



School libraries get significant updates

"Libraries store the energy that fuels the imagination. They open up windows to the world and inspire us to explore and achieve, and contribute to improving our quality of life." - **Sidney Sheldon**



Bookworm Vending Machines like this one will be installed at each elementary school for use next year.

Director of Elementary Education Janet Bisti presented this quote to set the stage for what the Poughkeepsie City School District is working on to improve the conditions of district libraries. Bisti's library updates presentation represented several activities among many the district has engaged in to strengthen literacy development among students. View the [library update presentation](#).

Highlights of the presentation included:

- Introduction of the district's librarians.
- Discussion on how librarians evaluated the schools' catalogues to determine whether to retain or discard dated materials.
- The strategic decision to purchase approximately \$140,000 worth of multicultural and multileveled fiction, nonfiction and graphic novels reflecting varying ability levels and interests.
- A onetime investment of \$430,000 in new furniture for the libraries at Morse, Clinton, Krieger and Warring Elementary Schools (ELC's library furniture was replaced in 2020 through the generous donation of a philanthropist, and fundraising efforts of the school's PTA).
- Renderings of the newly purchased furniture that will be installed over the summer at each of the schools.

"Libraries are the hubs of schools. If they are welcoming, inviting and filled with books kids want to read, they will be a place kids want to be," Bisti said. And, if they want to be there, "they will be more likely to show up, be engaged and be happy to be there." While the presentation showcased some of the recent activity to strengthen literacy development among students, the Office of

Instruction is finalizing a comprehensive literacy plan that will outline the district's strategic activity to guarantee that all learners receive meaningful literacy instruction and evidence-based resources and interventions needed to become successful readers. The plan is being finalized this month for implementation during the 2022-23 school year.

Other notable library improvement activities since 2019:

- Hired a full-time librarian for every school (library services is not required by New York State Department of Education for elementary schools). "Library media specialists work in collaboration with the classroom teachers to provide instruction in strategies and practices to our students," Assistant Superintendent for Elementary Education Greg Mott added. "They will also assist with developing fluency skills throughout the primary grades."
- Invested in myOn, a digital library that offers students over 7,000 enhanced age and developmentally appropriate digital books unlimited, 24/7 year-long, access.
- Providing the district's youngest learners with summer reading materials.
- Secured Bookworm Book Vending machines for every elementary school that will be used as part of the schools' PBIS/MTSS program next year.
- Partnering with the Poughkeepsie Public Library District to provide students and teachers with Sora (a digital library), access to Rover Roaming Library, a plan to provide library cards to students, and bringing the Poughkeepsie Book Festival to PHS.

Students share experiences at youth conference

The Transformative Classroom Learning Youth Conference from Dutchess BOCES brought students from across Dutchess County together to share what they learned this year - and Poughkeepsie City School District was represented. Students from the district's Saturday Morning Lights, English as a New Language, and Extended Learning Time at district elementary and middle schools attended with Director of Secondary Education Mariya Pushkantser and Director of Elementary Education Janet Bisti, who participated in the related professional development session on culturally relevant pedagogy.

"The focus of the training we received was to provide students with various learning experiences and exposure to learn about all backgrounds and cultures so they can own their learning and help improve the world we live in," Pushkantser said.

While most participants were teachers and had their own classrooms, Pushkantser and Bisti didn't have a class, so they invited students from the programs they work with to participate.

"The whole ENL Explorers Club from Morse came," she said, adding that the program is run by Tracey Bleau, ENL coordinator and Mary Marshall, an ENL teacher at Morse. "They presented their year's worth of activities and gave out chocolate candies that they made themselves in the program."

In addition to the six students from ENL, four Saturday Morning Lights students participated.

Students were given the option to present their work as a poster/exhibit, speaker session or another format.

Dr. Jevon Hunter, the Woods-Beals Endowed Chair at Buffalo State College, taught the professional development program at BOCES and was the keynote speaker. He also gave out prizes to the students.



Above, Dr. Jevon Hunter speaks to participants. Left, students in the ENL Explorers Club from Morse prepare to hand out chocolate they made to conference attendees.



High school garden growing again

A courtyard garden at Poughkeepsie High School is up and ready for students to grow fresh fruits and vegetables with the possibility of selling them.

The Michelle Obama Victory Garden was first built in 2008 and initially maintained by high school students interning for the Poughkeepsie Farm Project. It is located in the courtyard between the main lobby and the gym. PCSD recently received a grant to revitalize the garden after it sat dormant due to COVID. Under the guidance of school counselor Franky Perez, who serves as Green STEAM Garden Project Farm2School coordinator, a group of students spent two days cleaning up the garden and are eager to get back to work.

"It definitely sparked an interest," Perez said. "Even the ones that may have not filled out an application yet, they stop me in the hallway and they're like 'Are we getting back in the garden?'"

Freshman Omari James shows off strawberries in the Michelle Obama Victory Garden at PHS.

The program is crucial for students to see where food comes from, as well as how to eat and cook healthily. Perez believes students will have more of a connection to healthy food when they see it grow from seed to sprout. "Food is life and our kids need to know where healthy food comes from," Perez said. "The mission is to teach kids and hopefully they'll go home and teach their families as well." Eventually, Perez hopes to turn the garden into a business model where students can package and sell fruits and vegetables to the community and the school cafeteria. The students will also plant microgreens inside so they can garden all year long.

"The ultimate goal is that we can create a product that everyone gets to enjoy," Perez said. "Our model is going to be one that if it's sustainable, I hope we can grow enough food to start a store."

The program meets the school's Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math requirements as students use math to build garden beds and science to learn about the compost used. For some students, gardening is a great stress reliever and they have thanked Perez for offering them the opportunity. "This is right in line with social-emotional learning," Perez said. "People were in their zone."

Freshman Omari James joined the program because he loves gardening and said the space will make fresh produce more readily available in the community. James felt welcomed by Perez and plans to continue with it through high school.

"I love going outside and pulling weeds," James said. "It's a great program, I love it."

The Farm2School Garden Project is holding a plant sale to support the garden. Bedding plants from Sorbello's Greenhouse in Highland and 10- and 12-inch hanging baskets are for sale. Perez will have plants available on Friday for anyone who did not get a chance to place an order.



PHS guidance counselor and keen gardener Franky Perez is proud of the project so far.

Warring teachers are bringing out the fun in lessons



Above, fourth graders participate in a science vocabulary challenge at Warring Elementary School. Left, Antonio, a student in Kari Webber's class, adds Oreos that his classmates crushed to the ice cream mix.

Fourth graders in three Warring Elementary School classrooms challenged each other to an online science vocabulary battle while a second grade class learned to make ice cream as part of recent school activities.

Using the website Blooket, fourth grade teachers Samantha Bianco, Patrick White, Shereen Cader and Kristina Wynne orchestrated the effort to make prepping for the state science test fun. Students answered content-specific vocabulary questions in preparation for the test.

"It was a blast," Wynne said.

Meanwhile, students in Kari Webber's second grade class learned how to make ice cream as part of the year-end A-Z countdown. Each student received a copy of the recipe.

"First we read the recipe, then we followed each step to make our delicious treat," Webber said.

The measuring helped students work on math skills while reading the recipe helped with comprehension. Students then got to eat the ice cream they made.