The Saturday Morning Lights enrichment program resumes in-person this week at Poughkeepsie Middle School. A phased-in approach is being used to ensure the program can meet participants’ needs and adhere to all COVID-19 safety precautions, Interim Executive Director of Community Schools Natasha Cherry said. The first group will be about 30 students in grades K-6. Parents interested in having their children participate in future sessions should email Ms. Cherry at ncherry@poughkeepsieschools.org. Several new community based organizations have joined the effort and new programs are being offered during this first session. SML is offered every Saturday except for some holiday weekends, from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Among the new partners/offerings are Community Matters Two’s drone program, the Culinary Institute of America’s cooking/food program and the Poughkeepsie Public Library’s book club. PCSD staff are offering some new programming as well. Restorative practices will help children develop empathy and learn to help others - a program that builds on content offered during Summer Lights, literacy and MyON aims to improve reading skills and athletics will get children moving. Many previous offerings, including chess, acting and STEMZ, which reinforces STEAM education are returning as well.

College and career exploration
A new program for students in grades 7-12 is launching Feb. 27 live at Poughkeepsie High School. “This program will help students identify areas of interest they’d like to pursue and give them a chance for exposure,” Cherry said. The program will outline major career clusters, help students determine interests and aptitudes, walk them through creating a resume, workplace skills, lead students through an action project and pair them with mentors in fields of interest. The program has partnered with seven colleges and 16 employment partners to bring real-world experience to our students. “The Community Schools department is ecstatic at the opportunity to offer Saturday Morning Lights to students of all ages this year. We are grateful to all the parents, community partners, teachers and contributors who help make the program a success,” Cherry said.

Safety
To ensure everyone’s safety, all programs will observe CDC guidelines. Students’ movement throughout the building will be limited and participants will be required to fill out a COVID-19 questionnaire. Temperature checks will be done before admitting anyone to the schools. Parents will be notified by robocall if a session must be canceled.

Focus groups set stage for future PMS, PHS programs
Last week, a series of focus groups met to discuss what career pathways should be represented in Poughkeepsie City School District schools. The Poughkeepsie Middle School and Poughkeepsie High School Transformation Focus Groups held their first meetings Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday this week. There were groups for students, parents and staff from each school. A group for community members and businesses is scheduled for 6 p.m. today. If you are interested in attending, please fill out this PMS, PHS Transformation Focus Group form.
“It is important to ensure that we choose focuses that are viable careers in the area, ones that are up and coming and that excite students and get them more involved,” Director of Special Projects Kristina Giangreco said. To start the conversations, each group was asked a series of questions. For parents, staff and community it centered around the type of skills they felt students needed to achieve lifelong success. Students were asked about their career aspirations and what classes they’d like offered at their respective schools.

“A lot of what we heard from students is that they wanted more guidance on basic life skills such as how to develop a budget and pay taxes,” Giangreco said. They also wanted classes that would “challenge them and allow them to experience new things.”

Poughkeepsie Middle School teachers indicated that they’d like to be able to provide more electives developed with student input. As for career paths, students identified many, including politics/activism, sciences, arts, music, human rights attorney, psychologist. “Regardless of the profession, their purpose was to give back, it was more than just about making money,” Giangreco said. Parents said they wanted to make sure that their children could meet the requirements for entry into the local colleges. They were comfortable and open to having students remain in the area after graduating, provided career options were available here.

Parents unable to make the meetings, can fill out these online forms to provide information:

- PMS Parent Focus Group Feedback form
- PHS Parent Focus Group Feedback form

All the responses are going to be put combined into larger categories for consideration, Giangreco said.

Parent Empowerment Center opens Monday

Parents will soon have a place where they can get help supporting their child’s education, seek help with getting a job, have access to technology and more. The district’s Parent Empowerment Center at Poughkeepsie Middle School will have a soft grand opening on Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Jan. 18, 2021. “A lot of our offerings will start virtually, but parents will be able to come in to the PEC by appointment to meet with our family advocates, schedule computer time or use our parent resource library,” Interim Executive Director of Community Schools Natasha Cherry said.

Nearly all the classes and activities will be free. They all fit into one of five focus areas of the center:

- Academics
- Social emotional learning
- Parent leadership and advocacy
- Professional growth and development
- Family bonding

Cherry and Community Schools Administrator Mario Johnson are in the process of putting together a catalog of offerings that include high school equivalency/GED classes, pre-employment training for women, parenting classes, early child literacy help, immigration/citizenship help, help with domestic violence/family law issues, eviction prevention, help for people who have a loved one that may be using drugs or alcohol, the OSHA courses for construction and general industry, healthy food/meal preparation tips and more.

“Our goal is to have the Parent Empowerment Center be a place where parents can grow themselves, grow their children and grow each other by using our resources and participating in our programs,” Cherry said.

The center is authorized for four full-time staff members plus Cherry and Johnson. Upon opening, all but one position will be filled. Joining the team are Teacher Assistant Julie Maserjian and Family Advocates Shiann Mayorga Cash and Christina Peterson. The district is still interviewing for the third advocate. Cherry said she hopes that parents will volunteer to work at the center and asked anyone interested to email her at n.cherry@poughkeepsieschools.org.