

SUPERINTENDENT'S BRIEF

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

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Arts education continues to grow

As part of the district's vision for Arts Education (see [Superintendent Brief No. 71 Vol. 3](#)), the district is making significant progress in expanding arts education programming for all pre-K-12 students through district-wide investments and engaging the arts community to support this important work.

In collaboration with the New York State Education Department, [Stringendo](#), [The Art Effect](#), Dutchess Community College, the [Bardavon](#), [The Public Arts Commission](#) and members of the arts community, Poughkeepsie City School District students have greater opportunity and access to arts programming in and out of the school district.

"What's most exciting about this movement is that our students are able to explore their interests and develop positive youth development competencies through the use of motor, social, creative and decision-making skills with the assistance of talented PCSD teachers and equally talented and committed community partners. What I appreciate most is the student agency these opportunities are providing our youth," shared Dr. Eric Jay Rosser, superintendent of schools. Enjoy this special edition of the Superintendent's Brief, which highlights some of the most recent arts performances of Poughkeepsie City School District students.

Also, this evening members of the [Poughkeepsie Board of Artistic Youth](#) will be presenting research and recommendations on how to increase student participation in out-of-school programming to the Board of Education. The presentation is available on the [school district's YouTube channel](#).



Above: Poughkeepsie High School students look at art on display at the school's Arts & Music Festival May 30. **Below:** Jazmine Berra poses with a Certificate of Art Excellence in front of a drawing she made of sneakers.



Shows put student talents on display

Jazmine Berra looked up at her sketch hanging in Poughkeepsie High School's lobby and thought back to what went into its creation.

The pencil drawing of three sneakers was one of the first pieces she worked on in the fall, but it's still one of her favorites. She recalled being encouraged to "play around with values" of light and dark.

"Everyone put their shoe in and we took pictures," the sophomore said of creating the model for the drawing. Heather Duncan-Carter, art department chair for the district "gave us a lot of creative freedom. It was nice."

All these months later, Berra's work was on display for the community to see, along with a year's worth of work from other artists in the school at the Poughkeepsie High School Art & Music Festival. It was just one of a long list of year-end events aimed at showcasing the work of each student studying the fine arts.

In addition to physical arts showcases at each school level, there have also been a series of musical performances and the annual [Poughkeepsie's Got Talent show at the high school](#). Some events have been especially unique. At Morse Elementary, the students assembled a glow-in-the-dark "rain forest," featuring neon art displayed behind the curtain of the school stage.

This Friday, the Poughkeepsie High School Drama Club and Poughkeepsie Youth Theater will bring the season to a crescendo with the first of two performances of "Annie Up."

The series of exhibitions punctuated the Poughkeepsie City School District's focus on fine arts education, which includes the creation of the [Smart Scholars](#)

[Early College High School Performing Arts Academy](#) this fall. The program – the first of its kind in the state – will allow incoming freshmen to earn college credits and experience in all aspects of the performing arts.

Many of the year-end events combined multiple schools or multiple genres into one event, bolstering the audience and heightening the experience for participants. The Elementary All-District Concert Tuesday evening at Poughkeepsie High School featured the band, chorus and strings ensembles from Clinton, Krieger, Morse and Warring elementary schools. For the strings students, it was a second experience playing together as one unit, following [a combined practice session and concert at the Family Partnership Center last month](#).

Stacy Kalbfus, one of two elementary orchestra teachers in the district, said elementary music education brings "a sense of belonging" to a student. "It's a place to grow their friendships with each other, and build their own personal confidence in working toward a goal and achieving it."

The Art & Music Festivals – one held at each the middle and high schools – combined the two sides of the school district's fine arts into one event, giving the community and school members the chance to take in

both genres at the same time. The art exhibitions in the lobby of each school were opened before evening musical performances in the auditoriums began.

More than simply a show, though, the festivals were treated as an extended celebration for the students. "We come together and put on a show for the kids," Duncan-Carter said. "They love to see each other's work. They're very inspired by it, it helps them decide what to take next year. And they just have a good time."

Most genres of artwork – ceramics and sculpture, drawing and painting, stained glass, jewelry making and



Above: Morse students created a glowing rain forest art display. Right: The high school Art & Music Festival included outdoor tie dyeing and free hot dogs. Below: Ceramic cakes and clocks were among the works on display at the high school.



others – were on display at the high school's lobby. Students with creative arts businesses also set up tables to show off their products.

Bradley Sweda was representing his two-year-old clothing and fashion line, Mutual Emotions. "It's a small brand but I have high hopes," he said. "I see the future ahead of me."

Sweda said his background "wasn't the most artistic, in the sense that it may not look the best," he said, "but I've always had a creative touch." The senior credited the school's art teachers like Duncan-Carter for helping him evolve his skills.

Outside in the school's courtyard there were free hot dogs on the grill and a tent where students could tie dye souvenir Art & Music Festival shirts. Even staff members took their turn creating a garment.

"The kids do it on their own," Duncan-Carter said. "The students run the booths, the students do the grilling. "I've never seen kids more proud than when they're showing off their work or seeing a friend's work," she said. "It makes them want to do better."

Berra called the event one of her favorite of the year, and something she looks forward to.

"Tie dying, eating, just talking to my friends, being able to walk around doing different activities, seeing stands where people sell their own things they made," she said, "it's pretty neat."

And the Drama Club's performance is still to come. "Annie Up," a reimagining of "Annie" "with a hip hop embrace," will debut at the high school auditorium Friday at 1:15 p.m. An encore performance is scheduled for 6 p.m. June 12 at the Family Partnership Center.



Hip Hop Theater put on its year-end show May 23 at the Bardavon.

Hip Hop Theater finishes year with big performance

Since 2006, the Hip Hop Theater, one of Bardavon's in-school residencies, has been integral to its arts-in-education partnership with the Poughkeepsie City School District. Each year, the Hip Hop Theater offers an immersive arts-based learning experience that complements and enriches the education programming Poughkeepsie Middle School students

receive. This year, Poughkeepsie Middle School teachers Selina Barrington, Ashely Bass, Devon Esposito, Catherine Natonio and Heidi Murphy's sixth-grade students wowed the audience of parents, students and community members as they recited poetry, beatboxed, danced, djayed and rapped in a culminating performance to this year's Hip Hop Theater.

"Being a tremendous fan of the early formation of hip hop culture, it was nostalgic to see how the resident teaching artist engaged our students in exploring their voice through the creative expressions of poetry, rap, beatboxing and dancing. It reminded me of my middle school years when my friends and I were consumed with the then-budding cultural phenomena," shared Dr. Eric Jay Rosser, superintendent of schools.

According to the Bardavon's website, the program helps students gain knowledge in poetry, art, music and dance "through multicultural, multi-faceted workshops" and "drawing on their own creative abilities.

"They connect with the rhythms of their bodies and explore the art of the written and spoken word. They share feelings and emotions with their peers and neighbors. They discover the satisfaction that striving for a shared goal can offer – and they realize they have a voice. Reaching these kids and strengthening their voices through the arts are at the heart of our programs," the website reads.

The Bardavon YouTube page features a great [overview video of the Hip Hop Theater](#).