

SUPERINTENDENT'S BRIEF

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

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New playgrounds add accessibility, safety at schools

The Poughkeepsie City School District is replacing and augmenting the playgrounds at each of its five elementary buildings with the intention of adding safety, accessibility and explorative possibilities for the students.

The districtwide project may be completed as soon as the end of this week. Most of the schools will have completely new play areas, and new equipment has also been installed at schools like Morse Elementary, where some of the existing structures already met modern needs.

The new sites will look distinctly different and more inviting than the outdated facilities they replaced. Gone are the beds of mulch that served as padding for the students but also could be tracked into buildings and encourage insect populations. In their place is a rubber flooring that prevents weeds and mold from forming and has been shown to more effectively prevent injury in the event of a fall or collision.

"We were looking to upgrade the playgrounds for safety purposes and for accessibility for all of our students," said Janet Bisti, director of elementary education. "For example, we have some students with sensory concerns. We wanted to make sure we had playgrounds that were supportive of their particular needs. We ensured there's a wide variety of equipment at all buildings."

This is evident at the swing sets. At each school there's a large circular swing with netting, which can either accommodate a student who may be wheelchair-bound, or simply serve as a swing multiple students can ride at once.

Construction at each school began in May and Director of Facilities Marcos Rodriguez said the project is ahead of schedule.

The components chosen for each school were also deliberate, as officials sought to create playgrounds



From top: New playground equipment is being installed at Krieger, Morse and Warring elementary schools.



that the entire population of elementary ages and abilities could use.

Each school has some similarities – swing sets, slides, balance elements – but their layout and look varies. Krieger and Clinton feature a more industrial appearance with bars on which to climb, while Morse and Warring look more traditional, with climbing walls with footholds. The Early Learning Center includes a mix of styles. Warring and Krieger feature a ropes element in which students can traverse a jungle gym-like expanse by moving from one vertical rope to the next.

“Anyone who comes to our new playgrounds is able to enjoy them,” Bisti said.

Playgrounds are an important part of the educational experience. For most of the day, a young student is told what to learn and how to learn it, with assignments structured by teachers. But on the playground, the students need to find their own way. That leads to learning how to collaborate and coordinate games themselves.

“They really learn how to use teamwork together to solve a problem, to take turns, to talk to one another to solve their problems,” Bisti said. “They come up with games. It’s a creative space for them to both use their physical bodies running around but also their brains: ‘What’s the story that goes along with why we’re climbing up this rope or this slide? Why do we have to escape the tower?’ They come up with these great stories and ideas. It’s a creative outlet for them.”

Patrice Woods, director of teaching and learning, noted also the social and emotional learning benefits of unstructured playtime.

“It’s a time for them to decompress,” she said. “It’s a chance to step away for a bit and reenergize.”

Dr. Eric Jay Rosser, superintendent of schools, said, “Play is an extremely important element in positive youth development, particularly for elementary school students. Who doesn’t have cherished memories of our youth on the playground? These state of the art playgrounds are one of many examples of how PCSD is continuing to address the needs of the whole child.”



The padded floor for the Early Learning Center’s playground was being poured Monday (top). The surface at Clinton Elementary (below) was among the last to be poured.



Grants allow teachers to innovate in classroom

Community gardens. Guest speakers. Yoga programs. Classroom experiences across the Poughkeepsie City School District this year were bolstered by the advent of the Teacher Innovation Grant program, which enabled teachers to apply for \$500 grants to make targeted academic, social and emotional learning or wellness lessons possible for their students.



District teachers will again have that opportunity in 2024-25, with the deadline to apply for grants approaching on June 24.

Some of the programs funded this year added new elements to the curriculum – like Krieger fifth-grade teacher Andrea Boccio's yoga program, which may expand school-wide next year. Other programs helped add dimensions to existing curriculum, said Janet Bisti, director of elementary education.

"There's lots of opportunities for embedding social emotional learning and opportunities for bringing the curriculum to life with real-world experiences," she said. "Project-based learning tends to bring about those real-world experiences that children don't really get just from a book in a classroom."

Other examples of possible programs include hands-on experiences in such areas as science or art; mental health or mindfulness initiatives, fostering home-school partnerships, enrichment trips and others.

"If the teachers are motivated by an idea they came up with, they're going to be more engaged and more enthusiastic about presenting it to the students, which then is going to increase the students' motivation and their understanding of things," said Patrice Woods, director of teaching and learning.

Other teachers may also be motivated, Bisti added.

"Once a teacher sees something cool happening in one classroom they're going to want to try something cool too. And it will spread, develop and grow," she said.

Any teachers and counselors in the district can apply for a grant through [this Google form](#) by June 24. Any staff member with questions can contact Bisti at JBisti@PoughkeepsieSchools.org.



Pulaski Pool will reopen with a ribbon-cutting ceremony.

City pools to open June 29

The City of Poughkeepsie will open both of its pools on Saturday, June 29, and will begin by dedicating the new pool house at Pulaski Park.

Last year, Pulaski Pool was closed due to the construction of the pool house, which will include a men's room, women's room, family bathrooms, lifeguard room, office welcome desk, and storage and kitchen areas.

A ribbon-cutting ceremony for the pool house will take place at 10:30 a.m. June 29 at Pulaski Pool off Washington Avenue, and the pool will then be open to the public. Spratt Park Pool site off Wilbur Boulevard will open at noon that day.

For the rest of the season, both pools will be open from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. each day. Adult lap swimming will take place from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m. each day at Spratt Pool.

Entrance fees are being waived again this year, but this year users must register for a pool pass. Application forms can be found online at www.cityofpoughkeepsie.com/pools and can be filled out in advance and brought to the following locations at the specified times:

- Tuesday, June 11: 1 to 4 p.m. - City Hall
- Thursday, June 13: 1 to 4 p.m. - City Hall
- Monday, June 17: 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. - Poughkeepsie Middle School
- Tuesday, June 18: 1 to 4 p.m. - City Hall
- Monday, June 24: 5 to 7 p.m. - City Hall
- Tuesday, June 25: 1 to 4 p.m. - City Hall
- Wednesday, June 26: 5 to 7 p.m. - City Hall
- Thursday, June 27: 1 to 4 p.m. - City Hall

Additionally, evening registration times will be added to accommodate more residents. More dates will be announced.

Swim lessons for ages 3 to 16 at Pulaski Pool are available to city residents free of charge. Three sessions (July 8-19, July 22-Aug. 2, and Aug. 5-16) are being offered in three timeslots (9 to 9:30 a.m., 9:35 to 10:05 a.m., and 10:10 to 10:40 a.m.). Registration forms are available at www.cityofpoughkeepsie.com/pools.