ReStore partners with PHS class for art lesson

Art offers many opportunities for students to display their talents and maximize their potential. PHS art teacher Debbie Lashlee took advantage of an offer from the Poughkeepsie Habitat for Humanity’s ReStore location to do just that.

Her advanced art and craft students learned about upcycling, recycling and refurbishing in class and were given a project to do: Upcycle (repurpose with a higher value), recycle (convert waste into something useful) or refurbish (clean up and renew) something for yourself or as a gift for someone else.

To support Ms. Lashlee’s lesson, ReStore provided each student with a $25 gift card to ReStore to use at their store. Since ReStore opened, more than 800 tons of items have been saved from landfills, according to a Habitat for Humanity of Dutchess County fact sheet.

On Monday, seven PHS students went to ReStore to use their gift cards and participate in two mini-workshops. PHS junior Phoenix Winthrow, purchased a desk and chair with her gift card. “I’m going to repaint them to fit the theme of my room,” she said after Monday’s workshops. “This is something I actually need and I couldn’t find something in my budget.”

Kyazia West, a senior, said she has Sweet 16 photos she’d like to frame, so she was scouting out different frames. “I’m looking for something I could do a collage in,” she said.

Tytiana Britt and Deanna Powers were focused on the variety of lamps available, saying that while they are basic, they offer a variety of options from doing something with the lampshade, the base or both. Tytiana liked, “the idea of taking something someone else sees as old and having less value and then turning it into something better.”

Deanna said she liked that the assignment was open-ended. “You could choose whatever you wanted and change it into something you would like.” “We have creative liberties,” Tytiana interjected.

That’s exactly what Margaret Ianelli, an upcycle volunteer, stressed to students in her workshop. Ianelli picks items from the floor, which ReStore donates to her, upcycles them and then donates them back for ReStore to sell.

She talked to students about how old shutters can be made into bulletin boards, how to apply different paint treatments, how they can take one item, add something else and make it totally different.

“The best part is, it is entirely your imagination,” Ianelli said.

Marist College student Hayden Abrahams was there to share how he took his artistic talents and put them to use post high school, by performing as well as tips for college.

For the project, students must show before, intermediate and final photos and submit a plan for what they want to do along with a list of supplies they’ll need, the steps they’ll take and what the expected outcome is. “It’s nice to see them so enthusiastic about doing it. I’m glad I can be a part of that,” Lashlee said.

Thank you Ms. Lashlee and ReStore for helping our students realize their potential and creativity.
Addressing absences

Poughkeepsie City School District is implementing several strategies to reduce student absences and thereby improve academic performance. Interim Executive Director of Community Engagement Felicia Schinella outlined a plan to develop a comprehensive Attendance Improvement three-year plan in a presentation to the board Wednesday night. Academic year ‘18-’19 data reveals that district elementary students have a 34 percent chronic absence rate and secondary students a 41 percent rate. Risk factors associated with high rates of chronic absence are substance abuse, violence, criminal behavior, teen pregnancy, being unable to find work and mental health issues, which the plan seeks to preemptively address, she said.

Five priority actions will be incorporated in the plan to help combat absenteeism:

1. Enhancing district-wide attendance improvement and prevention supports
2. Supporting increased capacity for schools to meet the needs of students and parents
3. Engaging and educating parents and students to realize their full potential to succeed in school and beyond
4. Enhancing schools’ capacity to support attendance improvements and dropout prevention
5. Engaging the community

Schinella is currently completing New York State Community Schools Technical Assistance Centers Chronic Absence training and will in turn-key train others in the near future. Focus groups are being formed to identify challenges and the resources to address them.

A task force formed in August has been making home visits regularly to homes. “We’ve touched every student’s home of anybody who didn’t have a Chromebook, wasn’t able to log on or had any barriers or any concerns with virtual learning,” she said. School principals provide weekly updates to the task force on absences so new/follow-up visits can be made.

And, the district has partnered with City Connects to pilot a whole child intervention program that will create an individual education plan for each child in the district. Once the City Connects program is implemented the focus will be on sixth graders at Poughkeepsie Middle School.

“This plan will help make sure we are connecting the proper resources with what the students need in the community and in schools that can support their advancement and make sure they have some successes,” she said. “There is a lot of work going into addressing some of the systemic things that have not been as strong here at Poughkeepsie City School District. We all understand that in order for students to receive a quality academic experience, they must be in school every day,” Superintendent Eric Jay Rosser said.

Poughkeepsie High School celebrates student success

Poughkeepsie High School Principal Kelleyann Royce-Giron wants to celebrate students all year, so she is holding quarterly Student Success Celebrations, beginning Dec. 22.

“We’re going to do it in-house at grade level and then do a town hall for parents to attend so that kids and their families can celebrate together,” Royce-Giron said.

Teachers were asked to submit names of students for the following awards: Academic excellence, Most improved and PRIDE values - these are values Royce-Giron plans to unveil to students when they return to the building. But, she said the first one will be P which stands for perseverance.

“During this tough time, we wanted to recognize those kids who really persevere.” Students achieving the three honor roll tiers will also be recognized: Merit - students with an overall weighted GPA of between 80-84.9; Honor Roll - 85-89.9 and Principal’s Honor Roll - 90+.

For this first recognition, 396 students in total are being recognized for honor roll achievements. “I’m really super proud of these individuals,” Royce-Giron said. She’d like to see the students who achieved Merit and Honor Roll bump up to the next level and see the Principal’s Honor Roll achievers stay there. “I’d like to see the total double!” she said.