District seeks growth in parent engagement

Encuesta de PCSD para padres de la comunidad

One goal of the Community Schools initiative is to have “active and engaged parents,” according to Interim Executive Director of Community Schools Natasha Cherry.

One element of the plan is gaining an understanding of our parents and what their needs are, Cherry said. The district is asking parents, through a Community Schools Parent Engagement Survey, to help the district identify ways it can promote more parent involvement in school buildings.

The survey asks parents what their needs are, how the district can meet those needs, ways they are involved, how PCSD can help them get more involved and what weekend parent engagement opportunities they would take advantage of.

Cherry is following the Joyce Epstein framework for engagement. Epstein is a nationally recognized leader in school partnerships and is director of the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships and Professor of Education in the Johns Hopkins University School of Education.

“We want a collaboration with the parents and the community,” Cherry said, adding that the survey is just one element. “We’re developing parent volunteer forms and forming a district-wide parent organization that will help inform district decisions.” The goal is to work in partnership with our parents to improve outcomes for students. “Parents who are involved in their child’s education have a child who is more likely to have higher grades, better attendance and better behavior,” Cherry said. Take the English survey here.

myON helps with literacy push

One of Poughkeepsie City School District’s major focus areas under the district’s reform efforts is early literacy.

The Renaissance myON digital library is a new supplemental tool introduced this year that school staff are using to support preK-2 students gain the skills they need to make the jump into third grade, Assistant Superintendent of Elementary Education Gregory Mott said.

Given PCSD’s remote delivery of instruction, myON extends student learning beyond the school environment. The supplemental educational resource provides opportunity for all students, preK-12, to access thousands of books, Mott said. “It puts a digital library at their fingertips and helps them develop a rich vocabulary and knowledge of the world around them.”

The district is in the process of developing workshops to share with parents how their children can access this resource outside of the school environment. Be it supports provided in school or opportunities to access reading materials outside of school, the goal is to help students successfully transition to independent readers, said Mott. Research conducted on the myON Reader program indicates using it is associated with higher levels of annual growth in reading ability.
Barnes & Noble hosts ELC fundraiser

If books, calendars, music, movies, journals or magazines are on holiday gift lists, supporters of the Poughkeepsie City School District can obtain them at Barnes & Noble Poughkeepsie and help complete the Early Learning Center library project. Shopping Barnes & Noble Poughkeepsie in person Dec. 12 or online Dec. 12-17 will support this project.

Over the summer, the library received a new paint job and furniture thanks to donations from the community. Additionally, under the Community School Initiative every school has been allocated funding to support a full-time librarian. All of the efforts are helping move the space toward the district’s goal of expanding and strengthening PCSD’s library services to students and the development of literacy skills.

“When this first began, we thought we’d create a really welcoming, warm space for children. ... A place where they could just take a book, curl up on a comfortable chair and develop a love of reading.” Principal Colleen Hardiman said. “We still need books, so that is definitely something money will go toward.” Comelia Harris, president of the ELC PTA which, together with other champions of PCSD children, has spearheaded the effort to rebuild the library, and indicated that the project is nearing completion.

“We’ve raised close to $20,000 for the library and we’ve come a long way,” Harris said. The money includes a $3,000 grant from Stewart’s/Dake Family and from a fund set up at the Community Foundations of the Hudson Valley. Nearly $5,000 in furniture was also purchased to meet the needs of the district’s youngest learners.

“We have a plethora of genres, both fiction and nonfiction for children to choose from,” Hardiman said. Plus, the children learn library skills while there which will hopefully increase their use of the public library. The library isn’t just for children. It is a resource for teachers to draw from, using books from there to help teach themes in the classroom, she said.

Farm coming to Pershing Avenue

Residents on Poughkeepsie’s north side may soon be able to grow their own fruits and vegetables on a nearby piece of land. The Pershing Avenue Neighborhood Farm, under construction adjacent to Pershing Avenue Park will have 14 garden beds available for members of the community. The other half of the project is an urban farm, whose bounty will be given to Dutchess Outreach to help feed families throughout the region, River City Program Director for Scenic Hudson Zorida Lopez-Diago, said.

The farm is the product of a partnership between RPA/New City Parks, Scenic Hudson, the City of Poughkeepsie, LCS Landscapes and Nubian Directions II, Inc.

“We recognized that there were about 3,500 families within a five minute walk of Pershing Park and the garden and that childhood obesity and food insecurity are some of the issues many families face,” Lopez-Diago said. “The goal of the farm is for the community to have access.”

Community members interested in a bed, should email Lopez-Diago at zlopezdiago@scenichudson.org as slots are already being requested. Garden beds aren’t limited to individuals. Families, local churches and organizations can apply for one, she said, adding, “No experience is necessary.”

In addition to the land, educational programs will be offered, “to ensure that whomever has a plot feels equipped and ready.” And, there will be other programs as well, geared for the general public.

“We definitely think of the community garden and urban farm as a catalyst not only for neighborhood improvement but for the community at large.”

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

www.poughkeepsieschools.org