

SUPERINTENDENT'S BRIEF

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

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Presentation helps define Community Schools initiative

A [recent presentation](#) of the Poughkeepsie City School District's Community Schools Initiative brought more definition to how the two year old initiative is making an impact on the district's efforts to increase student success while creating

greater opportunity and access to high-impact levers that combat social detriments known to impede in and out of school youth success.

In 2020, the Poughkeepsie City School District designated all seven of its schools as Community Schools. The decision behind the designation was to create schools that serve as community beacons, bringing together school and community resources to improve student success and create stronger families and healthier communities. Given the fact that a child's waking hours between kindergarten and high school amounts to 20 percent in the school environment and 80 percent in the community, it is imperative that a school, home and community approach is employed to holistically address the evolving and emerging needs of children. Across the country, community schools build bridges between school, home, and community to facilitate a holistic approach that will better guarantee that children find success in and out of school.

The Poughkeepsie City School District Community School model focuses on five pillars: Early Learning – Prenatal to Pre-school, Integrated Student and Family supports, High-Level Community and Family Engagement, Expanded and Enriched Learning Opportunities, and Collaborative Leadership Practice intended to:

- Implement strong educational programs which reduce learning gaps, enrich and expand the curriculum, and strengthen parent and community engagement throughout all schools.
- Implement high quality extended day and year-long programs of excellence (e.g., academic, cultural, artistic, athletic, and needs-based).
- Coordinate local resources to offer medical, dental, health & wellness for families.
- Extend PCSD's involvement in the Prenatal to College & Career Success youth development space.

The [presentation](#), by Executive Director of Community Schools Natasha Cherry, highlighted high-level activity that has gone into fulfilling the district's commitment to achieving the status of implementing a full service Community School model as part of the system's districtwide transformation strategy.

"Together we have done an exceptional job as a community in transforming the district from being a system of individual schools to representing a school system where horizontal and vertical alignment is more evident. The Poughkeepsie City School's Community School Initiative serves as "connective tissue" in this effort", shared Dr. Eric Jay Rosser, superintendent of schools.

The alignment of the district's Community Schools initiative to the [Poughkeepsie Children's Cabinet](#) and its four focus areas [Early Childhood](#), [Out-of-School Enrichment and Learning](#), College, Career and Civic Readiness, and Integrated Health and Human Services strengthens the community's impact on the success of children and families who reside in the City of Poughkeepsie.

One aspect of the program is the Parent Empowerment Center at Poughkeepsie Middle School, which provides resources to help families navigate the school district, offers help with job searches and workshops for parents/guardians and more. Learn more at www.poughkeepsieschools.org/pec



New advocate helps families of students with exceptionalities

The Department of Students with Exceptionalities has recently made a major change to how it supports the district's families of students with exceptionalities navigate the laws and regulations that speak to the provision of services for this portion of the student population.

Aurora Porto, family advocate, has helped support families in various capacities over the years and now brings that skill set to Poughkeepsie City School District's Students with Exceptionalities department as a bilingual family advocate.

Porto helps parents as they work to understand how the district is proposing to support their children and secure the necessary signatures and consents for those services to be provided. She makes home visits and explains what evaluations are needed, calls parents as needed, confirms external testing appointments with families and helps make connections with district partners including Abilities First, School for the Deaf, Cardinal Hayes Home and more.

Being bilingual is of great benefit for the district's Spanish-speaking families.

"I enjoy working with children and bilingual families to get them all the resources they can have," she said about coming to PCSD from Family Partnership Center.

Her goal in her first year is to obtain as much information as possible to make parents feel comfortable reaching out so she can help them. "I'm passionate about helping them and their immigration status doesn't matter when it comes to receiving services."

Porto can be reached at aporto@poughkeepsieschools.org or 845-437-3473 ext. 1365.



Poughkeepsie's Jimy Hernandez, Yocelin Bernabe-Diaz, Rosa Celaya-Luis, Gianelli Luis-Ruiz and Guadalupe Hernandez pose for a photo after winning the Lightweight 4 competition in spring 2022.

Crew program gets \$40K grant

Crew coaches Mike Smith and Bob Creedon want to grow the 74-year legacy of a diverse rowing program in the City of Poughkeepsie, by using a grant worth up to \$40,000 to help fund the purchase of equipment, pay for hotel/food costs at regattas, enter additional regattas and attract more students. Poughkeepsie hosted the Intercollegiate Rowing Association's Championship on the Hudson River until it departed in 1949. At that time, the organization left its boathouses behind, making them available to local high school crew teams.

"Poughkeepsie was one of the first high schools in New York State to have a rowing team," said coach Mike Smith, who has been with the program for 32 years. Since the start, the team has been diverse and this is important to Poughkeepsie. The Head of the Charles Regatta and Gold Cup of Philadelphia teamed up to offer grants to schools demonstrating a commitment to diversity and inclusion.

The Poughkeepsie Crew Parents, a nonprofit organization that supports the team and the school district applied for one of five Hoffman Challenge Grants offered and was successful. Brendan Mulvey, race director for Head of the Charles, said Poughkeepsie fit the goals of the grant program to create diversity in the sport.

"We want to learn what the programs truly need funds for and what their pain points are," Elle Carolan, a grant committee member and Gold Cup board member said, adding that site visits are also planned.

Asked about Poughkeepsie's selection, Carolan said, "I think it was the strength and commitment of the program's leaders to diversity, inclusion and belonging. ... Seeing the passion and commitment we felt really comfortable working with them and supporting them to help fulfill their mission."

Poughkeepsie's program has been free to students. "They've never had to pay to row," Smith said, explaining that in addition to district funds, the crew parents and alum have donated money to help sustain the program.

Grant recipients can use the money as they see fit, with \$20,000 being awarded the first year and upon a successful evaluation and participation in a mentoring program, are eligible for the same amount in the second year.

Creedon and Smith plan to work with the Poughkeepsie Children's Cabinet partners and the district's swimming program to grow the number of rowers. The coaches hope to expand participation into the fall season and enter the Head of the Charles and Philadelphia competitions as well as adding a regatta in June or July, according to the application. Smith shared that pre-COVID, the district had about 80 rowers but the number has since dropped to between 45 and 50, as many have graduated.

"We want to promote rowing to students at the high school and middle school but also reach younger students," Smith said. "We want to go to the Boys and Girls Club, Liberty Partnership and introduce the sport of rowing to more students."

Smith said the team has won 20 state championships since it began and earned 15-20 medals in the Scholastic Nationals. While rowing is the focus, Smith said the program also encourages academics. When

taking the team to other places for regattas, Smith brings students to see historical sites such as the Liberty Bell and Betsy Ross Homestead. Many of PCSD's rowers excel in academics too.

"2023 will mark the 74th season Poughkeepsie Crew has empowered our culturally and economically diverse student body from the City of Poughkeepsie Schools through free access



Poughkeepsie's crew team (in blue) after a competition.

to the sport of rowing as a path to build strength, gain confidence, develop positive relationships and pursue excellence on the water, in our schools, and in our community. The grant from HOCR will help us maintain that tradition for the next 73 years," Creedon said.

CI Weekly: Helping students succeed beyond school

This week's edition spotlights efforts aimed at helping Poughkeepsie High School students prepare for life after high school and the Elevating Success feature talks about teaching students about constructive feedback and how it can help them beyond school. Read more, [download the Nov. 18, 2022 edition](#).



Upcoming events

- Wednesday, Nov. 23-Friday, Nov. 25: Thanksgiving Recess, Schools closed.
- Friday, Nov. 25: Poughkeepsie Public Schools Foundation Pioneer Alum Social, The Academy, 33 Academy St., 5-7 p.m. RSVP to PSFoundation78@gmail.com.
- Monday, Nov. 29: Elementary Parent Teacher Conferences, half-day for elementary schools only.