happening at the local level."

The \$140,123,358 budget represents a 3.1 percent increase over the \$135,957,853 budget for the 2023-24 academic year. The proposal takes into account a \$1.4 million decrease in state aid, announced before the beginning of the state budget negotiations. Poughkeepsie was among more than 300 school districts in New York anticipating a drop in aid. This year, the district presentations to the Board of Education includes a detailed, line-by-line draft budget breakdown highlighting the various streams of revenues and where funding is allocated for district operations. The [draft budget document](#) provides greater detail and transparency to board members and the community at large.

However, the district also created a [concise overview document](#) that captures the district's budgeting philosophy, highlights the budget priorities for the 2024-25 academic year and provides a summary of the proposed budget, which includes revenue sources and where those revenues are to be expensed. Rosser shared the overview document at the April 6 Superintendent's Fireside Chat. But, that won't be the only community engagement opportunity regarding the budget. A May 7 budget hearing will be held, giving community members an opportunity to discuss the proposed spending plan with district leaders and the Board of Education.

Poughkeepsie to host trades job fair

The Poughkeepsie City School District is hosting a trade fair for students, parents and guardians.

The Ethan Allen Trade Fair, from 4-6 p.m. Thursday, April 11 at the Poughkeepsie High School gymnasium, will bring together community businesses with jobseekers of all ages. The trade fields featured will include manufacturing, automotive, construction, plumbing and more.

"The students are going to get to learn about the community businesses and local trades," said Dr. Janety Encarnacion, director of college readiness and workforce education.

Held in association with Ethan Allen Workforce Solutions and the City of Poughkeepsie, the inaugural trade fair is scheduled to include:

- an hour-long panel featuring career insights from leading professionals about their journeys;
- interactive booths where attendees can speak with industry leaders;
- opportunities to learn about internships, training programs, job openings and skill-building workshops.

The Poughkeepsie district has placed an emphasis on career pathway learning and preparation for future employment, which may or may not include the traditional college path.

Encarnacion said attendees will have the chance to learn more about what those career pathways may entail but also learn about the first steps in getting involved with a local trade, such as possible internships.

"They may find opportunities for summer jobs. The hope is they get summer jobs," Encarnacion said. "But also, the parents may want to apply for a job. We wanted to create that opportunity, too."

Poughkeepsie City School District students can register for the trade fair by visiting [this registration page](#).

