District opens Parent Empowerment Center

Sen. Sue Serino, Assemblyman Jonathan Jacobson and City of Poughkeepsie Mayor Rob Rolison joined Interim Executive Director of Community Schools Natasha Cherry and Superintendent Dr. Eric Jay Rosser to open the Parent Empowerment Center (PEC) Monday. Since it was a soft opening due to COVID-19 restrictions, only a few additional guests attended, including Board of Education President Felicia Watson, Vice President Debra Long, Community Schools Administrator Mario Johnson, parents and parent engagement staff. The PEC is a one-stop shop for parents. It seeks to provide assistance and support, strengthen the parent and school relationship, and provide opportunities for parents to expand their own personal aspirations. The Center will offer a variety of programs, including parent empowerment workshops, English as a second language classes, voter registration help, job readiness assistance and more - look for a complete catalog coming in February. See PEC Page 2

Virtual college fair debuts on website

Poughkeepsie High School students can explore more than 150 different colleges virtually, thanks to an effort to increase student opportunity and access as outlined in the District Annual Goals. Growing out of the weekly virtual tours arranged and presented by counselors Kelly Jackson-Semexant and Takiyah Ingram, a new Virtual College Fair page on the website has been created. The page combines the weekly tours the counselors were offering, along with other schools, Director of Special Projects Kristina Giangreco said. “One of our district goals was to increase the number of colleges represented in our fair to 150, but because of COVID, colleges aren’t coming out,” she said. “Kelly and I started talking and thought about creating a virtual college fair.” Now, students can go online any time they want and explore community colleges, CUNY schools, private colleges and universities, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, technical and trade programs, and colleges from around the nation. Each listing has a link to the college’s main webpage, admissions page, an email to the admissions department and a video about the school - either recorded from the virtual tour done for PHS students or from videos culled from the school’s YouTube channel. “Hopefully this takes down some of the barriers to students looking at schools as some of the links were not easily found,” Giangreco said. So far, 164 colleges are represented and the list will grow, she said. Once COVID is over, the page will still be a resource for students to use, she said. To access the virtual college fair visit the webpage at bit.ly/pcsdvirtualcollegefair.
There is also a preK-12 academic resources library, computers with internet access and job readiness help.

Jacobson spoke briefly at the event and shared this comment on his Facebook page:

“One of the highlights of this year’s Martin Luther King, Jr. weekend was attending the ribbon-cutting for the Poughkeepsie City School District’s Parent Empowerment Center. Parental involvement is one of the most important factors - if not the most important factor - in determining a student’s future success.”

Cherry said the opening of the center is just the first phase of community schools and the district’s parent engagement plan. “It creates a permanent space for parents.”

The workshops being offered will include parents’ choice topics as identified by surveys they submit at the center. It will also be driven by data based on which resources are being used by parents.

“We want to make sure that we are always meeting the needs of our parents.” Cherry said.

The first virtual workshop, “Immigration Law,” will be held next week, put on by Legal Services of the Hudson Valley. For the time being, all workshops will be virtual to meet safety requirements forced by the pandemic.

When schools open for hybrid instruction in February, parents will be able to make appointments to utilize the Parent Empowerment Center’s resources.

“This opens more doors for parents. It makes you feel more comfortable reaching out,” Stephanie Believe, who has three children in the school district, said during an interview. “I would love to bring more parents in and get them more involved in their children’s education.”

Believe, who was asked to speak at the grand opening as well, moved to the City of Poughkeepsie about 10 years ago. She shared that the center helps parents which in turn helps their children.

“It gives them the tools to make it happen.”

Even though it just opened, the center is already attracting attention in the community and beyond.

Cherry was interviewed today by someone from the New York State Education Department for an article in a February newsletter.

“They want to showcase the PEC, they said the work we are doing to engage our parents is phenomenal.”

And, community based organizations have been calling wanting to partner with the center.

Tonight’s board meeting agenda includes a public hearing on the district-wide safety plan and presentations on the district’s new virtual college tour, Children’s Cabinet, Office of Exceptionalities and a financial update.

In addition, board members are expected to consider awarding a contract for architect and engineering services related to the capital improvement project approved by voters.

One of the highlights to tonight’s workshop meeting will be a presentation on the Poughkeepsie Children’s Cabinet.

Launched approximately a year ago, the Cabinet has made significant progress in impacting the outcomes of children prenatal to college and career in the City of Poughkeepsie. To learn more about the Children’s Cabinet click on the following links:

Poughkeepsie Children’s Cabinet website
2020 Year in Review

To view the agenda and presentations for tonight’s meeting click the following link: BoardDocs page.