



## Class of 2021 set to graduate tomorrow

Poughkeepsie High School's Class of 2021 is set to walk across the stage at the Poughkeepsie High School Sports Complex tomorrow night at 6 p.m. The night will see 180 graduates walk across the stage to receive their diplomas after COVID-19 disrupted their learning for the better part of two school years.



PCSD staff prepare the football field for graduation.



Tyonna Morgan takes care decorating her graduation cap.

"This morning I walked over to the fields where they are setting up the stage and it became real. This class will get as close to a normal celebration of their graduation as possible after 17 months of shifts, discomfort and the unknown," Royce-Giron said. "There will be 180 graduates on the field of Poughkeepsie High School to celebrate themselves. I had a moment that felt really good."

The keynote speaker will be Robert Johnson, a 2012 Poughkeepsie High School graduate and Director of Multicultural Affairs at Sacred Heart University - his alma mater.

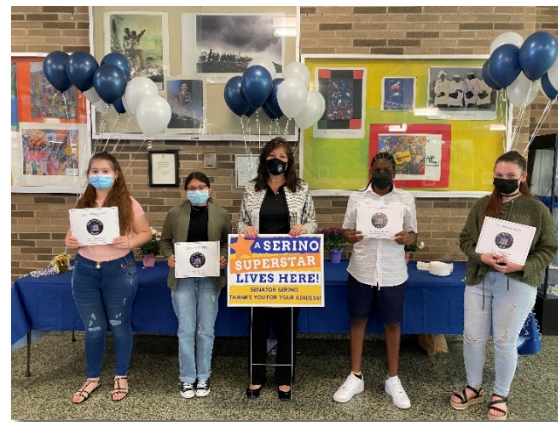
## Senator honors Superstars

Sen. Sue Serino honored four Poughkeepsie Middle School students with Serino Superstar awards June 17 during a special afternoon ceremony hosted by the Social Studies department. The students: Amiyah Wood, Jamir Hawley, Ximena Alarcon and Naomi Valle-Netzahuatl were present along with their parents.

Teachers Jennifer Burke, Christopher King, John Hines and Jackie Spadaro nominated the students for the award which is designed to recognize students who demonstrate exceptional kindness.

Burke nominated Wood because she is, "a breath of fresh air during this very difficult time. She is kind, compassionate and always available to offer a helping hand to me or her peers." Hines and Spadaro nominated Valle-Netzahuatl for her positivity. "Naomi was always prompt and prepared for all our meets. When it came time to return to school for in-person learning, Naomi was a role model for her peers," they wrote. "When other students joined the in-person class, she would help them in our classroom and help them navigate the halls of the middle school."

Hawley brings kindness and humor to the classroom, all while being a reliable participant in the lessons, King wrote. For example, King said he'd perform a rap song if 20 of the 23 students handed in their assignment on time. Hawley "worked extremely hard to make sure that all of his classmates understood



The recognition ceremony ended with a photo of, from left to right, Ximena Alarcon, Naomi Valle-Netzahuatl, Sen. Sue Serino, Jamir Hawley and Amiyah Wood. Courtesy/Office of Senator Sue Serino

the content so they would be able to complete the assignment. He encouraged all the students, especially the least motivated to work their hardest." In addition, King said "he adds insight and shows a deep understanding of American History. He displays kindness and leadership in unexpected ways during these uncertain times."

Alarcon, "is a great student and an even better kid. Her personality brightens the entire virtual classroom environment," King wrote. She is an ELL student who speaks English well and is working hard to learn how to read and write in English. "She always participates in class and completes her assignments. She learns from mistakes better than any student I have ever had over my 18 years of teaching." Serino was impressed with the way the school handled the awards.

"This is the first time a school has ever held such a formal ceremony for my Superstar award. It's absolutely spectacular," Serino said.

Each student received a certificate, lawn sign and a photo with Serino.

"We want to thank Senator Serino for providing this wonderful opportunity for our students whose kindness makes them true superstars," Principal Joe Mazzetti said.

Eighth grade assistant principal Kenneth Behr added, "We are extremely proud of our Poughkeepsie Middle School students who excel not only in the classroom but out of the classroom. They are the epitome of what it means to have Pioneer Pride."

## Puppet show adds fun to Morse art lessons

Melissa Cascio's art students shared their learning experiences with a guest from another planet this year as Scribble from Splat joined the class for most of the year.

In reality, Scribble is a puppet character created by Cascio and her husband - exclusively for Morse Elementary School students.

He came about during the pandemic after Cascio watched a former colleague do a few puppet shows for morning announcements and was inspired. "I wanted kids to be excited because when you're sitting at home there are a lot of distractions," she said.

She ordered a puppet, had it shipped overnight and three weeks into September Scribble came to life via a recorded puppet show shown to all of her students. "I'll be honest, it was only supposed to be one or two lessons ... but the kids loved it.

The video is a family affair, with her husband being the voice and antics of Scribble, her daughter handling the recording and her son chipping in as a character as needed. Cascio said each episode takes 2-3 hours to create. There are about 30 of them. Aside from her lesson, the Word of the Week and the joke, it is unscripted.

"We'll discuss the lesson and Word of the Week over dinner for about two minutes, but that's it," she said.

All videos teach a lesson that is part of the curriculum. Each week, there is a review of the previous week's lesson, an art Word of the Week, a joke and a lesson.

Scribble does the lesson with the students and everyone has a chance to share what they are working on with the others. Since Scribble is from another planet, he often relies on the students to teach him. At the end of each lesson, Cascio created a rating scale from one to four Scribbles for students where they can indicate



Above, art teacher Melissa Cascio holds a copy of "Scribble Stones" as Scribble reacts. At right, Jeylin Palma-Corea holds the Scribble Stone she created as part of that week's lesson.





whether they need help (1) or feel great about their work and can teach Scribble (4). Every episode ends with the Cascio's motto, "Be great and create."



Recently, for Scribble's birthday, Cascio used the book, "Scribble Stones," and had each student design their own rock on paper and then paint it. She and her husband gathered and primed about 140 rocks for students to use. Once students painted the rocks, they placed them in the school garden. Going forward, Cascio plans to continue using Scribble even when in-person learning resumes. For the younger students, she plans to reuse this year's videos. For third through fifth graders, she may do monthly check-ins with Scribble. "We love doing this," she said, adding that the most rewarding aspect is "connecting with the kids." Interim Principal Samantha Mitchell said it's not just the students who love it, but the teachers, too.

Cascio and Scribble in the last lesson of the year - Scribble is excited about going on vacation and dressed the part.

"I think she did a phenomenal job," Mitchell said, "She created a way to activate children's excitement and a way to motivate them to be involved that is both entertaining and educational - they talk about Scribble in the halls."

Cascio said she "loves to spread positivity among the staff. I'm more than an art teacher, I love making people happy and the kids are learning."

## Guest speakers share career options with young students

About a dozen members of the community took time out of their work days to share what they do with Poughkeepsie City School District's elementary school students last week. On Tuesday and Thursday, students logged on to Zoom calls to learn about different careers they could pursue.



Sonographer Jessica Cruz reads to students during her presentation.

Presenters also read an age-appropriate book about their career to students, copies of which will be in each school library in September as well as in PDF form for remote learners.

On Tuesday, City of Poughkeepsie Police Department detective Karen Zirbel had 315 log-ins to her session - the most of any presenter that day - an indicator, perhaps, that efforts to build a rapport between the police and students is working.

Fire Chief Mark Johnson was close with 261 log-ins.

But, some of the log-ins were from classrooms with multiple students, Director of Special Projects Kristina Giangreco pointed out.

Thursday's presenters included a veterinary technician, Garnetta Santiago who had 198 log-ins; Yulia Ovchinnikova, an IT entrepreneur and founder of OpenHub with 118 and representatives from banking and finance, sonography, nursing and manufacturing fields.

The goal of the two-day event was to expose students to a variety of careers and encourage students to dream and explore their own interests and learn what steps to take.

Thank you to all the community members who participated, shared their knowledge and experience to inspire our students.