

SUPERINTENDENT'S BRIEF

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

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District welcomes staff back for 24-25

With much jubilee for the start of the 2024-25 school year, the Poughkeepsie City School District welcomed staff back on Tuesday to a host of speakers and professional learning opportunities.

Day One of the Superintendent Conference Days opened with a convocation, celebrating the start of the new school year and welcoming district employees.

A welcome from Board of Education President Fatimah Carmen Martinez Santiago energized the audience as she engaged them in a call-and-response exercise before speaking about the importance of the district's work on addressing the needs of students.

Mayor Yvonne Flowers welcomed the staff back by sharing her journey as a former Poughkeepsie district student. She explained how, if it were not for teachers and administrators, she would not be who she is today. She encouraged the audience to maintain their commitment to the city's children so that they would have greater opportunities to succeed.

Sen. Rob Rolison closed out the Welcomes by celebrating a new chapter in the district and the staff who will be responsible for writing the successes students will attain this school year.

Dr. Eric Jay Rosser, superintendent of schools, pointed out the district employees do not stand alone in this work, highlighting that champions at the Board of Education, city, and state levels are also positioned to actively engage in the work of bettering the outcomes of district students.

[Dr. Ebony Green](#), CEO of Cornerstone Equity Consultants, served as the keynote speaker. Drawing on more than 25 years of experience in leading schools, organizations and people, she helps audiences understand complex ideas and simplifies in a way that everyone, irrespective of difference, can find a space to connect, learn, grow and build.

Upon taking the stage, Green thanked the audience for their choosing to become "superheroes" to the children they committed to serve, reminiscing on the time when we all had educators who championed our success. "When you go through the course of your year and you struggle or feel stressed, I need you to know that you are special and you are appreciated," Green said.

Filled with personal introspection, Green's keynote address touched upon the essence of being of service to others and being mindful of yourself (growth and well-being) in the process. Salient to this theme was an emphasis on the importance of self-reflection with the intention of transforming into better versions of ourselves through the learned experiences and interactions with peers and students.

"Reflection really matters, because if we don't reflect we can miss it. If we don't allow people to inform our process, we become lost," she said. She also discussed the importance of finding time to rejuvenate while being of service to students, noting that without the energy to press forward our value as team members and educators will not yield the best results.



Dr. Ebony Green, above, and Mayor Yvonne Flowers, right, were among the speakers at the first of two Superintendent Conference Days.





Green concluded by thanking the audience again for their commitment as educators. In the closing message, Rosser reinforced that this year the district will deepen its focus on students' success, while also focusing on those that facilitate student learning and positive youth development – PCSD employees.

He announced that the Board of Education has authorized funding for each school for staff wellness, staff half-day professional learning opportunities being incorporated into the district calendar, and an extended winter break for instructional staff to find space to rejuvenate.

He also pointed out that while there is a great amount of work that still needs to be achieved for the district to fulfill its mission, there are several accomplishments worth noting that are evidence that the district's school, home and community approach to addressing the needs of students is working. Some of the recent accomplishments include:

- Morse transitioning from a school in "Receivership" to a school in "Good Standing."
- Clinton achieving "Good Standing" status, which resulted in all PCSD elementary schools being in that status for the first time in 13 years.
- Warring's continued success, highlighting preliminary 2023-24 3-5 NYSED State Assessment Math data for fifth-grade students, which indicate the percentage of students proficient surpassed the state average by 6%.
- Eighty-five percent of eighth-grade students at Poughkeepsie Middle School who took the Algebra I Regents passed.
- Seventy-eight percent of Poughkeepsie High School graduating seniors were accepted into a college and planned to attend.

Day Two on Wednesday included district employees continuing their professional learning before Thursday's welcoming of students back to school.

The complete schedule for Poughkeepsie's Superintendent Conference Days [is available online](#).



Pre-K and kindergarten teachers learning how to use new student iPads.



Assemblyman Jonathan G. Jacobson held a forum to discuss possible changes to the state's aid formula.

PCSD leaders lobby for state aid changes that benefit students

An effort to change the state's formula for allocating educational aid could put in jeopardy future funding to support student programming and staffing in the Poughkeepsie City School District and others. The state has commissioned The Rockefeller Institute of Government to assess New York's foundation aid education funding formula and discuss potential changes to how it works. As part of the study, the Rockefeller Institute wants to hear from education stakeholders across the state, including students, their parents and families, teachers, school staff and administrators.

Due to the Rockefeller Institute not scheduling any hearings in the Hudson Valley, [Assemblyman Jonathan G. Jacobson](#), who supports Assembly District 104, hosted a foundation aid hearing with legislators and school officials on Wednesday, Aug. 28, at Orange County Community College. Poughkeepsie district officials were among those invited.

Dr. Eric Jay Rosser, superintendent of schools, and Ken Silver, assistant superintendent of business, delivered compelling testimony on the need for the state to make adjustments to the formula.

"We support changes that will provide greater support and oppose any changes that will reduce financial support!" shared Rosser, citing the challenges the Poughkeepsie district faces and how the current formula misses the mark in providing adequate funding to support the varying and evolving academic, social, emotional and wellness needs of the city's children.

He highlighted data that states communities challenged with high rates of intergenerational poverty, limited opportunities for social and economic mobility, and limited taxing ability, such as Poughkeepsie, were at a



greater disadvantage, and cuts to school funding would only exacerbate what schools and communities are working hard to reverse.

The Rockefeller Institute is accepting public comments through Friday and the district strongly encourages everyone to provide feedback by submitting written comments on the Rockefeller Institute website's [online platform](#).

Over the past four years, Poughkeepsie students have benefited greatly from the financial resources that have been provided by the state (approximately 68% of the entire school district's budget). Any reduction to the amount of state funding will have an adverse impact on our children's ability to continue to strive. Please join the district in taking action to have our voices heard.

Board, leadership tour building improvements

When the 2023-24 school year ended, Marcos Rodriguez had a list of projects nearly 100 items long, each written on a whiteboard in his Poughkeepsie Middle School office.

Less than a week before students were scheduled to return for 2024-25, the Poughkeepsie City School District facilities director crossed many of the items off.

"Done... done... done," he slowly said as he crossed off items, before stepping back and looking at the board with slight amazement.

"We got to it all. That was a heck of a list."

As students return on Thursday, they will find improvements in each building across the district, from new gym floors in Clinton and Morse elementary schools, to a new brighter ceiling in the middle school, to kitchen and cafeteria renovations in the high school. Some improvements add to building safety, such as new security vestibules, while others add to the comfort of faculty and students, like new furniture and bike racks.

Much of the work was part of the Strong Schools Equal Strong Communities Capital Improvement project, while others came through funding and other grants obtained by the district.

As the projects neared their final stages, members of the Board of Education and district leadership toured all seven of the district's schools this past Friday.

Board members were provided with a list of projects as a guide of upgrades to view in each school. A complete list of the work [is available online](#).

Throughout the tour, board members cited areas where additional improvements are needed. Rodriguez took note and committed his team to addressing the items that can be handled locally. Dr. Eric Jay Rosser, superintendent of schools, shared that the district's engineering and architectural firm, CPL, is completing a building conditions survey that will inform future capital projects for the district to undertake.

Rodriguez noted a small amount of work, such as some interior door replacements, remain to be completed later this fall, when the district receives the new doors already ordered. Aesthetic work also continues on the high school's cafeteria renovation. Work in the kitchen included removing a divider in the serving line opening the space up, and new amenities that will allow for grab-and-go options, as well as salads. Rodriguez said each small improvement helps students take pride in being part of the district.

"They need to see their schools are nice places to be," he said. He thanked district leadership for facilitating a summer in which his team was constantly on the move.

"This is not a typical summer," he said, noting a grant allowed for more projects to be funded. "They asked me about what projects could get done. I kept bringing them, and they kept saying I could bring more."



New blue tiling outside bathrooms in Poughkeepsie Middle School is one of several building improvements made this summer.