

# SUPERINTENDENT'S BRIEF

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

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**Budget, all propositions approved**

## Elementary buses coming this fall

Albert Luce Sr. is credited with inventing the school bus, by attaching a wooden body to the frame of a truck. That was in 1925. One hundred years later, the City of Poughkeepsie's children will finally widely benefit from it. In fall 2025, every Poughkeepsie City School District elementary student who lives at least a half-mile from their school will be offered bus service for the first time, after residents overwhelmingly

supported the two propositions enabling it during Tuesday's district budget and Board of Education election vote. Residents also approved Proposition 1, the district's proposed \$147.7 million budget for the 2025-26 school year, and Proposition 4, which grants the district permission to utilize a previously created capital improvement reserve fund to make building repairs and upgrades.

"I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to the Poughkeepsie community for your overwhelming support in approving our school budget and district initiatives," said Assistant Superintendent of Elementary Education Gregory Mott, who will become superintendent of schools July 1. "Your vote in favor of these transformational propositions marks a transformational step forward for our district. I am especially pleased to share that eligible students in Pre-K-5 will now have access to district-provided transportation. This critical advancement responds directly to concerns voiced by our families and will help remove barriers to attendance and academic success.

"Thank you for believing in our shared vision," Mott said. "Together, we are putting children and families first! Well done, Poughkeepsie Family!"

Each of the measures were supported overwhelmingly, with the budget passing 329 votes to 93, Proposition 2 passing 375-65, Proposition 3 passing 363-68, and Proposition 4 passing 349-68.



**Above: Superintendent of Schools Dr. Eric Jay Rosser, left, and future Superintendent of Schools Gregory Mott, right, celebrate bus service for Poughkeepsie elementary students with a class from Morse Elementary Wednesday morning. Below: Students pose for a photo on the bus.**





**Morse students leave the school bus after learning about safe practices while aboard.**

Meanwhile, Eleanor Evans-Chiarenza was favored by voters over Gregory “Tron” Melton for the lone open seat on the Board of Education. Evans-Chiarenza will serve a three-year term beginning July 1, taking the seat that will be vacated by Dr. Andrew Rieser. Chiarenza is a parole officer with the state Department of Corrections and Community Supervision. She is president of the Poughkeepsie Middle School PTA and an active member of both the Superintendent’s Parent Advisory Committee and the Parent Engagement Committee.

The approved \$147,634,460

2025-26 budget increased the tax levy by just 1.247% while still increasing the amount spent on general instruction by more than \$2.8 million. Dr. Eric Jay Rosser, superintendent of schools, called the budget “an investment plan” intended to “sustain and enhance student progress.” The budget supports:

- Instructional programming, including the addition of high school credit-bearing courses at the middle school, giving students a head start on graduating on time.
- Extracurricular program expansion at the secondary level.
- Expanding extended learning time, or ELT, from three days to five at the elementary level.
- Financing early college and career training programs, such as dual-enrollment courses and [participation in the Dutchess BOCES CTI program](#), and the general pre-K through 12 college and career readiness programming happening in each district school.
- Multi-language learning supports, including the implementation of 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, and the natural extension of the dual-language program into the third grade.
- Supports for students with exceptionalities.
- Arts and music education supplies and repair funding.
- Increased availability of field trips.
- Social and emotional learning, including adding an additional social worker for the middle school.
- Teacher and leader professional learning.
- Rightsizing compensation for staff, a process that has been ongoing for six years.

The budget also supported the plan to add bus service at the elementary level, which was made possible as part of the Elementary Reconfiguration movement and approved by voters Tuesday. In propositions 2 and 3, residents authorized the district to provide transportation to all eligible pupils and established Child Safety Zones. The zones will allow the district to be reimbursed for 90% of the cost of providing bus service to students who live more than a half-mile from their school and would have to walk through a hazardous area as defined by factors like traffic, lane crossings, availability of sidewalks, traffic control devices or crossing guards, crime rates and others.

District leadership has already been working with BusRight, finalizing bus routes and determining how many additional school buses it will need to provide the service. Its next step is issuing a request for proposals to companies interested in supplying the buses.





The district, since it was established in 1843, has never before offered bus service on this scale. The district believes the availability of buses will lead to increased attendance, test scores and graduation rates, all elements for which the Child Safety Zone program was established.

"I am honored to be part of this historic moment as the Poughkeepsie City School District passes a transformative referendum," Superintendent of Schools Dr. Eric Jay Rosser said. "This vote fulfills a decades-long aspiration shared by families throughout our community. For years, parents have voiced concerns about the lack of busing, from safety issues and harsh weather conditions to the everyday difficulties of getting children to and from school. These challenges have contributed to chronic absenteeism and lower academic achievement for too many of our students.

"Today, we take a significant step toward educational equity," Rosser said. "By removing this transportation barrier, we not only support families, we ensure that every child has a better chance to succeed, no matter where they live."

Residents also favored Proposition 4, authorizing the district to utilize the "2021 Capital Reserve Fund," \$5 million plus accrued interest, for repairs and improvements to the Jane Bolin administration building at 18 S. Perry St., including installing new unit ventilators in classrooms, installing an elevator, roofing repairs and the installation of a digital sign.

The district over the last four years has invested more than \$150 million into improving and upgrading buildings and facilities through the Strong Schools, Equal Strong Communities capital improvement project.



**Assistant Superintendent of Elementary Education Gregory Mott spoke with Poughkeepsie Middle School teachers Wednesday at the school.**

## Mott meets with, listens to middle school staff

Middle schools across the country experience challenges, given the developmental stage students of that age experience. As part of the district's ongoing and continuous efforts to be intentional in improving the Poughkeepsie Middle School environment, as well to strengthen academic and positive youth outcomes, Superintendent of Schools Dr. Eric Jay Rosser, Assistant Superintendent of Elementary Education Gregory Mott, Assistant

Superintendent for Student Support Services Dr. Yvonne Palmer, and others are engaged in researching middle school models and having conversations centered on how the district may be able to adjust its approach and structure. Rosser, Palmer and Assistant Superintendent of Secondary Education Dr. Charles Gallo have frequently visited the school this year, offering support and guidance to staff.

Mott, who will become superintendent of schools July 1, this morning met with Poughkeepsie Middle School teachers as they congregated outside the school before the first bell.

"We are the staff at PMS," sixth grade teacher Heidi Murphy announced to Mott in welcoming him to speak. She explained they congregated in the interest of "finishing up the school (year) in a positive way, showing up and fighting for a safe school environment for staff and students, for the best outcome for everybody."

Mott introduced himself to the group before explaining their goals are aligned.

"I hear your concerns and I assure you that safety is a priority," he said. "A positive, productive working environment is important. Following protocols and procedures that are laid out by Board policy is important. Each of you are important, because we really are going to need you if we're going to transform the middle school into a high-performing school."

After he spoke, Mott convened his administrative team and building leadership to discuss the teachers' perspectives and needs within the building. They then spent the morning in the school observing classes and interactions within hallways and other spaces.

# Elementary performers combine for 'Moana Jr.'

There's plenty to like from this week's production of "Moana Jr.," Mia Muniz said.

There's the singing. The dancing. The unique ways in which three elementary school students will pull off playing one enormous crab or, in general, a story focused on a vast journey across the ocean. But the show's star said one thing will stand out from everything else:

"How we all work together," Muniz said Monday. After all, that's what makes the production unique.

When audiences attend "Moana Jr." at Krieger Elementary School tonight and Thursday evening, they'll see a cast and crew comprised of 63 fourth and fifth grade elementary students from across the district. It's the second time in three years a play will feature the combined talents of students from Clinton, Warring, Morse and Krieger.

"It's been fun," Muniz, a Clinton fifth grader who is playing Moana herself, said Monday before a dress rehearsal. "We get to all do it together."

The shows begin 6 p.m. both nights, with doors opening at 5:30 p.m. Krieger librarian Dorothy Luongo is directing the group, which includes 51 cast members and 12 on the crew. The school has been the district's theater hub of late, with five total productions in the last four years; four featured only Krieger students and one was the previous all-district performance, "Aladdin," in 2024. Still, roughly two-thirds of the students taking part in "Moana Jr." come from the three other schools. Luongo said there's been a mix of students who have experience on stage and who do not, noting there's been "a learning curve." Overall, though, the preparations have "been going really well," she said, noting many students live near each other geographically but haven't had the ability to work together. "There are times when it's so exciting. You can see the friendships forming," she said. "It's just totally beautiful; they get to know each other."

The production began with auditions in early February and rehearsals by the end of the month. Each day, a bus visited the other elementary schools to collect the students and deposit them at Krieger.



Three students combine to portray Tamatoa, a giant crab.



Clinton student Mia Muniz, as Moana, is surrounded by students dressed to act like the ocean.

## Moana Jr.

**What:** All-elementary district play

**Where:** Krieger Elementary, 265 Hooker Ave.

**When:** Tonight, May 21 and Thursday, May 22; doors open at 5:30 p.m. and shows begin promptly at 6 p.m.

**Cost:** Free

"Moana Jr.," an adaptation of the 2016 Disney animated movie "Moana," features several scenes in which there are many background actors playing the roles of villagers, ancestors and the water itself. Subsequently, there are plenty of opportunities for the cast of 51 to take part in the catchy dance numbers like "You're Welcome" and "Shiny." Luongo said the release of the movie's sequel last year, "Moana 2," was one reason for choosing the play, as she knew there would be added excitement. But also, "I really wanted to do something that appreciated a different culture that was a little more modern. The story is really accessible because a lot of the kids know it." Jasim Lewis, a fourth grade student from Warring, said learning his role was easy, as "my baby sister makes me watch the 'Moana' movies on repeat." He's playing





Maui, a demigod character voiced by Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson in the movies. The role appealed to him because "I get to be funny. I like to be funny a lot."

Meylin Reyes Martinez, a fifth grader from Krieger, is likewise participating in a play for the first time. "I made new friends," she said. "It's really fun to meet other people."

Reyes Martinez is playing an ancestor and is looking forward to opening night.

"I want them to like our dances, our singing," she said. "I want them to be like, 'Oh, wow, they're so good!'"

Muniz is looking forward to performing past the fifth grade, as annual productions at Poughkeepsie Middle School were revived this year with last week's performances of "High School Musical Jr." Lewis, true to his role as a demigod, hopes he can spark interest in the next class of Poughkeepsie actors coming up. "I just want people to have a good time and make them feel amazed," he said of the audience. "Maybe the kids they bring from younger grades, maybe they're going to be like, 'Oh, I want to do that.' When I can inspire somebody, it makes me feel awesome."

He might even say, "you're welcome."

## PMS Hip Hop show set for Thursday at Bardavon theater

On Thursday night, Poughkeepsie Middle School students will take the stage at the Bardavon 1869 Opera House to show off their musical, dance and poetic skills.

For two decades, students have performed in the school's Hip Hop Theater show, which culminates a powerful arts-based learning experience. Over the span of two weeks, expert instructors in the areas of art, music, dance and poetry visit with sixth grade students during English language arts classes for workshop sessions on various ways to express viewpoints and emotions through performance and art.

The program each year is one of the Bardavon's several in-school residencies and integral to its arts-in-education partnership with the district. The theme for this year's show is community and culture, and the unit allows instructors to incorporate multicultural and divergent points of view highlighting the diverse student population. "They really express themselves about what their perspective is on the community, and the power of their voice within the community," said sixth grade teacher Heidi Murphy.

Roughly 80 students will take part Thursday evening in the hour-long show, after rehearsing at the Market Street theater Wednesday and Thursday mornings. Students from the school's Life Skills class are scheduled to watch the rehearsal Thursday morning.

While the group dance portions are choreographed, students also have portions in which they can incorporate their own individual moves, allowing for their own creativity to shine, and poetry or spoken word segments in which the students read their own work. A handful of students unable to perform received special training in, and will perform Thursday, DJing skills.

"I like that I get to dance and add viral trends to it," said Sincere Thomas, noting he's learned "To try new things and participate, because you never know what you'll like."

In addition to performing, the students also get to experience how a show is put together behind the scenes, adding a measure of career exposure. "They get to see behind-the-scenes production job opportunities; lighting production, backstage production and future opportunities," Murphy said.

Kiayana Bartley said she liked to have the opportunity to dance, sing and write poetry.

"I like to dance. I'm kind of nervous" she said of Thursday, "but I'm excited to show people what I've been learning."



### Hip Hop Theater

**What:** Poughkeepsie Middle School hip hop and poetry

**Where:** Bardavon 1869 Opera House, 35 Market St.

**When:** Thursday, May 22, 7 p.m.

**Cost:** Free; suggested donation \$6