

SUPERINTENDENT'S BRIEF

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

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Class of 2023 celebrates graduation



Members of Poughkeepsie High School's Class of 2023 toss caps in the air celebrating their graduation Friday, June 23, 2023. [SEE MORE PHOTOS ONLINE HERE](#)

While rain may have dampened the ground outside Poughkeepsie High School, it didn't dampen the spirits of the 174 Class of 2023 graduates and their friends and family who packed the auditorium Friday night, June 23, 2023. Principal Dr. Phee Simpson thanked everyone for coming together to "recognize the outstanding accomplishments of the Class of 2023," and then called for a moment of silence to remember those people who could not be in attendance so that they would be included. She then told the class that they "have the approval, respect and appreciation of everyone" in the

building and that the skills they learned at PHS were "crucial to any plan you have in life" and that "The work each of you completed shows to you that nothing is impossible."

Several speakers, including student board of education liaison Gabrihana Jones, reminded the class that what they've accomplished isn't theirs alone.

"Don't forget those who helped you get here. Those who supported you and loved you," she said.

Superintendent Dr. Eric Jay Rosser thanked the parents, community members, staff and community partners for their involvement in the students' lives. He encouraged students to "cherish all the memories of being a student in Poughkeepsie City School District. But memories are not just things of the past but they are waiting to be created in the future."

Salutatorian Kayla Hawkins said friends and family were key to her being on the stage speaking. She pointed out her sister, parents and 90-year-old grandmother who were in attendance. "I love them more than anything," she said, and then gave sage advice to her classmates which was punctuated by a large round of applause: "Never surround yourself with anyone who won't support you. You choose who you take with you!"

Valedictorian Amira Ibrahim continued the theme of recognizing others who contributed to her success.



Salutatorian Kayla Hawkins speaks during the June 23, 2023 commencement.



Valedictorian Amira Ibrahim delivers a message to the Class of 2023.

"To say my mother is the reason I'm standing here today would be an understatement," she said, relating how her mother left family and the home she loved to give a better life to her. Now, she wants to grow and do the same for immigrants who share her story. Ibrahim gave shout outs to the teachers and friends who impacted her and closed encouraging the class to "continue to strive for greatness and to make a positive impact."

Class counselor Franky Perez, who is retiring after 33 years with the district, was called up to speak and met with thunderous applause. He recounted meeting the class when they were in fifth grade and he was a counselor at the middle school.

"You, the Class of 2023 are resilient, capable, worthy and loved. I am so proud of every single one of you," he told them. "Develop your heart, be compassionate. Work for peace and never, never give up." Perez spoke in Spanish for a while and then returned to English to pay special tribute to Amara Parker, a student who passed away before being able to graduate. He then presented a diploma, posthumously to Parker's mother and family, drawing tears and applause from the

audience.

Keynote speaker Da'Ron Wilson, who graduated from PHS 30 years ago, kept his talk brief, telling students they need to be able to adapt and adjust through life.

"There are so many talented individuals in your class. You are the future leaders. I want to thank your families for sharing you with us," he said, reminding students that "you always have a place in Poughkeepsie."

Wilson left the class with this piece of advice: "In this world, you get what you settle for and the only thing I know that settles is dirt and there isn't any dirt here."

PHS' Class of 2023 had 36 honor graduates - students who maintained averages of 90 or better, each called by name at the start of the ceremony. Naiya Garvin was one of them.

Asked what she was looking most forward to, she said, "I'm excited to see what the future holds for me outside my comfort zone." She will attend Russell Sage College in Troy and plans to become an art therapist and work in mental health. She said people have the wrong impression of the school. "Poughkeepsie High School gives a lot of opportunities to people. While it may get a bad reputation, the school gave me a lot of opportunities I wouldn't have had."

Congratulations, Class of 2023!

Basics University preps students for school

In a little more than 12 hours of the Poughkeepsie City School District graduating 174 students from Poughkeepsie High School, the Community Schools office, in partnership with Day One Early Learning and Dutchess County, welcomed about 20 families representing who will soon be the district's youngest students to a day of learning and orientation at the Early Learning Center, Saturday, June 24, 2023.

The Poughkeepsie Basics University was developed to engage families of children aged 0-3 in conversation and activity that better prepares the soon-to-be Poughkeepsie City School District student to be school ready (see [Poughkeepsie Children's Cabinet Report of Early Learning](#)). "As educators, we have an



Poughkeepsie Basics University was a series of workshops and presentations designed to help parents prepare their children to start school. It took place Saturday, June 24, 2023 at the Early Learning Center.



Children engage in an activity during Poughkeepsie Basics University Saturday, June 24, 2023, at the Early Learning Center.

obligation to address the learning needs of all children so that they can maximize their potential. As in many urban school districts, our youngest learners often arrive to school developmentally behind, not possessing the skills or knowledge to be kindergarten ready. Understanding this, the Poughkeepsie City School District, Poughkeepsie Children's Cabinet and other strategic partners are working earnestly to support early learning prenatal to age 4." Superintendent Dr. Eric Jay Rosser, said.

"The Poughkeepsie Basics serves as the anchor for the district's [Community School's Early Learning Pillar](#). Our children are Pioneers from the time that they are in the womb so it is only right to welcome them and provide wraparound supports to them and their families from the time they are in the cradle," Natasha Brown, executive director of community schools, said.

The goal of Basic University is adopted from [The Basics](#) program created by Ron Ferguson, where infants, toddlers, and preschoolers have meaningful engagement to achieve their full potential—through early experiences that foster healthy brain development, learning, joy, and resilience.

The Saturday event welcomed families to a breakfast where parents were able to socialize with staff from the district and partnering organizations and among themselves, with the following presentations and workshops:

- What are The Basics?
- Maximize Love and Manage Stress.
- Play Based Workshops – Dr. Riess, Day One Early Learning Community.
- Nutrition and Wellness Work Shop – Poughkeepsie Farm Project.
- SNAP Benefits – Kendra Anderson, United Way.
- Health Insurance Options.
- Family Engagement Kits Distribution.
- Final Remarks.
- Graduation & Certificate Distribution.

Jessica Ortiz, community schools liaison, who was formerly a nursery school teacher along with Estefany Umbach, director of community engagement for Day One, facilitated the event. "The feedback that we received was amazing. Parents want to have these workshops regularly," Ortiz said.

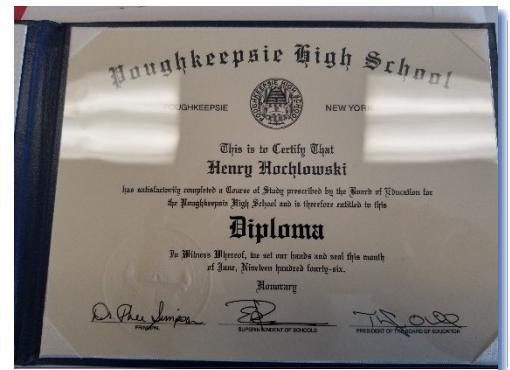
District awards veteran diploma

Poughkeepsie City School District worked with the Wappingers Central School District and Dutchess County Sheriff's Office to award a high school diploma to a now Wappingers Falls resident on Saturday, June 24, 2023.

Henry A. Hochlowski was a junior at Poughkeepsie High School in November 1943 when he was drafted into the U.S. Army. During his time in the service, Hochlowski served as a rifleman in Northern France, Rhineland and Central Europe. He was a prisoner of war for six months during that time and was honorably discharged in 1945. Hochlowski, now 97, lives in Wappingers Falls and was presented with his Poughkeepsie High School diploma during the Roy C. Ketcham graduation made possible by Operation Recognition, which is part of New York State Education Law allowing veterans who left school early to earn their diploma.

"I'm honored to be a part of issuing Mr. Hochlowski his high school diploma after all these years. His service to our country makes him, among others, a national hero." shared Dr. Eric Jay Rosser, superintendent of schools.

[See the MidHudsonNews article.](#)



Henry Hochlowski's diploma