

SUPERINTENDENT'S BRIEF

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

ISSUE NO. 85 | June 26, 2024

VOLUME 5



Celebrating students moving up



Top left: Kindergarten students stand on risers for their moving up ceremony; Bottom left: Rhianna Bramwell receives her certificate at Clinton Elementary's fifth-grade moving up ceremony; Right: Asalyah Lander shakes hands with Poughkeepsie Middle School Interim Principal Robert Parkes during the school's eighth-grade moving up ceremony.

These past five years as superintendent of the Poughkeepsie City School District have been a heartfelt honor and blessing to witness the growth and success of so many children. From our youngest learners to our most senior learners, moving up ceremonies and this evening's high school graduation serve as pivotal moments in our children's lives marking the successful completion of an educational milestone as they journey as lifelong learners.

An abundance of thanks goes to every parent and caregiver for supporting the success of their child; all of the educators for providing high-quality educational experiences to all of the children; community-based organizations who supported the positive youth development of district students; and the Board of Education for its steadfast commitment to increasing the opportunities for all students to maximize their potential. Enjoy this special brief that covers the moving up ceremonies and be sure to read Friday's brief that will highlight tonight's Poughkeepsie High School graduation ceremony.

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

~ Dr. Eric Jay Rosser, superintendent



Pre-K students perform songs during a ceremony at the Early Learning Center.

Class of 2037 takes first steps



Songs performed by the Pre-K students at their moving up ceremony included the alphabet in both English and Spanish.

Having met the standards of their curriculum and stood in front of family and friends, the students proudly walked off stage to begin the next chapter.

"I present to you the Poughkeepsie High School graduating class," Principal Nadine Elting-Dargan announced, "of 2037."

College may still be a few years off for the 71 young learners who completed pre-kindergarten with a moving up ceremony at the Early Learning Center on Friday. Still,

parents and teachers agree on the importance of celebrating each step along the way while keeping the end goal in sight – even for students whose ages can be counted on one hand.

"This is their first introduction to education," Elting-Dargan said. "If I never hear about college, if I never hear about graduating high school, then that's not a vision for me."

The class moving up to kindergarten performed a slew of children's songs on Friday, including "The Alphabet Song," "Open Shut Them," "Down by the Bay" and others.

Chynna Green said her daughter, Chyne' Brown, had been practicing the performances.

"She comes in and sings the songs. Even in the tub she sings. She likes to record herself singing," Green said.

"It's pretty exciting. I'm happy for her."

In greeting the families, Elting-Dargan emphasized the progress teachers have seen since the fall.

"We have watched them grow, come in the doors very, very shy, afraid to speak. And now, they are able to walk through the halls, they are able to deliver messages, some of them are reading. They know their letters, they know their numbers," she said.

Robin Kravitz, whose daughter Rylie Kravitz is moving up to kindergarten, called the ceremony "wonderful," saying "they have great teachers" at the Early Learning Center.

"Rylie has grown since the beginning of the school year," she said. "She counts. She knows her ABCs. She's been writing her name. And she uses words I've never known her to use before."

The teachers spoke to the audience in both Spanish and English, talking about not only the skills students learned but also becoming more comfortable socially and emotionally. The students also recited their ABCs in both languages.

As summer arrives and the students will be out of school for more than two months, Elting-Dargan reminded parents to follow their own set of ABCs: "For us, the 'A' stands for attitude. 'B' stands for behavior. And 'C' stands for character," she explained. "If your attitude is correct, then your behavior will follow. If your behavior follows that positive attitude, then your character will speak for itself. I encourage you as parents to be a role model. You are your child's first teacher. So, continue to be that role model for them."



Kindergarteners' growth, language skills on display

Yariela Pimentel Lodge celebrated completing kindergarten June 17.

Three days later, she was in Costa Rica, putting what she learned to the test.

Yariela is a member of the Poughkeepsie City School District's dual language program. As kindergarteners throughout the Early Learning Center celebrated advancing to the first grade in ceremonies held last week, the program's progress was among the accomplishments highlighted.

"She loves being immersed in the language," Yariela's mother, Victoria Lodge, said, noting she has family in Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic and Panama.

"It's great that she's able to have that during and through the school year, as well as at home."

At the three moving up ceremonies held at Poughkeepsie Middle School, Early Learning Center Principal Nadine Elting-Dargan spoke not only of a future in which Poughkeepsie graduates a bilingual class, but also future educational milestones for each young scholar.

"I want to remind you that this is the first" graduation ceremony for the students. "I encourage you to continually talk to them about the last," she said. "As parents, it is our responsibility to ensure our children are prepared for the future. Their future is just beginning. Right now, what we do today, determines what happens in the future."



Above: Kindergarten students sang pop songs with special school-themed lyrics at their moving up ceremonies; Below: Yariela Pimentel Lodge poses for photos with her family.



Jenniesha White agreed it's an important lesson for her daughter, Elea'leigh White, and her classmates to remember. They were announced at the end of the ceremony as Poughkeepsie High School's Class of 2036. "As they get older they have to push forward to graduate," she said, "and I feel like they all can do it." After entering the auditorium as "Pomp and Circumstance" played, the students took to the stage and sang three pop songs in which the words were changed to match their accomplishment. Then, each student's name was called and they took turns standing and waving to their family and friends. Afterward, the students were invited to pose for photos in yellow caps and gowns provided by the ELC's PTA and the Community Schools Department.

Taina Mercado said it was "really emotional" watching her daughter, Ava Rayford, on stage.

"She's my youngest," Mercado said. "Just seeing her graduate and going to first grade – it's exciting seeing them grow."

Elting-Dargan emphasized their growth in addressing parents, encouraging them to exercise their child's abilities and knowledge during the long summer months.

"Don't doubt what they can do. Let them show you what they can do," she said. "Many of our children are reading. Opening a book and reading. Have them practice their name, practice writing numbers to 100. The more you do with them over the summer the more they'll be prepared for first grade."

The dual language learners were each being sent home with a book in English and Spanish to practice each day.



Students took turns standing on the risers and waving when their name was called.

“Encourage them to speak Spanish to you. You speak Spanish to them. Anyone you know who can speak Spanish to them or English on the other side, make sure you practice with them,” Elting-Dargan said. “By the sixth grade, the goal for the Poughkeepsie City School District is that we can graduate a class of bilingual students.”

For Yariela – who said she liked reading best in kindergarten and planned “to party” after her ceremony – that Spanish language practice before she arrives at Krieger Elementary in the fall will come with family and friends in Costa Rica.

“When she goes there she gets to go to school there, and she loves that,” her mother said. “I’m super excited about what the future holds for her.”

‘Resilient’ fifth graders reach middle school

The students who were in the first grade when the world changed are on their way to middle school.

Four moving up ceremonies held by the Poughkeepsie City School District’s elementary schools in the past week marked the end to a challenging primary learning experience.

“This is a special one,” Dr. David Scott, principal at Clinton Elementary, said of their ceremony. “We have been through some ups and downs together.”

The fifth-grade class he was addressing had only been in the school for six months when classrooms were closed in March 2020 amid the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Their first full year of traditional learning did not come until the third grade.

“This would be a cohort of students who experienced an unprecedented interruption in their critical primary years of education,” said Gregory Mott, assistant superintendent for elementary education. “They did endure traumatic experiences of COVID. Grief, loss,

trauma, interruption of their academics by not being able to have face-to-face instruction, not being able to have student interaction, not being able to see – what we take for granted – how a teacher pronounces words, letters, sounds, the critical piece of modeling instruction to them at the most critical age at the primary level.



Above: Clinton Elementary fifth graders perform “Lift Every Voice and Sing;” Below: Students cheer and laugh while watching a retrospective video during the Clinton moving up ceremony at Poughkeepsie Middle School; Bottom left: Clinton Principal Dr. David Scott looks on as Janelle Ryland delivers the Class of 2024 Speech.



“This group should be celebrated for their endurance, their perseverance and we hope that they’re leaving fifth grade with the tools they would need to be able to go into a sixth-grade classroom.”

Each of the moving up ceremonies struck a celebratory tone, as students not only received certificates but also performed. At the Clinton ceremony, held Monday at Poughkeepsie Middle School, the class of 44 students sang “America the Beautiful,” “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” and “I Believe.” Sophia McKoy recited a poem, “Hey Black Child,” by Countee Cullen.



McKoy beamed from ear-to-ear as she left the auditorium and said she enjoyed reading the poem for the room. However, "I was very nervous. On the stage, my hand was shaking," she said. "I felt relieved I was done with it." Janelle Ryland provided the Class of 2024 speech, in which she recalled being "challenged to dream big. "Thank you, moms. Thank you, dads," she said. "Thank you Clinton staff. We'll dream big and believe in ourselves." Mott likewise said the list of people who had a hand in the fifth grade students reaching this point is broad. "You have to recognize parents, you have to recognize guardians and caretakers, because many of them should be celebrated for the kids being able to walk across the stage today," he said.



Moving up ceremonies were held by Warring (above), Morse (below left) and Krieger elementary schools last week.

There's also the teachers and faculty, of course. Mott noted in addition to learning how to navigate the difficulties of the pandemic and remote learning, the elementary staff over the last three years has implemented a vertically aligned curriculum and a new foundation that teaches the five pillars of reading, which has revolutionized the district's primary learning experience.



And now, those students will start a new chapter. McKoy said she's eager to learn what it's like to navigate a middle-school schedule.

"I'm looking forward to walking around the school, switching classes, I think it will be really fun," she said. Domani Williams agreed switching classrooms will be a highlight. "Plus, we'll have our own lockers," he said. "I always wanted a locker."

Students eye success in high school, college

Zhariah Atkinson is looking forward to taking part in extracurricular programs and joining sports teams.

Nathaniel Franco is eager for new experiences and to stay focused through the next four years.

Heavenly Priester is aiming for scholarship offers from multiple colleges, to pursue nursing or veterinary medicine.

For 157 Poughkeepsie students, middle school is over. And while Tuesday's moving up ceremony was a time for laughter, celebration and looking back on classroom fun, many high school-bound Pioneers said they know the hard work of graduating high school is just beginning.

"I'm just feeling like I've got to stay prepared and do what I got to do to make it far," Josiah James said in-between posing for photos with friends outside the middle school. "I need to stay in school, behave myself and focus."

Interim Principal Robert Parkes focused on preparing for the future in addressing Poughkeepsie High School's Class of 2028 early in the ceremony.

"After today, you're going to be ninth graders," he said. "No one says 'I regret getting so many A's and B's in high school.' People do say 'I regret getting so many D's and F's in high school,' right? So, my piece of advice is, as ninth graders, there's no second chance. As 10th graders, there's no second chance.



Nasim Moore receives a hug from Poughkeepsie Middle School Assistant Principal Danielle Green after he received his certificate.



"You're competing with scholars that are all over the world. I don't know about you, but I don't have \$300,000 in my pocket to pay for college," he said. "I want you to have choices. If you get A's... you're going to have choices. I want you to be able to have six, seven, eight scholarships lined up and ready to go."

After students entered the auditorium to the tune of "Pomp and Circumstance," Nalani Dawes recited the Pledge of Allegiance while Yareli Juarez translated in sign language. Later, two high school seniors served as the keynote speakers, Kate Lopez Santiago – who delivered her speech in English and in Spanish – and Peter Sealy Jr.

"Don't be afraid to show your intelligence," Sealy said. "Strive to make your voice heard. It's very important. Adults want to hear from you. People want to hear from you. The world is waiting to hear your voice. Gain the intelligence, gain the courage throughout high school so that as young adults you can be champions for yourself and champions for others."

Above: Christian Martinez Sanchez is congratulated by Poughkeepsie Middle School Interim Principal Robert Parkes; Left: Nalani Dawes recites the Pledge of Allegiance while Yareli Juarez translates in sign language.



Sealy, the student liaison to the Board of Education, also encouraged parents in the audience to "be the rock for your child to lean on."

In addition to certificates of middle school completion, school leaders

handed out awards to students for the top achievers and most improved in the areas of ELA, math, social studies, science and language, as well as annual awards for citizenship, leadership and other areas of excellence. Ryeli Alfaro had the highest average overall and earned honors in ELA and math.

"I would say it was a great ceremony," said Atkinson, who was named a Fred Hanlon Leadership Award winner along with Asaliyah Lander. "I'm glad that everyone who deserved it got recognized and all the parents got to see their child."



Left: Alexis-Rihanna Bali-Spence gives a high-five after receiving her certificate; Right: A group of Poughkeepsie Middle School students pose for photos outside the school after the moving up ceremony.