

SUPERINTENDENT'S BRIEF

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

ISSUE NO. 78 | May 31, 2024

VOLUME 5



Universal Prekindergarten expands

The Poughkeepsie City School District's Universal Prekindergarten program will expand again this fall, adding an additional community partner agency and growing its dual language program.

Universal Pre-K (UPK) is an essential part of a young student's academic, physical and social-emotional development. PCSD UPK programs use research-based curricula and strategies that give our youngest learners opportunities to explore foundational numeracy and literacy skills that will assist them in being successful in school. In full-day classes, students learn numbers, counting, shapes, colors, letters, and phonics and phonemic awareness, as well as develop vocabulary and print knowledge. They also learn how to manage their emotions and make good choices, while developing 21st-century skills including critical thinking, collaboration, communication and critical thinking, both with and without the use of technology.

"Our robust curriculum will provide students with the tools that they will need to be successful in kindergarten and the years beyond," said Patrice Woods, director of teaching and learning.

In addition to the classes offered at the Smith Early Learning Center, PCSD also partners with several community organizations to provide the same high-quality UPK instruction at locations throughout the city. In the 2023-24 school year, UPK partners included Day One Early Learning Community, Astor Early Childhood, Holy Trinity schools and North Star Academy from the Boys and Girls Club of Poughkeepsie, serving a total of 172 students.

In the upcoming school year, PCSD will add an additional partner at the Louis Greenspan Day Care Center on the Dutchess Community College campus. The Smith Early Learning Center will also offer an additional UPK class, bringing its total to five classes, and expand their dual language program to two classes. The dual language program, which began in 2022-2023 with one class of pre-K and one class of kindergarten, offers students an opportunity to learn English and Spanish simultaneously. The class is designed to support language acquisition for all students, half of whom are native Spanish-speaking and half of whom are native English-speaking, in both English and Spanish. The students alternate language days, where one day they are taught in and speak English and the next day Spanish. They learn concepts across both languages and bridge the language and academic gaps between the two. The ultimate goal of the program is bilingualism and biliteracy.



Both the Universal Prekindergarten program and the dual language program will add opportunities for students in the fall.



UPK registration deadline

The deadline for Universal Prekindergarten registration is June 3. The program is available to all PCSD students who will be 4 years old by Dec. 1, 2024, and spots are given by lottery.

Visit the [district website](#) to register and learn more about the program.



Bilingualism "is a superpower," said Dr. Jennifer Daddino, director of multilingual programs and academic support. "The U.S. Department of Education Raise the Bar: Lead the World initiative names a focus area goal of providing all students with a pathway to multilingualism. The dual language program embedded within our pre-K programming does just this," Daddino said. "This amazing opportunity sets our young learners on the pathway to bilingualism. This pathway has shown to lead to sociocultural, cognitive, educational and economic benefits."

This year, the program included a class of first-grade students, and next year it will extend to second grade as well as add a second class of pre-K students.

As a result of the increased time in school, dedicated and trained teachers of early childhood development, and the consistent work of administrators, teachers, and teacher's aides, there has been an increase in students entering kindergarten at grade level in reading and math, as well as having a stronger understanding of school expectations, routines, problem-solving skills and self-regulation.

Part of PCSD's commitment to early childhood education includes providing high-quality school-readiness programs that support the whole child. Janet Bisti, director of elementary education, said the district intends on continuing to build the UPK program and grow its community partnerships.

"Children who attend prekindergarten programs are not only more prepared for school but also are more likely to graduate high school and have successful careers," said Bisti. "When students enter school with a strong academic foundation and the social-emotional skills to work with others, independently, solve problems and manage frustration, they are better equipped to face challenges and more likely to persevere through struggles."

Morse class visits Marist after attendance win

Stefanie Lombardi's fifth-grade class had near-perfect attendance for the month of April.

As a reward, they got to go to college.

The Morse Elementary class last week took a tour of Marist College in which they were able to see buildings, learn about the campus experience, eat pizza and hang out with the Red Foxes baseball team.



Stefanie Lombardi's fifth-grade class visited Marist College.

The trip was the latest step in the Poughkeepsie City School District's ongoing effort to raise awareness for higher education among its younger students and to combat absenteeism.

Kelly Semexant, college and workforce readiness counselor, combined those goals by holding a districtwide attendance contest in which the fifth-grade class with the highest attendance in April was the one that would visit Marist.

In addition to Semexant and Lombardi, elementary Caseworker Ariel Bland and School Counselor Olivia Post chaperoned, as did National Honor Society member Elijah Poole-Davis. The tour was given by Crystal Purfield, the director of the Liberty Partnerships Program at Marist, which works with the Poughkeepsie district to prepare students for graduation and college.

Lombardi said the 14 students on the trip "were in awe of the size of the college and the possibilities available to them in their future.

"For many of the students, coming from tough home lives, the thought of attending a great college is just a dream," Lombardi said. "This trip planted the seed that that doesn't have to be the case."

The tour included the library and classrooms, as well as games in a conference room and pizza for lunch. Though the college has already held its commencement and most students have left for the summer, the group encountered the baseball team practicing and the Red Foxes called the young Pioneers onto the field for a group photo. The students also received Marist T-shirts.



Many of their questions regarded campus life.

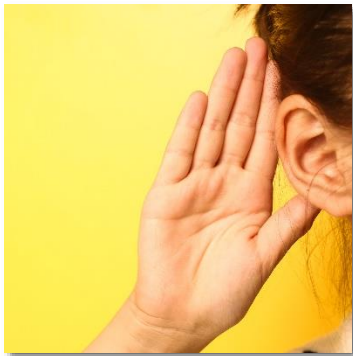
"One of the kids was asking, 'Would I go home on weekends? Do I sleep here overnight?'" Semexant recalled. "It's fun to just explain what dorming actually looks like and what it means. You don't eat lunch with the same people every day, and there's a dining hall, it kind of starts them thinking about the social aspect of it, too. They were intrigued by that."

Poole-Davis was another highlight for the students. They were able to ask the Binghamton University-bound senior questions in advance of the tour and talk to him throughout.

"It was kind of weird at first to have kids looking up to me," Poole-Davis said. "It was nice to show the younger kids around. Give them some confidence, make them feel less nervous."

"I think it's nice hearing from someone who looks like you and came from your area that things are going to be OK and what to look forward to and what to expect," he said.

Lombardi, who said the class has "continuous conversations about college and careers," added Poole-Davis talked about the college application process and scholarship opportunities. "The students were able to see that with hard work and dedication that they, too, can achieve greatness," she said.



Be heard: Survey aids improvement effort

An annual survey of Poughkeepsie Central School District students, parents and staff is underway.

The Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness, or DTSDE, is intended to aid school districts' efforts to improve in six key areas through obtaining transparent feedback and evaluation of a district's operations from its stakeholders. The online survey is available on the district's [DTSDE page](#), with different surveys offered for the [elementary](#) and [secondary levels](#). The window to provide responses ends June 7.

The survey, which includes thoughtfully crafted questions, was designed by the New York State Education Department. Six tenets of effective school systems and instructional practices were identified for evaluation following extensive research: systems and organization, school leadership, curriculum, instruction, social-emotional learning, and parent and community engagement. Following the survey period, results are analyzed and reflected upon. Results are posted annually on the district's [DTSDE page](#), and the current survey's results will be posted later this year. The survey is an important tool for driving district improvement and strategic planning. Through evaluation, the district gains a deeper understanding of where to target improvement efforts while also identifying which existing efforts have been most successful.

The district wishes to thank all those who have already contributed feedback to this important effort and encourages all who have not to take the time to do so. Your feedback is highly valued and valuable toward making a positive impact on student experience and achievement.

Other newsletters to keep you informed:

Poughkeepsie City School District publishes a variety of newsletters throughout the year. Here are the available newsletters now: [Curriculum & Instruction Weekly](#), May 31, 2024; [Mental Health in the Spotlight](#), May 2024; [Mental Health & Wellness](#), May 2024; [7 Mindsets for staff](#), May 2024; [7 Mindsets for parents](#), May 2024.

Upcoming events

- **June 3:** Poughkeepsie High School Awards and Scholarships Celebration: 6 p.m. at 70 Forbus St.
- **June 4:** Elementary All-District Concert: 6 p.m. at Poughkeepsie High School, 70 Forbus St.
- **June 5:** Board of Education regular meeting:
6:30 p.m. at the Columbus School Administration Building, 18 South Perry St.
- **June 6:** Athletics Department Awards Banquet:
5 p.m. at Poughkeepsie High School's gymnasium, 70 Forbus St.