

SUPERINTENDENT'S BRIEF

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

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Superintendent Dr. Eric Jay Rosser receives a student-created MLK canvas from art teacher Kathy Orza as Greg Mott, assistant superintendent for elementary education, watches.

MLK's Vision reminds us

In commemoration of Martin Luther King Jr.'s recently celebrated birthday, 5th-grade students in Warring Elementary School's Art Club, led by art teacher Kathy Orza, created two 20- by 29-inch canvases showcasing the late civil rights activist.

Orza presented Dr. Eric Jay Rosser, superintendent, with one of the two art pieces to display in his office. The other will remain in the school to support the school's beautification efforts and provide students with a visual reminder of the civil rights icon who emphasized the importance of working hard and being kind to others.

Orza is one of many Poughkeepsie City School District art teachers who specialize in developing in each student an interest in and the ability for creative expression using a variety of skills and techniques to achieve works that reflect the individual and/or group talents of the children she works with. Last year, Orza's work with Warring students was showcased in Albany (See [Superintendent Brief Issue #45 Volume 4 - Warring student' art on display in Albany](#)) and Warring and Morse student work was showcased during last year's John Iyoya's 26th Annual Children's Art Exhibit (See [Superintendent Brief Issue](#)

[#56 Volume 4 - Vassar gallery shows district artwork](#)). The collaborative art piece, created by 5th-grade students Dayli Yat Pan, Shayla White, Victoria Hernandez-Azamar, and Sincere Thomas, was created using a repurposed composite board and paint. Orza projected the image of Martin Luther King, Jr. on the board for students to maintain the image's painting boundaries. Rosser, who collects student art to showcase in his office, plans to place the canvas in a prominent viewing place where he and visitors can be reminded of how imperative it is for educational institutions to deliver on the democratic principle that equal and high-quality education is every children's civil right. Embracing Dr. King's vision and commitment, guaranteeing that children have access and opportunity to high-quality educational experiences must be paramount in everything we do and stand for.

Art from Atlanta inspires Poughkeepsie youth

Made possible by Vassar College, Poughkeepsie City School District budding artists have had the fortunate opportunity to explore their artistic abilities with local artist and educator Azia Brown, and PHS student Elijah Miller. During Saturday Morning Lights, students learned about artists in [Silver Linings: Celebrating the Spelman Museum Art Collection](#) and designed art by nearly 40 African American artists. The exhibition, on display at [The Francis Lehman Loeb Art Center](#), is a celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Spelman College Museum of Fine Art (SCMFA) located in Atlanta. Curated by Liz Andrews, SCMFA executive director, and Karen Comer Lowe, SCMFA curator in residence, the exhibit represents "'silver linings' - the glimpse of hope in the daunting times we found ourselves in as a world in the early pandemic." During the COVID-19 pandemic, Anne Collins Smith, a curator of collections and Spelman 1996 graduate, turned to the internet to bridge the chasm that COVID-19 had cast on society. The 25th-anniversary exhibition draws from Collins Smith's online exhibition telling the story of the Spelman Art Collection.



A variety of student art done during Saturday Morning Lights is displayed at The Francis Lehman Loeb Art Center. It includes painted plates and sculptures.



This past Saturday, Board President Tom O'Neill, Board Trustee Bob Creedon, Superintendent Dr. Eric Jay Rosser, and Assistant Superintendent Greg Mott, visited the Loeb Art Center's Bring a Friend event to view PCSD student projects that were inspired by artists representing the nearly 40 artists' works on display.

The exhibition is scheduled to end Jan. 28 at the Loeb Art Center before continuing its tour throughout various museums across the country. Special thanks to T. Barton Thurber, director of the Francis Lehman Loeb Art Center, Amanda Potter, assistant director of learning and community engagement, and [Art Bridges Foundation](#) for making this opportunity possible for Poughkeepsie City School District students.

"Beauty and the Beast" at Krieger Thursday

As part of Poughkeepsie City School District's investing in expanding Arts Education for district students, Krieger Elementary School is inviting the community to a performance of the Disney classic "Beauty and the Beast" tomorrow, Thursday, Jan. 25. Doors open at 5:45 p.m. with the show starting at 6 p.m. This year marks the third theatrical performance the school has produced, following "The Wizard of Oz" in 2023 and "Annie Jr." in 2022. The first two plays were less familiar to students, prompting third-grade teacher/play producer Nicole Schmitt to choose something they had seen and that would stretch the talents of several student actors who starred in the previous shows. "I've gotten to know their acting personalities and voices," Schmitt explained. "I was thinking about what play and what characters would fit them best, not to mention the costumes are so fun." Schmitt was ecstatic to see more newcomers involved, including fifth grader Mark Thomas who portrays antagonist Gaston. Forty-two students in grades three through five are involved in the production. "I had several new fifth graders audition and step into some lead roles," Schmitt said. "They have impressed me."

Thomas was encouraged to join the show after being asked to be involved last year by Schmitt who told him he could carry a tune. As rehearsal went on, he found that acting is not as easy as it looks, but has enjoyed it.

"I like it when I get on the stage," Thomas said. "It's good to try something new."

Taking on the lead role of Belle is fifth grader Lara Topaloglu who watched the 1991 animated film for inspiration, but made sure not to copy the original.

"I like to make things unique, I wouldn't make it the same," Topaloglu explained. "I was trying to use her as an inspiration on how to do it."

Topaloglu appreciates getting to sing and dance for this show, as well as watching her cast mates display hidden talents. "It's interesting to see your friends do stuff that you never knew they could do," she said. "You're inspired by them."



Krieger fifth grader Mark Thomas (Gaston) flexes his muscles, held up by Noah Adamson (Lefou) for his admirers, played by (L-R) Lucie Flores, Love Brown and Gabi Richards."



Krieger fifth grader Lara Topaloglu, as Belle, performs a song with Andriana Papamitoukas, Love Brown, Gabi Richards, Boubacar Bah, Camari Neil (back row L-R) and Cheyanne Elem, Kaileigh Kelly, Inayah Johnson (front row L-R) as villagers.

For Topaloglu, her favorite aspect of acting is seeing how life is in someone else's shoes. She encouraged future performers to not get discouraged if they do not like a role they are cast in because there are always open roles to fill.

"You don't always have to be the main character," Topaloglu said. "You can choose whoever you want to be." Fifth grader Caylee Wood pulls the stage's curtains in-between scenes, which she described as a tough job, but likes being able to meet new kids with similar interests.

"You can make friends with other crew members that you weren't friends with before," Wood said.

"There's a lot of new people."