Goal: Reduce absenteeism

District organizing focus groups

For decades, chronic absenteeism has been a rising issue in schools across the country. According to the most recent federal data, more than 7 million children in this country, or 1 in 7 students, miss 15 or more days every school year. Students who miss 2 or more days per month are more likely to face school failure and are at greater risk for dropping out. Chronic absenteeism is more of a particular problem among students living in impoverished communities and it impacts all students, not just those who are absent. All students end up losing valuable instruction time and teachers are forced to reteach the same material.

Poughkeepsie City School District, no different than other school districts across the state, has also seen increased numbers of students who miss more than 2 days of instruction per month. As part of developing a comprehensive three-year plan to increase attendance, the district is holding two focus groups to capture the perspectives of parents and the community. When addressing the barriers that prevent students from attending school regularly it is important that schools, parents, and community form alliances to combat this issue.

Interim Executive Director of Community Engagement Felicia Schinella is currently organizing dates to host focus groups with parents and community members. The intent of the focus groups are to understand what barriers parents and community members indicate exist to help inform the district’s plan. A survey will also be created to gather data. Schinella will present aspects of the comprehensive three-year plan set to begin later this school year tonight at the Board of Education meeting. Look for an update in Friday’s brief. Anyone interested in participating in the focus groups can email her at fschinel@poughkeepsieschools.org.

Push on to hire full-time librarians

As part of the Community Schools Initiative, the district is committed to having a full-time librarian at each school. Currently Morse and Warring elementary schools share a librarian as do the Early Learning Center and Clinton Elementary School. Poughkeepsie Middle School and Poughkeepsie High School each have a full-time librarian.

The job posting has closed and Warring, Clinton, and Krieger are currently interviewing, according to Timothy Wade, assistant superintendent for administrative services. “We will be excited to have a librarian in each school,” Wade said.

At this time, the following people are managing the school libraries:

- Holly Hammond is the librarian at Clinton Elementary and Morse Elementary
- Roger Silverblatt is the librarian at Waring Elementary, Krieger Elementary and at the Early Learning Center
- Sara Burlingame is the librarian at Poughkeepsie Middle School
- Dorothy Stone is the librarian at Poughkeepsie High School. See LIBRARIANS Page 2
PHS toy drive yields an abundance of gifts for kids

Though COVID-19 forced the cancellation of the “Cocoa, Cookies and Caroling” event to mark the end of Poughkeepsie High School’s first annual toy drive to support the John Flowers Christmas Wish, it couldn’t stop the donations. Principal Kelleyann Royce-Giron said staff from throughout the district made contributions. “From gift cards to board games to clothing and everything in between, we collected it all,” Royce-Giron said. “We’re going to put a lot of smiles on the City of Poughkeepsie children’s faces.” There were 106 toys and gifts donated. Some are still coming in. “I got an email from Early Learning Center Principal Colleen Hardiman who said they had items leftover from a Vassar College donation and she is bringing them over.” “[I] couldn’t be happier about the support we received,” she said.

Previous toy drives at PHS, done in conjunction with the JROTC program, benefitted the Toys for Tots program. This is the first year the drive is associated with Christmas Wish. Royce-Giron was disappointed at having to cancel the “Cocoa, Cookies and Caroling,” which was designed to celebrate turning over all the donated items to Christmas Wish and spread some holiday cheer among the adults. Instead, Royce-Giron and volunteers will be loading up her truck and bringing them to Santa’s workshop for distribution.

Because students and staff haven’t widely been in the buildings, it was mainly a staff and adult-driven event. “Next year we will expand it. When we are in-house, we will put it out to the children and their families. If they want to donate or make something they can participate.” And, “Cocoa, Cookies and Caroling” will take place too.

PHS Virtual Senior Wednesday highlighted on News 12

Last week, News 12 Hudson Valley followed up on a story that originally appeared in the Nov. 18, 2020, Superintendent’s Brief “PHS seniors tap into virtual college help” by featuring the college preparation activity of Poughkeepsie High School counselors Takiyah Ingram and Kelly Jackson-Semexant during the news station’s State of Our Schools segment. When Dr. Rosser was asked his thoughts about what Ms. Ingram and Mrs. Jackson-Semexant are engaged in he responded, “Having had the responsibility of leading the Atlanta Public School’s college preparation and readiness signature reform initiative targeted to support students who lived in impoverished communities it is important to innovate approaches to connecting students to important information on college participation.” I highly applauded the efforts of these two counselors in their continued support of PHS students.

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Burlingame moved to PMS about five years ago, after full-time elementary librarians were eliminated at the other schools. “Bringing the librarians back is a huge, huge plus,” she said. “Going from elementary school to middle school, I noticed that students don’t know how to do research, they don’t know the different genres or even how to pick out a book from the shelves. I’m very excited about getting them [librarians] all back.” Burlingame pointed out that many students love to read, but don’t have transportation to the public library or the resources to buy books. When librarians are at the schools full time, “they get to know the kids. They know what kind of books they like” and they develop a rapport. “They know if they have a problem they can come to me and it creates a bond.” A librarian’s presence also helps support the teachers to build a collection of books around what they need and to help reinforce classroom lessons.