



Director of security brings experience to role

Luis Melendez brings a unique combination of skills and interests to his role as Poughkeepsie City School District's director of school security.

A former New York City Police officer in the 46th precinct, Melendez is bilingual and worked as a youth officer and community affairs officer - so he recognizes the value of developing relationships with the community he serves. But, he also has a love of theater and the desire to share that with others. His path to law enforcement came somewhat by happenstance. A friend of his asked him to drive him to the exam.

"When we got there he said, 'You have to come in. I paid for your test,'" Melendez said, adding that he took the test and the rest is history. "It was the best non-decision I ever made," he said.

After about 30 years in law enforcement, Melendez's daughter heard him telling a story and asked him why he was wasting his time as he had a knack for storytelling.

Melendez enrolled at SUNY Purchase and is set to graduate in June with a degree in theater and performance with an emphasis on writing plays and scripts.

So, why did he come to PCSD?

"It has to do with schools, kids and the community. What better environment to be in than one where I can keep people safe, get involved and be part of the community."

Security, he said, can mean different things to different people. For Melendez, it begins by building relationships with the students, staff and community.

One goal is to start a parent-community task force with the district and police department. "I want to do things that connect. If people feel there is someone who cares about them, they are more comfortable coming forward," he said.

Walking through the halls, Melendez speaks to students and encourages his staff to do the same because there are stories behind every behavior - "there's more than meets the eye," he said. "These kids need consistency - we have to keep respect up and make sure they are safe."

Safety involves everyone

Many school safety incidents arise from human error - a door left open, an ID not checked, a large bag not seen, according to Melendez.

He plans workshops with students, staff and parents so that there is no guilt associated with bringing an issue to the attention of authorities.

"I want to get input and hear new perspectives," he said, adding that he doesn't want to be confined to security.

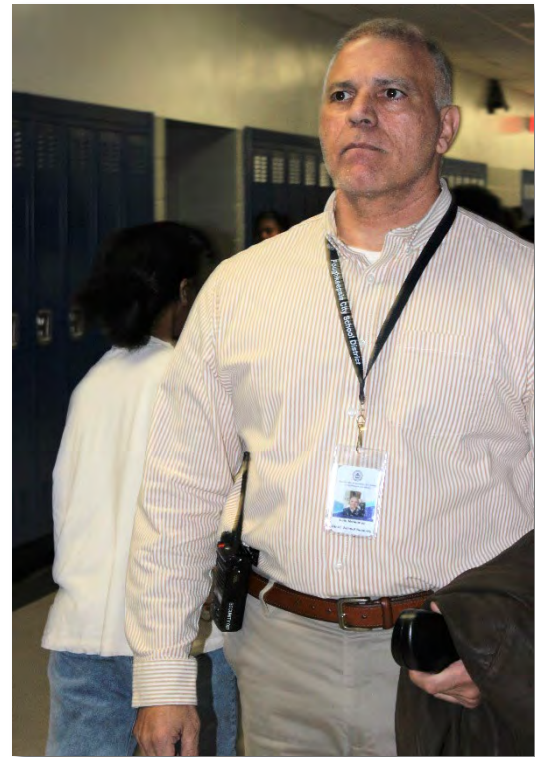
"I want to improve community relations," he said.

Melendez wants to bring his dream of starting a community theater to life at Poughkeepsie High School.

"When kids see you in a different light, it changes how they see you."

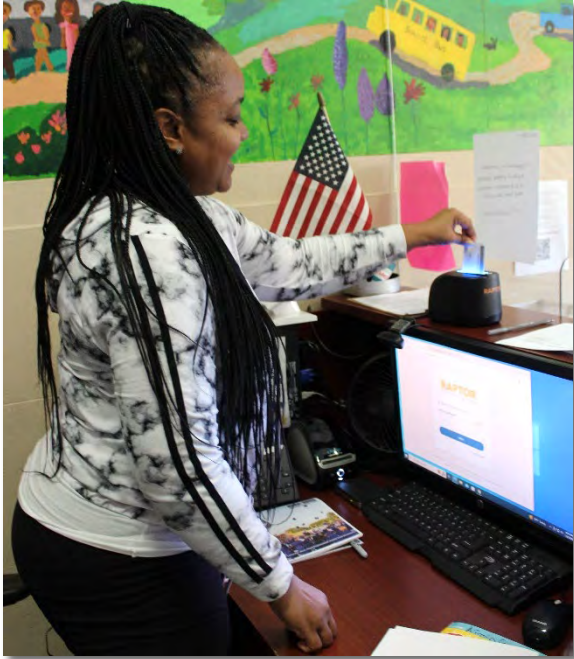
This theater group would be different in that students would create performances that allowed them to express themselves by performing plays about the dress code, climate change and other important issues.

The catch: they'll play the role of school administrators, parents.



Luis Melendez, the district's new director of school security, walks the halls of Poughkeepsie High School.

Outside of work, Melendez enjoys going to the theater, volunteering to deliver meals, watching New York Rangers hockey, reading autobiographies and history and spending time with his two daughters and son.



New tech screens visitors

Alerts for sex offenders, banned individuals

Poughkeepsie City School District recently began installing the Raptor Visitor Management System to increase the safety and security at our schools.

This technology based visitor management system instantly alerts school officials if a visitor is flagged as a security risk. It automatically captures and stores visitor data, enabling schools to create security-focused reports for analytical and investigative purposes.

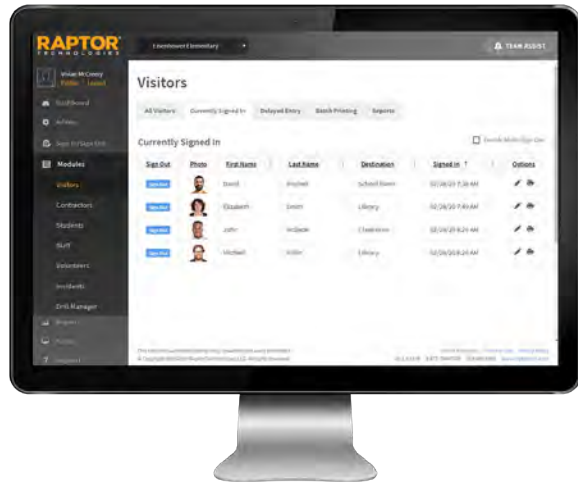
Once installation is complete, the system will:

- Screen every visitor against sex offender and custom databases, including those with custody orders and banned visitor status.
- Sync with PCSD's student information system to have accurate student and guardian data and ensure students are released only to approved guardians.
- Instantly screen anyone attempting to sign out a student against the sex offender registry in all 50 states and any locally-customized databases, including custody databases.
- Immediately alert administrative, security, and other appropriate personnel via text and/or email when a visitor is identified as a risk.
- Generate district- or school-level detailed reports in real time. Create security-focused reports for analytical and investigative purposes.

The following link provides a short [video on the Raptor Visitor Management System](#).

Installation of the system is set to be completed within the coming weeks and updated protocols will be shared with parents and caregivers so that they are aware of the identifications they will need to produce when visiting PCSD schools.

Once a visitor's ID is scanned into the system, they are logged in and a self-sticking visitor badge is printed for them, Alfreda Ghee, greeter at Columbus Administration Building said, adding that it is quicker than the old process of having people manually sign in and then creating a plastic ID badge and putting it into a



holder. Top, Alfreda Ghee, an Administration Building greeter demonstrates how an ID is scanned into the Raptor system. Above, a screenshot from Raptor Technologies shows how the scanned IDs create an automatic visitor log.

holder.

"This is good, we needed it," she said.

Raptor's system is in place in more than 5,000 U.S. schools and more than 52,000 globally, according to information from the company.

The Raptor Visitor Management System is one of many innovations the district will be bringing to all schools. Under the Capital Improvement Plan, the installation of external and internal doors and the creation of security vestibules in all district buildings are priorities. Additionally, the district's Safety and Security Plan is set to invest \$3 million dollars in weapons detection systems, cameras, access control, public announcement integration systems, and lock-down technology.

Counselors featured at state conference

Poughkeepsie Middle School Counselors Ann Marie Tucker & Shavon Ashe gave a workshop on Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) at the annual New York State School Counselor Association (NYSSCA) Conference in Albany on Nov. 18. This was the first time Poughkeepsie City School District Counselors have presented at a NYSSCA Conference.

DBT is a method that combines mindfulness with other skills to help people manage emotions. Their presentation, "Successful Outcomes for Students (S.O.S): DBT Step-A in Middle School" was highly attended by counselors throughout New York State. Utilizing DBT Step-A as a foundation, this workshop provided a framework for middle school implementation as a Tier 1 (Universal Supports). The unmet emotional/problem-solving needs of students relating to mindfulness, emotional regulation, distress tolerance, interpersonal effectiveness, and the middle path decision-making within a high needs school were addressed.

Tucker and Ashe have been in a classroom together before - Ashe was a student in Tucker's social studies class at Poughkeepsie Middle School years ago and is now a colleague. A fact that drew a huge round of applause from the audience.

The PMS School Counselors have infused guidance and DBT into their lessons using SOS during the 2021-22 school year with support from Dr. Joshua Steinfeld through the RPC at Dutchess BOCES.

Each month at PMS, grade-level counselors push into classes to deliver lessons. Through DBT, they explore:

- Mindfulness: The practice of being fully aware and present in this one moment.
- Distress tolerance: How to tolerate pain in difficult situations, not change it.
- Interpersonal effectiveness: How to ask for what you want and say no while maintaining self-respect and relationships with others.
- Emotion regulation: How to change emotions that you want to change.

They felt it was essential to share with school counselors throughout the state so they sent a proposal to NYSSCA in June and were chosen by the committee to present a workshop. During the session, counselors participated in several mindfulness activities, were exposed to lessons to build compassion and empathy, and provided with multiple resources for all grade levels including appropriate picture books. Tucker and Ashe were supported during the presentation by counselors Rachel Birsner and Takiyah Ingram.

For more, see this [Psychology Today article](#) or this [National Institute of Health's National Library of Medicine article](#).



Poughkeepsie Middle School counselors Shavon Ashe (left) and Ann Marie Tucker present at the New York State School Counselor Association Conference.

CI Weekly: iReady diagnostic set to begin after winter break

This week's Curriculum and Instruction Weekly presents tips to prepare students for taking the iReady diagnostic which will be given Jan. 9-27, 2023. It also provides teachers with information on using cognitive interest cues to help stimulate learning.

Upcoming events:

- **Wednesday, Dec. 7:** BOE workshop meeting, 6:30 p.m., Administration Building, 18 South Perry St.
- **Friday, Dec. 9:** Winter dance performance, 3 p.m., PHS, 70 Forbus St.; additional performance at 6 p.m. at Frances Daly Fergusson Dance Theater, Kenyon Hall, Vassar College. Admission is free.
- **Thursday, Dec. 15:** Winter concert, 6:30 p.m., PHS, 70 Forbus St. Admission is free.