

SUPERINTENDENT'S BRIEF

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

ISSUE NO. 57 | March 13, 2024

VOLUME 5



Elementary reconfiguration planning to continue in 24-25

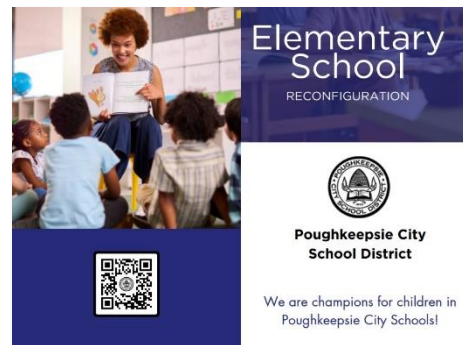
The Poughkeepsie City School District's exploration into reconfiguring its elementary schools will continue into the 2024-25 school year.

Under the leadership of Gregory Mott, assistant superintendent of elementary education, great strides have been made in determining the feasibility of the reconfiguration plan, with more important work to be finalized. Mott has led the Reconfiguration Taskforce in the effort to explore reconfiguring the district's elementary schools so that the district can strengthen its impact on the learning of its earliest learners.

The taskforce has [released an online survey](#) asking parents, caregivers, staff, and community stakeholders and organizations to provide additional information to help inform the final recommendation that will be made to the Board of Education.

Continuing the district's efforts into the next school year will provide more time to explore the details that will result in a seamless process for reconfiguring our elementary schools.

To learn more about the project, check out the district's [reconfiguration website](#) or access [Issue No. 46 Vol. 5](#) of the Superintendent's Brief.



Students aim for social change at Poetry Cafe



Brianna White recites a poem at the Poughkeepsie Middle School Black History Poetry Cafe on March 6.

Brianna White stood in the spotlight with dozens of students staring up at her on stage.

Her hands were in her pockets and her head was slightly bowed. But her voice didn't betray her nerves as the young poet spoke from her soul.

"I am wondering and confused. I wonder why people are sexist..."

Brianna was one of several performers March 6 as Poughkeepsie Middle School's Culture Shock club held its second annual Black History Poetry Café in the school's auditorium.

Later, Brianna would admit the experience "was a lot." The eighth-grade student wasn't nervous until around the fourth period

Wednesday. She brought a bear she received for her birthday, named Junior, on stage with her for comfort. Despite the nerves, she performed three poems, one of her own creation, one written by sixth-grade student Lei'Lani Huxtable, and one by Maya Angelou – the show's finale – "Still I Rise."

Another student, Bianca White, wrote her own poem, "Poverty," but stood quietly next to Culture Shock faculty adviser Selina Barrington, who read it. Later in the show, Bianca performed a poem herself along with Jai'viana Wood.

Those moments of courage, said Culture Shock faculty adviser John Hines, were what the event was all about.

"They persevered. They were quite nervous when they saw the amount of kids coming in," he said. "This is to give kids the confidence to be themselves and not worry about what other people think, and just do it." The theme of the day, though, was enacting social change, which Hines explained to the crowd of students, "is the transformation of society's norms, values, behaviors and institutions. It happens when individuals or groups challenge the status quo and work toward a better future for everybody. ... At its core, social change is about creating a more just and equitable society for all."

Hines told the crowd each of the four poems created by Culture Shock students were inspired by social change needed in the school or City of Poughkeepsie communities.

The event began with an African drum exhibition from special education teacher Christina Gurnee's class. It was followed by a performance of "Lift Every Voice and Sing" by sixth grade crisis intervention worker Dijonae' Roberts, which ignited the audience and quickly became a singalong.

Barrington noted to the crowd the song, which is widely known as the Black national anthem, was written as a poem in 1899 before it was put to music the following year.

The students in the crowd joined in again when two members of the drama club, Hevenlie Miller and Drianny Terrero, performed Whitney Houston's "I Wanna Dance with Somebody," and Neveah Smith sang "Diamonds," by Rhianna.

But, poetry as a conduit for change took the spotlight for much of the show.

Hines said as "poverty is a prominent issue" in the city, the student poets "wanted to bring it to the forefront." Bianca White's "Poverty" injected eight simple words with power:

"Poverty.
Homeless.
Broke.
Poor.
Empty-handed.
Humans.
Poor."

Brianna White's "I Am," she said, was inspired by Angelou and sexism:

"I am wondering and confused.
I wonder why people are sexist.
I hear mean remarks about men and women.
I see mistreatment toward women and men.
I want equal rights for men and women.
I am wondering and confused.
I pretend that sexism was never created.
I feel sad.
I touch the hearts of mistreated women.
I worry for the men and women I can't help.
I cry about sexism.
I am wondering and confused."

Someday, Brianna said, she hopes to become a pediatrician as she likes helping people. A stuffed bear can go a long way in that field. Before that, though, more poetry is in her future.



Top: The cast of the Poetry Café, including Culture Shock, drama club and African drummers, pose together for a photo. Bottom: Hevenlie Miller and Drianny Terrero, perform Whitney Houston's "I Wanna Dance with Somebody."



"I want to try," she said. "I like writing poetry and reading it, mostly."

The PMS Culture Shock was established during the 2022-23 school year as one of the many new opportunities the district's Comprehensive Arts Education Initiative created to expand student access to exploring and developing their potential through arts programming. Read about the inaugural Poetry Café' in [Issue No. 56 Vol. 4 of the Superintendent's Brief](#).



Janet Bisti, Patrice Woods and Jennie Henne presented at the i-Ready Success and Innovation Leadership Symposium in Lake George on March 6.

PCSD staff presents at innovation symposium

Poughkeepsie City School District administrators Janet Bisti, director of elementary education; Patrice Woods, director of teaching and learning; and Jennie Henne, fifth grade teacher at Krieger Elementary School, were invited by Curriculum Associates to facilitate a professional learning session at the i-Ready Success and Innovation Leadership Symposium in Lake George March 6. The session was based on a course Bisti and Woods had taught through the PCSD Teacher Resource Center, framed around the book "Leading and Managing a Differentiated Classroom," by Carol Ann Tomlinson.

Teachers participated in five sessions in which they learned strategies to differentiate in the classroom using the i-Ready curriculum and teacher toolbox.

After applying the strategies to her classroom, Henne found her students made significant progress on the i-Ready diagnostic and performance assessments.

"The teacher toolbox helps me to determine which assignments I can give to my students based upon their ability level," Henne said. "I can utilize the differentiated activities to best meet the needs of the students in my class. I then utilized the results from the activities to determine which students need additional support."

At the symposium, Woods and Bisti shared a brief synopsis of the book and the key strategy provided to teachers on how to use the teacher toolbox and prerequisite report to differentiate for students' needs, particularly in math. Participants received an in-depth description of the essential differentiation elements – content, process and product – and were shown how PCSD teachers use the tools in i-Ready to meet students where they are. Participants then engaged in a workshop in which they were invited to apply the strategies taught to a particular lesson.

Bisti added: "We are all about experiential practice. When folk participate in a new strategy, they not only are able to apply the skill immediately, but also are able to put themselves in the position of the learner and be better prepared to address challenges and misconceptions."

The session concluded with a collaborative discussion on ways to support teachers and administrators in their districts. Henne was able to provide participants with teacher input on ways she has incorporated these strategies into her classroom and how students have improved as a result.

Curriculum Associates and participants found the session to be extremely informative and helpful, stating the major benefits as "educating teachers about what differentiation actually is and the misconceptions," and "being more intentional about small group instruction," with many participants showing excitement about hosting their own book study.

PCSD presenters were also invited to present at the Association of Mathematics Teachers of New York State conference in Albany this fall.

The course, "Leading and Managing in a Differentiated Classroom," is currently being taught by Woods and Kate McGuinness, district elementary instructional coach. More courses will be available soon.