

SUPERINTENDENT'S BRIEF

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

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A Week for Seniors, Honors



Seniors graduating with a GPA of 90 or above stand on stage at the annual Poughkeepsie High School Award and Scholarships Celebration Monday. More than \$142,000 in scholarships and awards was given to the Class of 2024.

Signing Day celebrates Pioneers' future plans

Each Poughkeepsie High School senior was treated like a star, for as long as it took them to sign their name. One by one as their names were called, the seniors walked to a table set up in the school's cafeteria and sat down in front of a navy blue backdrop of Pioneers logos, with a swarm of friends following close behind. As they signed the book sitting on the table with both their name and their post-graduation plans, their friends cheered and captured the moment with photos and video, as if they were documenting a professional athlete announcing their team of choice.

Surrounding them was a table of food and a table in which art students painted faces. On the opposite side of the cafeteria was a makeshift photo booth, in which students could pose with friends. And DJ Da'Ron Wilson, the district's executive director of school engagement, was filling the room with music in between when each name was called. Senior Signing Day turned Wednesday morning into a party solely for the impending graduates. "I've been celebrating all my friends and all of the people that I've grown up with for my entire life," said Schuyler Birrittella, who will attend the University of Wisconsin on a full scholarship. "It's so fun to see where everyone's going."



Jada Morgan signs Poughkeepsie High School's senior book at Signing Day Wednesday.



Above: Travis Jenkins Jr. is swarmed by friends as he signs. The track and field standout earned a full scholarship to Syracuse University. Below: Wisconsin-bound Schuyler Birrittella takes a picture of two friends at the photo booth.



In particular, the party honored any senior who had registered their plans for next year with Kelly Semexant, the district's college and workforce readiness counselor and the architect of the event. A majority of the students have plans to attend college, be it as far away as Birrittella in Madison, Wisconsin or as close as Dutchess Community College. Some also proudly reported they had earned full scholarships to places like Syracuse and Cornell. Still, others in the fall will attend trade schools and some will begin their career track immediately. Semexant made it a point as she announced the names to emphasize all should be feted equally.

"We know that not all of our students go to college and a lot of the time they feel like they're not being celebrated," she said afterward. She noted one student had just told her he signed a contract with a construction

company following an internship. "Why would I not celebrate that?"

She also reminded the students she was still available to help guide anyone who has not made a concrete plan for the future. In addition to giving each student a moment to shine with a turn at signing the book, the district gave out roughly 20 raffle prizes – a student received one raffle ticket for each college acceptance letter they shared with Semexant – and awards for the student who submitted the most acceptances and applied for the most scholarships. The prizes included tickets, water bottles and sunglasses donated by the Hudson Valley Renegades, but most were items to assist with their future needs,

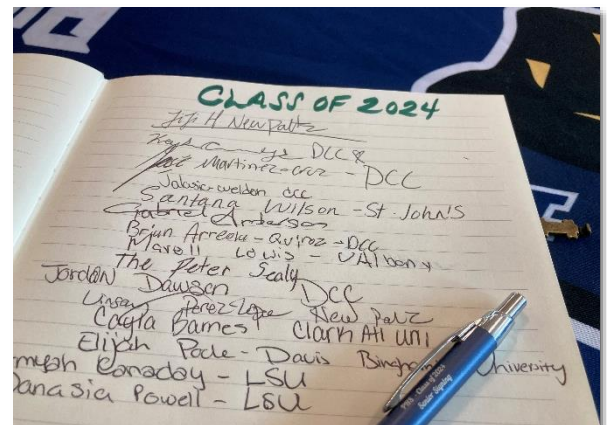
such as gift cards, sticky notes, staplers, planners and picture frames.

Gabriel Anderson's future plans include attending the University of Pittsburgh's Physician Assistant program, which admitted just 32 students for the fall. Wearing jeans she decorated with the word "PITT" and her class year in the school's blue-and-yellow colors, she said she wanted to find a campus in which the students participate in activities.

"I like their school spirit," she said.

Anderson was also among the many students who appreciated the party's atmosphere. Semexant said the idea was to give the students a relaxed gathering compared to the more formal events like Monday's Awards and Scholarships Celebration in which whole families are invited. "I've been doing those all week," Anderson said. "I was at the award ceremony and the (National Honor Society) induction ceremony. It feels nice to just be celebrated."

Linsay Perez-Lopez, the National Honor Society President, represented her own future school by wearing a SUNY New Paltz T-shirt. She said she liked the campus' proximity and beauty, as well as the school's academic standards. She wants to study biochemistry on a pre-med track.



Each senior signed not only with their name but also their plans for next year.



Of the party, she said, "I think it's really fun to be able to celebrate everyone. Signing in the book is a nice way to remember everything."

The book each senior signed isn't only a keepsake of the Class of 2024. It's a burgeoning heirloom. It's the same book members of the Class of 2023 signed, and before that the Class of 2022, Semexant's first year running the signing day.

"It's something that I would love for this to stay for years, long after I'm gone," she said. "We have generations here in Poughkeepsie. We have generations on generations. Who knows? In 20 years someone may look back and say, 'Oh my God, that's my mom's name in there.' I wanted something long-lasting."



Above: From left, Board of Education member Dr. Andrew Rieser stands with Salutatorian Abass Na-Aata and Valedictorian Oliva Groucher. **Below:** Senior Jayzlo Alexis-Taylor hugs Mary Whitted after winning the Curtis L. Whitted Jr. Scholarship.

Class of '24 awards night sees \$142,000 in local scholarships

In opening Poughkeepsie High School's annual Awards and Scholarships Celebration, Joseph Mazzetti had a message for the assembled senior scholars:

"You have the capacity to effect change," the 12th-grade assistant principal said. "Dare to think big, dream big and accomplish great things, even if they seem small at first." He also had a message for the family, friends and staff who had likewise come to the school's auditorium Monday to honor them:

"When you applaud for our scholars this evening," he said, "please applaud loud and hard."

Poughkeepsie's Class of 2024 made that an easy task. Through the course of the evening, more than \$142,000 in local scholarship awards were announced, which will go to



offsetting college expenses. In all, more than 50 students were honored, including 33 who came on stage as Honor Graduates – those who will complete school with a grade-point average of 90 or above – nearly 40 who received scholarships, and others receiving academic and service awards. "It's a way to represent the hard work I've been doing," senior Maritza Juarez said, noting her parents were able to "see how hard I've actually worked in school and how far I want to reach in life."

Ten students left the ceremony having earned three or more scholarships, which ranged from one-time awards of several hundred dollars to \$4,000 to be paid over the course of a four-year college experience. While some were created specifically for Poughkeepsie students, such as [12 Board of Education scholarships](#), most

were established by area businesses, organizations and private entities, many of which considered students from outside the district.

"This event is a testament to the outstanding contributions made by our students to our school community," Mazzetti said.

Most of the scholarships were highly competitive. In announcing the two winners of this year's Corey G. Ingram Memorial Scholarships – an honor created in the memory of a 2006 Poughkeepsie graduate who died while serving in the U.S. Navy in 2017 – his uncle, Dr. Ted Ingram, noted approximately 70 students applied. The scholarships went to Jahshawne



Jose Martinez-Cruz hugs social studies teacher Catherine Bryson after winning the Carrie Chapman Award for political, economic and social awareness.



Corey G. Ingram Memorial Scholarship winners Maelia Vasquez and Jahshawne Dyer, second from left and center, pose with Dr. Ted Ingram, left, and Corey Ingram's parents, Jerry and Jacqueline Ingram.

Dyer and Maelia Vasquez. The meaning of the awards resonated for both. Dyer noted he appreciated all the work the family has done in the community. Vasquez said she thinks about Ingram often, as she drives past Corey Ingram Circle each day.

"It's such a nice feeling to know that even if you're not here, you're always in somebody's heart," she said.

Poughkeepsie's top students were among those winning their share of the honors. Valedictorian Oliva Groucher and Salutatorian Abass Na-Aata were given the Pioneer Excellence Scholarships; Groucher's honors also included a prestigious Mid-Hudson Valley Alumnae Chapter Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc. Scholarship, and Na-Aata, Elijah Poole-Davis and Peter Sealy Jr. earned Beyond The Dream Foundation Scholarships awarded through the Poughkeepsie Alumni Chapter of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity.

Na-Aata earned eight scholarships, while Poole-Davis and Sealy each took home four.

"It's the end of high school for me," said Sealy, who also won a Poughkeepsie Leaders of the Future Scholarship after serving as the student liaison to the Board of Education. "The night represents how hard I worked and what I did in high school. These awards are just showing my accomplishments."

Students earn induction into National Honor Society

Matteo Howard spent time as a volunteer assistant for a program at the Early Learning Center.

The school had set up stations for the students at which they could do activities like making bracelets, cookies and other crafts.

"I was helping the kids make their cookies however they wanted," the Poughkeepsie High School sophomore said. "It was a fun experience, something new I've never done before."

The time he spent went toward the community service required for admittance to the most prestigious student organization in the country, one that stresses the value of not only educational excellence but also community leadership. On Monday afternoon, 37 students from Poughkeepsie lit a ceremonial candle and joined its ranks at the school's annual National Honor Society Induction Ceremony.

"It's a big responsibility," said Will Matias, a Poughkeepsie junior and 2023 inductee, who delivered the National Honor Society Pledge at the ceremony. "You're picked from the brightest and brightest of the school. The kids who are in the program deserve a spot. It's a major accomplishment."



National Honor Society inductees, like Jocelyn Rojas-Antonio, above, and Matteo Howard, right, lit ceremonial candles before assembling in front of the Poughkeepsie High School stage.





National Honor Society chapter President Lindsay Perez-Lopez offered opening remarks during the induction.

to play in bolstering the school and district as a whole.

"Most of them are 10th graders," she said. "As they're being inducted, we're hoping as 11th and 12th graders they're going to become the role models for our students."

Of his volunteering, Howard said he likes "helping the younger generation coming up... lead them down the right path if their older siblings can't."

Inductee Samuel Lawal's community service hours included assisting at The Lunch Box community meal program run by Dutchess Outreach. He said he was surprised he was admitted to the prestigious society. "It means a lot to me," he said.

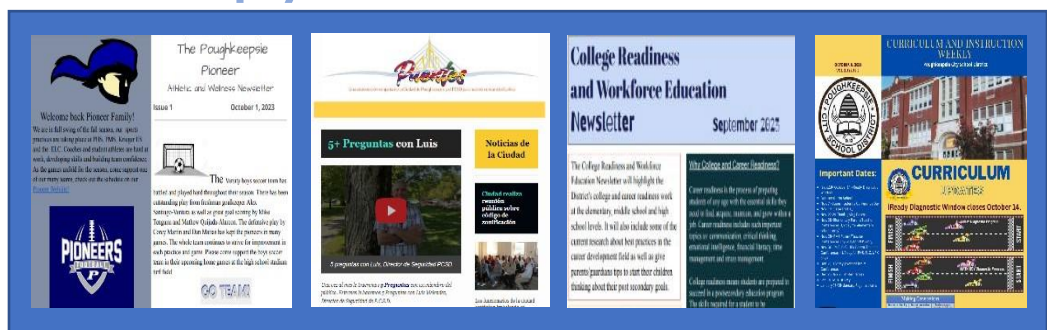
In congratulating the inductees to close the ceremony, high school principal Dr. Phee Simpson said "to embrace the limitless possibilities that lie ahead for each of you.

"As you embark on this new chapter, remember those traits we are celebrating you for here tonight," she said. "Seek our knowledge endlessly. Boldly spread kindness. Lead with empathy. And let your unique character shine through. Actively honing these traits will lead you to achieve all the greatness everyone here sees in you, and you should see in yourself."

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](#), June 7, 2024;
[College Readiness and Workforce Education](#),



May 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 12:** Poughkeepsie High School Drama Club and Poughkeepsie Youth Theater performance of "Annie Up": 6 p.m. at the Family Partnership Center, 29 N. Hamilton St.
- **June 15:** Superintendent's Fireside Chat: 9 p.m. at Poughkeepsie Middle School, 55 College Ave. Topic: 2025 – 2030 Strategic Planning Process and Community Involvement.
- **June 19:** Juneteenth: All schools and district offices will be closed.