

SUPERINTENDENT'S BRIEF

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

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Scholarships soar for Class of '25



Top: Each student who will graduate with an average of 90 or better stand together for a photo. Below, left: Jhanea Stewart poses with Megan Gomes. Below, right: Israa Hadine receives her RPI scholarship from math teacher Laura Tietz.

Israa Hadine didn't know she would be announced as a winner of the Rensselaer Medal Tuesday night.

The award is a merit scholarship worth \$160,000 – \$40,000 per year. It's given by Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute to an outstanding student interested in studying science, engineering and technology, should they decide to attend the college.

Hadine did have an inkling, though. For one, she was a junior invited to Poughkeepsie High School's Annual Awards and Scholarships Celebration, a night generally reserved for seniors.

"I'm so grateful," she said. "I definitely worked hard for what I received."

Not to be outshined by a member of the Class of 2026, Poughkeepsie High School's graduating seniors also worked hard for what the whopping amount of awards they received Tuesday.

More than \$171,000 in scholarships – in addition to that Rensselaer Medal – were officially announced at the ceremony, a total that is roughly 20% higher than last year.

Throughout the year, members of the school staff work not only to expose students to higher education opportunities but also to connect them with scholarship applications and offers. Among other efforts, College Readiness and Workforce Education Counselor Kelly Semexant maintains a running list of available scholarships, complete with requirements and deadlines, and circulates each through ParentSquare messages to students and staff.





Will Matias receives a scholarship from College Readiness and Workforce Education Counselor Kelly Semexant on one of his 10 trips to the stage Tuesday.

Rochester Institute of Technology's Computing Award and Women in STEM Award, respectively. The awards each represent scholarships valued at \$96,000 – \$24,000 per year – should the student choose to attend RIT. Thirty different seniors Tuesday were announced as scholarship recipients. Nine students each walked away with scholarships totaling at least \$10,000 cumulatively. Among them, nine students were awarded \$5,000 each from the Hudson Valley Federal Credit Union, two students won \$8,000 Applewood Leadership scholarships, two won \$6,000 Joseph H. Mildred C. McManus scholarships, and nine won \$1,000 Poughkeepsie Public Schools Foundation scholarships, in addition to many others. Board of Education Member Dr. Andrew Rieser announced those that were awarded by the board.

In providing opening and closing remarks, Assistant Principal Joseph Mazzetti called the students "leaders of tomorrow," and implored them to continue making positive impacts on the world.

"Recognition is not just about celebrating their achievements, it's about celebrating their potential to inspire change," he said.

Valedictorian Jhanae Stewart walked away with several awards – but most notably the \$2,000 Justin Andrew McClain Scholarship, as it came with an oversized, Publisher's Clearing House-style check. Megan Gomes, mother of the late McClain, said Stewart's application essay "just spoke to me." The Poughkeepsie High School graduate died in May 2024 at the age of 23.

"There were so many parallels to Justin's own life," Gomes said. "Jhanae started crocheting in the midst of the pandemic. Justin made masks for the community and for my job in the midst of the pandemic because he loved fashion."

Stewart said the ceremony is something students look forward to each year.

"The majority of us have been submitting scholarship entries," she said.

"Finally, we find out if we got them or not. There's a feeling of satisfaction that an entire year of hard work has paid off."

Karyne Perez-Rojas remembered attending as a member of the AFJROTC during her sophomore year, thinking she would be among those receiving honors one day. Tuesday she won the Peter Ulbrandt Memorial Award. "This is exciting," she said.

Hadine praised the ceremony, as well. "I feel like honors students, valedictorian, salutatorian, they should get the recognition they deserve," the junior said. "They worked for four years. This night is the perfect night to do so."

As for the Rensselaer Medal, she's keeping her options open before committing to RPI.

"I still have a year," she said. "I'm just going to take it one step at a time."

"Seeing the total amount award go up by nearly 20% feels like proof that all of those nudges, reminders and extra efforts paid off for the students," she said. Semexant and 12th grade counselor Stacy Lee ran the presentation, with other members of the staff and some representatives from specific scholarships also speaking and presenting awards. The annual ceremony is not only an opportunity to announce the outcome of scholarship applications but also for staff to give recognition awards in specific areas of academics or service. At the start of the ceremony, each student who will finish high school with an average of 90 or better was announced and brought onto the stage.

In addition to the new scholarships, two previously announced recipients were also honored Tuesday: juniors Rob Miranda and Aubrey Wood won the



Kelly Semexant presents an award to Carlene Cameron, who reached the stage seven times.

A walk to remember

Courtney Conethan spotted his cousin the moment she stepped into Morse Elementary's cafetorium Friday morning.

As he saw Tatiana Slater walk in near the front of a parade of Poughkeepsie High School seniors, each draped in a blue gown and a graduate's cap, the first grade student's face lit up and he waved. She broke from the line with arms spread and he jumped into her for a lengthy hug.

Slater said she knew she would see the cousin, who is more like a little brother, in the school; she just didn't know it would be steps past the front door.

"I thought I made him cry. I started crying," she said, welling up again.

Dozens of soon-to-be graduates enjoyed a festive, nostalgic and, at times, emotional morning Friday during the annual Senior Walk. The Class of 2025 boarded buses and visited each school building in the district, in addition to the administration building and City Hall, where they took a group photo. At each stop, they marched the halls and were greeted by students lining up to cheer them on. There were also detours to the Krieger playground and a performance from cheerleaders at Clinton, to the delight of the seniors.

For the younger students like Courtney, he agreed, seeing the senior Pioneers in cap and gown serves as inspiration to graduate, as well. For the older students, it's a trip down



Students greeted the seniors as they walked the halls of the Smith School Early Learning Center. Later they took a group photo at City Hall. Find video of the day on the [district's YouTube page](#).

memory lane. One senior left Morse in tears after a teacher gifted him a lunchbox with a unicorn on it; when he was her student, he had repeatedly told her he wanted to be a unicorn.

After the tour, the students enjoyed field day at the school's athletic complex, complete with a barbeque lunch and a DJ. Slater, a Morse product herself, said the younger students and the school buildings made the trip a special experience.

"We went to the administration building, we walked through City Hall, I wasn't teary or emotional," she said.

"It's the little kids; I was just here. I remember playing on this playground. I saw my third grade teacher, I haven't seen her since fifth grade. And my softball coach is here. I saw her and I started crying."





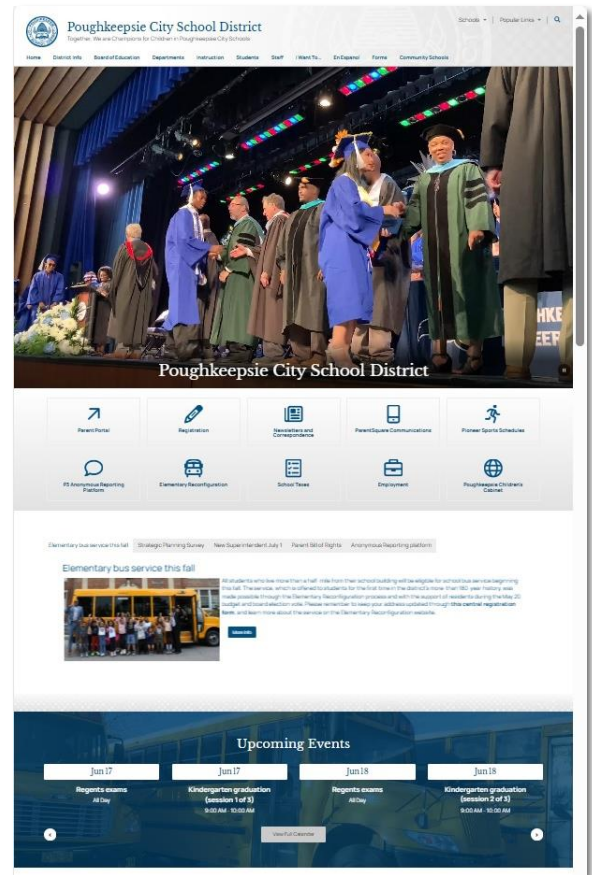
New websites launch Monday

In a year that's been filled with transformation, next week will bring another exciting change. The new Poughkeepsie City School District websites will launch Monday afternoon, bringing a fresh, clean look to our pages and increasing the accessibility of information. You won't have to change anything to find the new pages; they'll be available at the same URLs you've already used to access the district and school homepages, such as PoughkeepsieSchools.org.

The new web platform is called "Smart Sites" and it's provided through the same company that administers the ParentSquare platform to which all of our families are already accustomed. This enables us to seamlessly integrate messages you're already seeing on ParentSquare into our website and condense our calendars into one source to ensure all families are aware of the many events available throughout the district.

More than that, the new platform drastically increases our capability for incorporating video clips and packages onto the site, as well as our social media feeds, giving us additional avenues for showing off all the great things happening here. As part of that, the district site features a YouTube channel that will include not only videos of the schools but also each Board of Education meeting, making following the district's governance more accessible.

Our hope is that you find the new, cleaner look easier to navigate and connect with important information. And though Monday's launch marks the finish line for our work preparing the sites for you to see, it's also just the first step in our online revitalization. You'll find, when you visit the pages, that plenty of information you'll want to know is still missing. This includes details of what teachers and services will be provided in each elementary building following the onset of our reconfiguration plan, as well as updates to existing programs. Throughout the summer we'll be adding pages upon pages of information to the site to prepare it for the fall. We'll also be adding many, many photos. No website is a finished product; we aim to update constantly as new ideas arise. If there is something specific you would like to see added to the sites, email Public Information Officer Mike Benischek at MBenischek@PoughkeepsieSchools.org with your suggestions.



Upcoming events and ceremony schedule

- **June 18:** School Board meeting: 6:30 p.m. at the Jane Bolin administration building, 18 S. Perry St.
- **June 19:** Juneteenth (all schools and district office closed)

Graduation and Moving Up Ceremony Schedule (June 17-27)

- **Pre-Kindergarten:** Friday, June 20 at 9 a.m. at Poughkeepsie Middle School's auditorium.
- **Kindergarten:** Tuesday, June 17 at 9 a.m.; Wednesday June 18 at 9 a.m. and noon; all at Poughkeepsie Middle School's auditorium.
- **Fifth Grade:**
 - Krieger: Friday, June 20 at 9 a.m. at the school's cafeteria and gym.
 - Warring: Friday, June 20 at 9 a.m. at the school's gym.
 - Morse: Monday, June 23 at 9 a.m. at Poughkeepsie Middle School's auditorium.
 - Clinton: Monday, June 23 at noon at Poughkeepsie Middle School's auditorium.
- **Eighth Grade:** Tuesday, June 24 at 11 a.m. at Poughkeepsie Middle School's auditorium.
- **Poughkeepsie High School commencement:** Friday, June 27 at 6 p.m. at the school's football field, with the auditorium serving as the backup site in the event of inclement weather.