

SUPERINTENDENT'S BRIEF

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

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Instructional rounds begin for year

To advance Poughkeepsie City School District student learning and success, districtwide instructional rounds started earlier this month. Instructional rounds involve district and building-level leadership visiting classrooms during instruction to gather and highlight best practices, help teachers grow and to gather data in order to target areas for professional development.

"Building and district leaders, upon completion of each visit, discuss their observations, highlighting specific areas of strength, areas in need of continued improvement, and topics that can be addressed in faculty, grade level, or community of practice meetings," said Janet Bisti, director of elementary education.

Visits are not part of the evaluation process, which is set to begin Oct. 1 and conclude June 1, 2024.

Instructional rounds also help build the capacity of principals and assistant principals.

"When doing walkthroughs with building administration, we are able to synchronize our instructional lens with building administrators to identify what's working and what areas may need attention. It opens the door for upcoming professional development for our teachers. Some of the professional development can occur during their COP's which building administration supports with the department chairs," Dr. Charles Gallo, assistant superintendent for secondary education said.

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At the elementary level, classroom visits take place twice a week. At the secondary level, walkthroughs will occur weekly at PMS and PHS. "Classrooms are randomly selected and feedback will be provided from building administration to support teacher practice," Gallo said.

During the rounds, a Google form is used to track observations, best practices and other data to help the district make informed decisions on what type of district-wide professional development to offer. Teachers and building leaders will receive a document with observational data and feedback.



Above, administrators observe an Early Learning Center classroom as part of instructional rounds. At right, a group of administrators gather at the Early Learning Center to conduct instructional rounds.



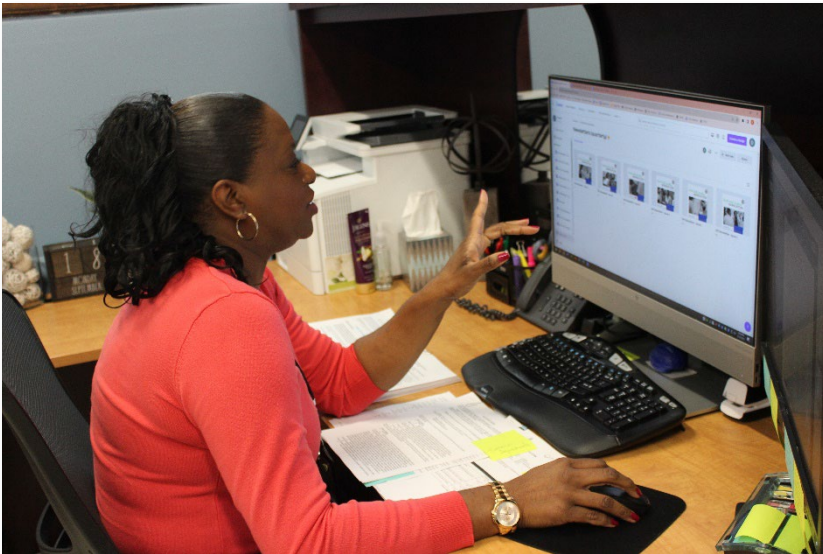
The elementary department has a monthly focus on particular high-impact practices, such as lesson objectives in September and modeling in October. Patrice Woods, supervisor of elementary education, says, "Principals and teachers are informed of the specific practices connected to the monthly instructional focus and a schedule of visitations."

Superintendent Dr. Eric Jay Rosser noted, "We are seeing student growth across the district, which is an indicator that the instructional team is positively impacting student learning. Our goal is to strengthen our impact on student learning so that student growth as indicated on district assessments and state tests continues to support the upward trajectory of district progress as reflected in the 5-Year Strategic Plan."

Mental health focus of two new positions

The Office of School Engagement has two new employees who will be focused on improving mental health throughout the district – funded by different grants.

Diandria Williams



Diandria Williams is currently a program coordinator in the Office of School Engagement overseeing the grant that provides Astor Services school-based clinics at the middle and high schools.

Though she went to school for architectural engineering and worked as a civil engineer, Diandria Williams knew it wasn't the right job for her.

"I wanted to sit with people, talk to people, help people," said Williams, currently the program coordinator in the Office of School Engagement. Williams went back to school and earned a psychology degree, taking a job as the program director for a domestic violence shelter and later becoming the executive director. After the owners decided to close the shelter, she saw the PCSD job posting and joined the team. Now, she oversees the New York State Office of Mental Health grant that provides Astor Services school-based clinics at Poughkeepsie Middle School and Poughkeepsie High School. The goal is to

engage students in mental health and help them succeed.

"When I was offered the job here, I thought I could make the most difference and affect the community in a positive way - which is my passion. I wanted to help make the community stronger," said Williams.

One of Diandria Williams' other responsibilities is putting out a monthly newsletter for student-facing staff. Each one has one main mental health topic that explains what it is, who is affected by it, ways educators can support students and topic-specific resources.

Her role also includes working on developing a system of collaborative care with Dutchess County and local agencies, representing the district on several community committees to discuss student mental health and providing professional development for PCSD staff through quarterly mental health and wellness newsletters and mental health training during superintendent conference days. She will soon launch a third newsletter for secondary school parents/families that will address mental health through a cultural lens.

Diandria has worked with children before through her church, offering mentorship and dance programs. In fact, dancing is a passion of hers and something she regularly pursues through ballroom dancing - she will soon enter her second dance competition.

Christine Smack

Christine Smack is no stranger to Poughkeepsie schools. As an alumni of the district, Smack worked for Marist

Upward Bound and Liberty Partnership at Poughkeepsie High School prior to joining the district as a school caseworker.

In her role within the Office of School Engagement, Smack oversees a mental health awareness training grant that gives the district an opportunity to implement the [7 Mindsets program](#) districtwide. The program is an evidence-based learning system that is based on the assertion that success depends less on what a person knows, and more on how he or she thinks.

The goal is to improve student well-being and achievement, healthy school culture and educator happiness.

"I have a strong sensitivity and passion for youth. It is my goal to make a difference in their lives by providing them with tools to lead a healthy and successful life, despite their circumstances," said Smack, who has worked with students in Poughkeepsie for about nine years, including time as a crisis counselor.

A family person at heart, Smack enjoys spending her out-of-work time with her two sons. "They are my life, and they inspire me every day," she said, adding that she likes taking long walks and being outdoors. Gardening and crafting are also on the list of activities that she enjoys.



Christine Smack is a school caseworker overseeing a mental health awareness training grant for the district.



Author Nana Ekua Brew-Hammond talks about her book with students at Warring Elementary School Wednesday, Sept. 27, 2023.

Author shares book with Warring students, staff

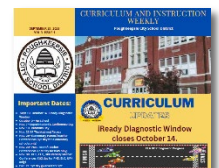
Thanks to Vassar College, Warring Elementary School students and staff were treated to a visit from author Nana Ekua Brew-Hammond this week.

Brew-Hammond shared her book, "Blue: A History of the Color as Deep as the Sea and as Wide as they Sky," with the school's third and fourth graders and talked about how she became an author and wrote the book. She shared her research process and how she traced the origins of the color blue through history to create this vibrant historical picture book. At the conclusion of her talk, all third and fourth grade students were given their own copy of the book to take home and share with their families.

The visit was made possible through support from the Louise Seaman Bechtel Lectureship in Children's Literature, the Vassar College Education Department and the Vassar Education Collaboration.

CI Weekly: iReady reports, teaching strategies

This week's Curriculum and Instruction Weekly shares five helpful reports teachers can use from the iReady Diagnostic and a column about teaching strategies. Get [CI Weekly for Sept. 29, 2023](#).



Upcoming events:

- **Sat., Sept. 30:** Girls varsity soccer vs. Arlington at PHS, 9 a.m.
 - Varsity cheerleading tournament at PHS, 11 a.m.
 - Varsity football vs. Peekskill at Torpy Field, 6 p.m.
- **Mon., Oct. 2:** School Custodian Appreciation Day
- **Wed., Oct. 4:** BOE meeting, 6:30 p.m., 18 S. Perry St.
- **Fri., Oct. 6:** National Coach Day

