Holiday message from Dr. Rosser

As the end of the calendar year is upon us, we find ourselves reflecting on the uniqueness of 2020 and looking forward to what 2021 will bring. We all deserve a much needed holiday season that is restful, safe, and enjoyable. The holiday season is a time to be thankful for the gifts that we have in our lives–our family and friends.

As I reflect on this year of both memorable achievements and unprecedented challenges, I continue to be amazed by the generosity, ingenuity and innovation of PCSD faculty and staff and the community in educating and supporting our students and families. We are all members of a special family, which I am grateful to be a part of.

My hope is that during this holiday season you find time to rejuvenate. Please keep in mind those who are less fortunate or who find themselves in disheartening circumstances and, where possible, support them as they venture through these challenging times. I look forward to our return from winter break. Until such time, I wish everyone a safe and enjoyable holiday season. ~ Dr. Eric Jay Rosser, Superintendent of Schools

Weekly meetings help improve Poughkeepsie schools

Assistant Superintendent for Elementary Education Gregory Mott meets weekly with representatives from New York State Education Department’s Office of Innovation and School Reform (OISR). The goal of the virtual meetings is to examine ways to improve school leadership and instruction and increase student achievement and learning, Mott said.

Mott and OISR representatives completed planning conferences with principals from Morse, Clinton, Warring and Krieger elementary schools as well as Poughkeepsie Middle School.

“We review their strategic goals for improvement, data, the strategies and evidence they are using to monitor if they are on track for their goal,” Mott said.

Because Morse is in receivership and Poughkeepsie Middle School was in receivership, they also receive support from a school support partner from the state. They meet monthly to focus on improving ELA and Math data through long-term, targeted plans.

On Dec. 14, Mott and Nicole Penn, acting principal at Morse, led the first NYSED virtual site visit. During the 1.5-hour meeting, they were joined by two OISR representatives, their school support partner, and Dr. Eric Jay Rosser, superintendent of schools.

“We looked at the implementation of the turnaround strategy and conducted three virtual classroom observations in ELA and math,” Mott said.

The observations focused on:

• How were students engaged in learning?
• How did the teacher manage routines and procedures?
• How did the teacher assess learning?
• How did the teacher organize lessons?

After the observations, Penn received feedback. “Improvements were noted and observations made on how to make further gains,” Mott said. The observations made are already being addressed through a series of professional development workshops on explicit direct instruction, Mott said.

“IN my one-on-one feedback with OISR, they said that in four years of working with Poughkeepsie, this was the first time they’d been able to have conversations around school reform with all the building leaders and assistant superintendent of elementary education,” he said. The next step is a mid-year assessment. He said the district is on-track with building structures and systems to attain the goal of increased student achievement. “Previously we had no structure or systems in place,” he said, adding, “We still have a lot of work to do.”
Open gym sessions begin

Varsity bowling, indoor track and boys swimming are set to begin practicing at Poughkeepsie High School Jan. 4, if the COVID-19 situation permits.

Athletic Director Greg Russo said the high-risk sports including basketball and wrestling at all levels along with varsity competitive cheer are still on hold.

But, those sports, along with the low- to moderate-risk sports starting Jan. 4 are already participating in open gym sessions.

“It’s open to all sports teams, including football and volleyball which are in the fall, but those are at the discretion of the coaches and student comfort level,” Russo said, adding that participation is high.

“Kids are eager to do things and the coaches are excited to work with the kids,” he said, adding that specific protocols related to health and safety are being followed, including allowing only certain drills, following social distancing rules, requiring masks to be worn and allowing specific time for hand washing.

And, while he has enough athletes to field teams, he is continuing to accept candidates for as long as possible.

“I want to give as many students as possible the opportunity to compete and learn, but more importantly - given the situation - the opportunity to socialize, have fun, learn to cooperate, form relationships with people of other backgrounds, set personal goals and team goals in a safe environment,” Russo said. He anticipates the first matches wouldn’t be until at least Jan. 18.

What to expect

Since bowling and indoor track events take place off-campus, students and parents will have to abide by the rules set down by the location of the event (bowling alleys and the Armory in New York). In addition, student athletes will have to stay six feet apart when not in competition and wear masks.

For events held at PHS, students will be issued two season passes that will allow two members of their family to attend the game. Visiting parents are prohibited from attending. Security will only let those with passes in, Russo said. There will also be designated seating areas and social distancing and mask rules will be enforced.

Modified sports

Poughkeepsie Middle School students will have to wait until at least Jan. 19 for their sports to start as they are all considered high-risk sports. At this time, PMS students are not eligible to participate in open gym. Russo said he expects there to be an update on all sports after the Winter holiday.

Superintendent Student Advisory Committee meets

Last Thursday, Dr. Eric Jay Rosser, superintendent of schools, had the opportunity to host the first of four quarterly Superintendent Student Advisory Committee Meetings with Poughkeepsie High School students.

The advisory committee exists to help inform the superintendent’s thinking around the K-12 school experiences of PCSD students. “I’m interested in hearing directly from our students what their experiences have been thus far, and what the system can do to expand opportunities to enhance their experiences,” Rosser said. “My goal is to enhance opportunities for all PCSD students by providing them with memorable opportunities that I was exposed to when I was in high school plus those that will guarantee their success in the 21st century”.

The conversation yielded a lot of good ideas that district and building administration will be exploring and implementing. It also reinforced some great things that the district is doing for students. Dr. Rosser was joined by PHS principal Kelleyann Royce-Giron, Interim Executive Director of School Engagement Felicia Schinella and Director of Special Projects Kristina Giangreco.