

SUPERINTENDENT'S BRIEF

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

ISSUE NO 81 | June 9, 2023

VOLUME 4



Morse students create mural for board



Morse Elementary School students created a mural to help beautify the Poughkeepsie City School District Board of Education boardroom and presented it to the board Wednesday, June 7, 2023, at the Board of Education meeting. It serves as a constant reminder how little hands are making a big difference. For the past three months, the first grade classes at Morse Elementary have been learning so much about the earth, plants, animals, and habitats. To celebrate our learning,



Above, Morse elementary students present the mural they created with recyclable materials to the PCSD Board of Education at the Wednesday's meeting. At the top, a close-up of the mural hanging in the board room.

they collaborated with our amazing art teacher, Melissa Cascio, and our community volunteer, Steven Ru (commercial artist), to create an underwater mural made completely out of recyclable materials. The mural debuted at Morse's annual science fair May 25 which was organized under the leadership of fifth grade teacher and science fair coordinator Michael Emard (see below).

The presentation of the mural was led by Morse Elementary teacher extraordinaire Cheryl Haines who was accompanied by close to a dozen first grade students in the presentation. Each student presented to the Board and audience their involvement in creating the mural concluding their presentation with a song.

As expected, the entire audience stood and applauded the Morse Elementary School students. Subsequent to the presentation, the Board of Education took action in approving a June 13 field trip to Maritime Aquarium in Norwalk CT for first and fifth grade students. The trip was made possible through the support of the Hudson Valley Credit Union,

Poughkeepsie Public Schools Foundation, Temple Bethel and Jewish Coalition.

Annual science fair energizes

Under the leadership of Michael Emard, a fifth grade teacher and science fair coordinator, Morse Elementary School held its annual Science Fair on May 25. The science fair provided an opportunity for students to showcase their scientific knowledge with exhibits ranging in topics. Parents, teachers, members of the community, Mr. Mott, assistant superintendent of elementary education, Dr. Eric Jay Rosser, superintendent of schools, and Thomas O'Neill, board of education president were in attendance to see the displays and hear students' presentations of their projects.

"Our students have worked very hard over the course of the last few months to prepare their projects, reports, and experiments and are eager to share them with the community," Emard said prior to the event.



Teacher Michael Emard with students at the Morse Elementary School Science Fair.



"I applaud the leadership of Mr. Emard in organizing such a wonderful event and opportunity for students to present what they have learned at Morse Elementary School. This is the second year that I was able to attend and, as was the case last year, it was exhilarating to see what our children created," Rosser said.

District improves equity

At the request of members of the Board of Education, Dr. Eric Jay Rosser, superintendent of schools, provided a presentation on the district's efforts to fix inequities that were pervasive in the Poughkeepsie City School District prior to his arrival in August of 2019.

Rosser shared that upon his hiring as superintendent, the Board charged him to address inequities that existed in three categories:

- Access and opportunity for all students.
- School facilities.
- Staff compensation and benefits.

The presentation chronicled the efforts that have been undertaken since 2020 to specifically address inequities in staff compensation and benefits, moving both to be more closely aligned to school districts in Dutchess County and other comparable districts. Rosser said the 2019-2020 fiscal structural deficit that he walked into had to be corrected before the important work of addressing the inequities that had long plagued the district could begin.

"Any organization's ability to move the needle in all facets of its operation is squarely situated in its strategic plan and the resources it has to be able to accomplish the goals the organization has for itself. In Poughkeepsie, we were in a place of inertia given the lack of a comprehensive strategic plan and the financial resources to methodically move the district from a district of promise to one of fulfillment", he said. In 2020, Dr. Rosser presented the [framework](#) for what would later become the district's [5-year strategic plan](#). With the help of Bill Hogan, interim chief operating officer and Robert McDow, school business consultant, the three of them were able to establish a plan to correct the multimillion-dollar fiscal structural deficit that resulted in regular staff layoffs, multiyear financial audit findings and the district's inability to sustain turnaround efforts to support student success. Combined with the 5-year strategic plan, the availability of financial resources has served as the foundation for the charge that the Board gave to Dr. Rosser upon his installation as superintendent.

The presentation highlighted past action that has taken place to address staff compensation and benefits across all employee groups, as well as current and planned future action. "I wish the inequities that existed and currently exist were not a part of our work in Poughkeepsie, however understanding that they must be addressed and that there is a commitment from myself and the board of education, we will, in time, address these long-standing, highly frustrating and sometimes debilitating inequities that impact the entire school and surrounding community," Rosser said.

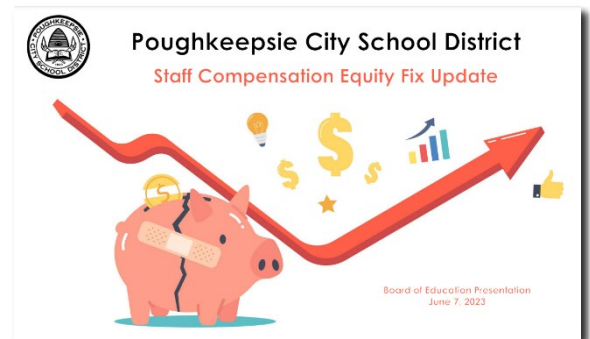
In conclusion, Rosser shared that in recognizing the economics of our time and how we have all been impacted by raising costs across the board, he and Bill Hogan developed a plan that would provide every current employee who has made at least \$10,000 this school year, with the exception of the superintendent, chief operating officer, and the assistant superintendents, a one-time, non-precedent setting cost of living allowance of \$1,700 to be paid from unused 22-23 funding set-aside for budget expenditures.

The board voted unanimously on this and other equity fixes the same evening, including a policy provision that neglected to provide non-represented employees in receiving a district contribution to health care into retirement after 10 years of service. This policy change created greater equality in what the district provides for other employee groups.

[Download the Equity Fixes presentation here.](#)

Kindergarten lesson helps planet, animals

Kindergartners at the Early Learning Center learned about recycling and helped the earth and animals in the process. Students in Tara Jankovitz, Jennifer Frisenda and Maribeth Smith and Kristina Parker's classes



brought in empty water bottles and cans from home starting on Earth Day in April and continuing through May.

"A letter was sent to parents explaining how students wanted to help protect our planet," Jankovitz said.

Each class had its own recycling bin outside the classroom where students could drop the bottles. "The whole school participated in bringing in cans and bottles - everyone from kitchen staff to bus drivers and the building principal," she said.

The team of teachers brought the bottles to the Redemption Center on Overocker Road, accumulating \$242 by the end of the project.

The three classes voted and decided to donate the money to the Dutchess County SPCA.

"We wanted to help the cats and dogs feel better and have a safe place to stay," student Robert Philipps said. "We helped the Earth at the same time." Nomiah Rogers agreed. "The animals need a place to stay until somebody wants to give them a love story."

When it came time to give the money to the DCSPCA, Aubrey Fitzpatrick, head of donations at the organization, came to the school with photos of the animals they would be helping and spoke with children before accepting the check.



Dutchess County SPCA's Aubrey Fitzpatrick receives a check from ELC students.



City of Poughkeepsie Mayor Marc Nelson cuts the ribbon at the park.

Malcolm X Park reopens to public

Children enjoyed new playground equipment, resurfaced basketball courts while adults took advantage of new walking paths and benches during the ribbon cutting and reopening of Malcolm X Park Thursday.

Located on the edge of the Fall Kill Creek next to Morse Elementary School, the park experienced many environmental challenges and suffered from years of neglect, but the City of Poughkeepsie committed in 2020 to restoring and revitalizing the park.

The city hired New City Parks to work with community partners (Scenic Hudson, Nubian Directions, the Art Effect, MASS Design

Group, Poughkeepsie Farm Project, Ecological Citizens, the Northside Collaborative) and a number of community leaders, municipal representatives and local organizations.

As part of the project, the city received funding from New York State to add greenery that provides shade, cooling and mitigates storm water run-off. There are also new basketball hoops, backboards and bleachers, tables, a new pavilion and a community designed and painted mural honoring Malcolm X's legacy.

The park also has ties to Poughkeepsie City School District beyond its location.

In 1978, Black Poughkeepsie High School students, including Dr. Felicia Watson, current board of education member, Greg Watson, Dr. Watson's brother, and Ed Pittman, senior high education consultant, former PCSD board member and retired dean, advocated for Morse Park to be renamed after human and civil rights activist El Haj Malik El Shabazz (Malcolm X). Their advocacy led to the name change and in the following decades Malcolm X Park has provided a safe space for neighborhood children to play and connect with the Fall Kill Creek, and has served as a gathering area for community events.

CI Weekly: More students meeting reading and math goals

Information from the iReady diagnostic as of June 8 shows that on the whole, more students are meeting or exceeding reading and math goals in the district. Download the [June 9, 2023 CI Weekly](#) for more.

Upcoming events

- **TONIGHT, June 9:** PHS Awards night, 6 p.m., PHS auditorium, 70 Forbus St.
- **Saturday, June 10:** Saturday Morning Lights, Poughkeepsie Middle School, 55 College Ave.
- **Wednesday, June 14-23:** New York State Regents exams
- **Thursday, June 15:** Free soccer clinic hosted by Hudson Valley Hammers, Pulaski Park Mini Pitch, 6-8 p.m. Ages 18 and under.