District gets $2.3M for mental health supports

Poughkeepsie City School District will be able to expand its mental health offerings to students and parents thanks to a $2.33 million grant from the New York State Office of Mental Health. District officials received word of the grant Tuesday. Structured over a five-year period, the Student Mental Health Support Grant provides funding for:

- School-based mental health clinics at Poughkeepsie Middle School and Poughkeepsie High School through an expansion of a partnership with Astor Services for Children and Families.
- Student engagement activities including presentations at orientation and school events, mental health workshops during homeroom at PMS and PHS and wellness workshops after school and during Saturday Morning Lights.
- Parent engagement activities at the Parent Empowerment Center, including presentations at Parent Teacher Conferences, interactive parent workshops during the evening and an annual Family Mental Health & Wellness Fair.
- Creation of a Poughkeepsie System of Care Collaborative which will work with providers across the continuum of mental health and wraparound services to create a map of current services, a needs assessment, action plan and host an annual Children’s Mental Health Conference to provide professional development for mental health workers in the region.
- Hiring a Mental Health Awareness Coordinator to oversee all project activities and track outcome data.
- Hiring a clerical assistant to the coordinator.
- Funding to purchase materials and support events and activities.

Superintendent Dr. Eric Jay Rosser said seeking the grant is part of the district’s overall strategy to help students. “Our responsibility as a school district is to provide a high-quality educational experience for all students, this requires enriched academic, social, emotional and wellness supports,” he said, adding that this grant award provides the ability to expand on the existing systems of social and emotional supports provided to PCSD students.

“We are grateful for our partnership with Astor and this grant will allow us to guarantee five years of services to PCSD students and parents. This partnership, inclusive of other partnerships with community organizations, greatly enhances the Poughkeepsie City School District’s Community School model.” Rosser said that since 2020 the district has aggressively sought and acquired more than $6.5 million in grant funding to support expanding opportunities and access for PCSD students.

Summer programs engage students

As the summer of 2022 is coming to a close and the district is preparing to welcome students back to the Poughkeepsie City School District after Labor Day, PCSD students had greater opportunities to participate in district sponsored/supported academic, social, emotional, and wellness

Students and staff have fun playing a parachute game at Summer Lights Camp.
programming when compared to years prior to the pandemic. As stated two years ago, when the district laid out its Academic Recovery Program plan, the goal was to provide greater opportunities for all PCSD youth to engage in meaningful and enriching activity that supports their academic, social, emotional and wellness success. This summer PCSD students had access to a variety of district-sponsored/supported summer programs that are further elaborated on through the following stories and pictures:

**Lights camp brings bundles of fun**
The district’s first Summer Lights camp at Camp Nooteeming in Pleasant Valley has been a success, giving students a chance to have fun in what may be a new place for them. Beginning Aug. 1 and lasting two weeks, the camp is serving more than 100 students entering second through seventh grade. Campers enjoy numerous activities from arts and crafts to Gaga Ball, a variant of dodgeball where the goal is to be the last player standing. Some light academics are squeezed in to keep their brains engaged in learning and to help prevent summer slide.

According to Executive Director of Community Schools Natasha Cherry, it is important to offer this opportunity to students who may not have the chance to go to a camp otherwise.

“You have to open them up to as many different opportunities and learning experiences as possible,” Cherry said. “We really wanted to provide our kids with the same opportunities that more affluent school districts have.”

Planning for camp came together in two weeks with assistance from dedicated PCSD staff and teachers. Dutchess County Executive Marc Molinaro let the district use Nooeteeming free of charge, while Assistant Commissioner of Youth Services Karmen Smallwood arranged for transportation and snacks for students.

“That gave us the incentive we needed to do this,” Cherry said. “This camp is an example of what community schools are all about.”

Soon to be 4th grader Amaliah Harris most enjoyed playing Gaga Ball and making bracelets. She plans to come back next summer.

“Camp is lots of fun and they do lots of fun activities,” Harris said.

C’Miya Carter, who’s going into 5th grade, came to camp to be outdoors, partake in the activities and to socialize.

“I can see my friends and I can make new friends,” Carter said. “I like to do a lot of stuff.”

**Summer program makes good use of field**
This summer, the Roy Watterson Community Foundation Football Camp, in partnership with the Poughkeepsie City School District as part of the summer offering of activities, took over the district athletic field, bringing about 100 children from Poughkeepsie and the region to the gridiron.

The nonprofit program, in conjunction with Watterson’s other nonprofit, R.E.A.L Men Stand Up, is all about creating positive relationships and stopping the violence in the community.

One of the youngest football camp participants runs against the resistance of a parachute.
“It’s all about respect and love,” Watterson told the group as they gathered to start the day. The eight coaches and nurse/secretary, Allyson Braxton, volunteer their time to help kids build relationships with each other and with the adults who participate in the program. Watterson and Braxton are both PCSD graduates. “I came back to give back,” said Watterson who works as a crisis intervention worker for the school district. “We want to show kids love and respect at an early age and try to instill self-respect, respect, dignity and unity.

Every participant received breakfast, snacks and lunch. The organization also provided cleats for them. Everything was provided at no cost, including an end-of-camp celebration with a ton of food and certificates for all participants. Camp ran from 7:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. with students separated by age groups. On the field, the older children encouraged the younger students to push themselves and, at times, helped them learn the specific drills being called by the coaches. This is the second year of the camp, but the first at PCSD’s field.

Watterson and Braxton were happy with the camp this year and thankful for the use of the district’s field. “We did it for four weeks this year. Next year we’d like to offer it for six weeks,” Braxton said.

Upcoming events

TOMORROW - Saturday, Aug. 13: Bridges to Poughkeepsie, Athletic Field, 70 Forbus St. This event is for families new to Poughkeepsie City School District. 11 a.m.-2 p.m. Activities, information, food and fun.
Thursday, Sept. 8: School resumes
Saturday, Sept. 10: Back to School Bash

Together, We are Champions for Children in Poughkeepsie City School District
www.poughkeepsieschools.org