

HOMEPAGES

THE QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE POCANTICO HILLS SCHOOL

MARCH 2018

Expanded Foreign Language Program Includes K-8 Students, Focuses on Global Citizenship

Each first-grader in a recent French class at Pocantico held a flash card with a colored geometric shape on it. Their assignment was to describe it in a full sentence in French to another student, ask what the classmate had, switch cards and repeat the process with someone else.

For the next exercise, teacher Katell Carruth called on individual students to identify the shapes on the board. Their responses had to be in full sentences, and they also had to tell her how many sides each shape had.

In Spanish teacher Adele Morton's class, the geometric forms lesson was a little different that day. While classmates sang "¿Qué forma es?" ("What form is it?"), a student in the front of the room "drew" a shape in the air with a finger. The person who guessed correctly got to go next.

The emphasis on spontaneous communication with other students and the immersion model, in which at least 90 percent of classroom interaction is in the language, are key components of the

district's new World Languages Curriculum. The program is provided to all students in kindergarten through eighth grade, compared to a more limited population previously, and the language exposure is frequent and consistent.

Pocantico's immersion model is unique among school districts, and it is providing children with opportunities they wouldn't have elsewhere, said Amanda Seewald, an educational consultant who has helped the district set up the program.

"The investment the district is making in providing a consistent number of minutes in the languages for students this young helps demonstrate that there are great cognitive advantages to an immersive language experience and that makes the investment extremely worthwhile," she said.

Beyond language and communication mastery, the program promotes four tenets of global citizenship – help, protect, respect and act. There will be a school-wide focus on service learning and world issues, said

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Pocantico Is Developing Children's Emotional Intelligence to Improve Well-Being, Achievement



In the parlance of a new emotional intelligence initiative at Pocantico Hills, a "Meta-Moment" is when someone experiencing strong emotions has a choice to make – either opt to potentially escalate a problematic situation, or regulate one's emotions and react in a healthy manner.

The "Meta-Moment" is part of a framework created by the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence to teach students how to recognize feelings and handle them in a healthy manner. The school district has

implemented Yale's Anchors of Emotional Intelligence in the classroom and on the playground this year.

"The Meta-Moment is a critical juncture in which we can choose to respond in a way that escalates the situation, or we can identify a strategy that we need to use to de-escalate, self-regulate and hopefully bring ourselves to a place that's healthy," said Brent Harrington, school principal. Increasingly, Pocantico students are

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New Special Education Director: Universal Support Model Ensures Classes are Inclusive

As Pocantico's new supervisor of student services and chairwoman of the Committee on Special Education, Celia Strino is focused on continuing the district's transition from a deficit model of special education to a universal support model.

The universal support model, which is considered a best practice, strives to keep as many students as possible in general education classes.

The curriculum and classroom structures ensure there are options that meet all children's needs, said Ms. Strino, who most recently was the Individualized Education Program coordinator and a teacher at Bronx Envision Academy, a public high school. The district uses a curriculum design and instruction approach that consists of a tiered system of support to accommodate all students, regardless of their backgrounds, learning styles and needs.

"The overall benefit for students is they learn better when they have access to their peers and different ways of thinking and more opportunities for collaboration," Ms. Strino said. "So it's really a question of equity and access."

At Pocantico, 22 percent of children have an Individualized Education Program, and



76 percent of them are served in district.

"Celia is a welcome addition to our leadership team," Superintendent Carol Conklin-Spillane said. "Her experience, enthusiasm and vision for developing our universal support model are already having an impact."

The universal model is designed to be more inclusive than the deficit model, which can lead to uneven and disproportionate referrals to support services. Rather than pulling

students out of classes, special education teachers help out in the general education classroom, Ms. Strino said.

"The fact that there are readers at different levels is already contemplated within each lesson," Ms. Strino said. "So while you still might need access to an additional or specialized reading teacher, that reading teacher could push into the classroom and work with that student on the material and the content that everyone else is working on."

The process of implementing the new model is challenging for everyone – teachers, students, parents and administrators. "It will definitely foster collaboration and increase communication between the school and the teachers and the administration and families to the benefit of students," she said.

Ms. Strino sought the position specifically because she wanted to work in a universal support model district. Prior to the Bronx Envision Academy, she managed international partnerships for Fordham Law School and Temple University Beasley School of Law. She is a lawyer herself and worked in the areas of estate planning and local taxes before entering the education field. She is an adjunct professor at Fordham Law School.

Ms. Strino is familiar with the surrounding community, having grown up near the Cranberry Lake Preserve in Briarcliff.

Community Responds to Survey on Improving Facilities

Rebuilding the tennis courts and installing air conditioning in the gymnasium and classrooms received the most votes in a recent survey about priorities for upgrading the Pocantico's facilities.

More than 300 people took part in the survey, whose purpose is to guide the district in developing its master plan. This spring, the school board will finalize a master plan to present to community members, who will vote in the fall on a capital project bond.

On the tennis courts question, 111 respondents said refurbishing them should be a high priority, while 24 said it should not be. Thirty-nine people said they didn't have a strong opinion on the matter. Other questions related to outdoor spaces, traffic flow and parking.

"Apart from general infrastructure maintenance or improvements, the tennis courts seem to be most in need of repair," one person wrote.

People who took the survey also felt strongly about providing air conditioning in the gym and in classrooms where it is not currently available. Of the 175 people who answered the question on air conditioning in classrooms, 108 said it should be a high priority and 30 said it should not be. Ninety-nine said having it in the gym is important, while 39 said it is not.

Below are the high priority versus low priority tallies on other questions:

- Create outdoor educational spaces (83/32);
- Upgrade kindergarten-grade 8 playground (67/39);

- Create outdoor physical challenge course (66/55);
- Improve traffic flow, safety, connectivity (64/53);
- Refurbish athletic fields (61/49);
- Create additional parking spaces for staff and visitors (58/60);
- Add site amenities for athletic field use, such as bleachers (46/71);
- Add site amenities for athletic field use, such as bathrooms (41/70);
- Renovate pre-kindergarten outdoor space (53/54);
- Relocate pool office to the pool deck (48/72);
- Create a covered walkway from the upper parking lot to the bus circle (29/108).

Students Access Rockefeller Archives, Learn about World Problems through Research Project

After researching the Rockefeller Archive Center's primary documents about the Armenian Genocide and current issues around gender equality, Pocantico Hills sixth-grader Adya T. found there hasn't been as much improvement in girls' access to education as she would like.

A photo that served as one of her primary sources about the genocide showed girls in orphanages were taught traditional home-making skills. More than a century later, girls don't even go to school in some parts of the world. A website she created for the assignment explains how people can help turn that around, such as by contributing to Let Girls Learn, an organization founded by Michelle Obama.

Adya was "shocked" at how widespread the lack of access to education is for girls and believes it contributes to gender inequality. "I'm a girl and I like school, and I don't know how it would feel not to go to school," she said.

Her work was part of a first-time collaboration between the Rockefeller Archive Center and Pocantico Hills. Rockefeller staff members worked closely with students to analyze primary sources about Near East Relief, an American organization created in 1915 to help Armenian Genocide refugees. The sixth-graders connected what they learned with modern-day world problems, including poverty, disease, and water scarcity. Each created a website.

The children celebrated one another's work as historians during a February 6 evening event at the Rockefeller Archive



Center, located in the stately Hillcrest mansion. They laid out their primary research

documents and displayed their websites on their laptops. Family members, students and Pocantico staff members visited with students to learn about their projects.

"The students practiced important research, reading and writing skills while learning about a world issue in an engaging way," sixth-grade teacher Laura Garrido said. "Their websites were an incredibly powerful way to share their findings with others in our school community."

The project was a collaboration between Ms. Garrido and Marissa Vassari, the center's assistant archivist and educator.

Lucas R. focused on water conservation and shortages. Nearly a billion people worldwide lack access to clean water, he wrote on his website.

"The water they drink now is filled with parasites like cholera and other deadly parasites that can cause disease," he wrote.

Catie Q. studied poverty. One organization she included in her "How you can help" section was Kiva, which crowdfunds donations to make microloans to borrowers in developing countries.

"I think the project was cool because we got to choose whatever area we were interested in and learn more about it and how to help," she said.

Parent Annealissa Green said the community is lucky to have the Archive Center as a resource. She is happy her son, Kasime, got hands-on research experience and became more informed about a world issue – gender equality.

"I'm also really impressed with how much he's been able to learn through this experience," she said.

Pocantico Students Excel in High School Sports

Congratulations to Pocantico students at partner high schools who excelled in winter sports this year.

Briarcliff High School student **Alex L.**, a senior captain of the soccer team and

four-year varsity player, received all-New York, all-section and all-league awards. He was the Section 1 Small School Player of the Year and the league's most valuable player. He was essential in helping the Bears make it to the Class B final.

At Pleasantville High School, **Jack M.** was all-league in basketball. **Nayshawn M.** and **Jayden K.** were all-league and all-section in wrestling.

Note: The request form for transportation to a non-public school for the 2018- 2019 school year is due by Monday, April 2. The form can be found on the front page of our website under Important Information.

Siblings Place First and Second in Pocantico Hills National Geographic Bee

After eight students had been eliminated with questions spanning the continents, from North America to Africa to Asia, eighth-grader Faisal S. and his sister, sixth-grader Maryum F., were the only remaining contestants in the Pocantico Hills National Geographic Bee.

"So this is fantastic. We have a first—two finalists who are brother and sister," said Adam Brown, the district's director of curriculum and technology and the Jan. 26 event's emcee.

They both got the questions about the Mississippi River and Amelia Earhart's disappearance in 1937 while attempting to travel around the world in an airplane. But Faisal edged out his sister on a question related to the Seikan Tunnel and the islands of Japan.

Faisal also won the school bee in sixth grade and seventh grade. According to his sister, he started studying atlases when he was in first grade.

"I have to thank my mom and my sister," said Faisal, who received high-fives and cheers from classmates. "I feel very proud."

The other students who participated in the Bee were Emily A. and Chizara I. (grade 4); Brady L. and Zachary M. (grade 5); Justin F. (grade 6); Evan G. and Fariha R. (grade 7); and Aren A. (grade 8).

The annual competition organized by the National Geographic Society starts at about 10,000 schools across the country. This is the eighth consecutive year Pocantico Hills has participated. Up to 100 winners across New York who pass a qualifying exam will compete in Albany April 6. New York's winner will advance to the National Geographic Bee in May.

Maryum said it was nice that Faisal won in the last year he can compete. The competition is for students in grades 4-8.

She said her mother, Shamima Sultana, got her and Faisal

interested in geography, and she makes learning geography fun. "It's kind of a family tradition," Maryum said.



These are some questions from prior years:

- Sand dunes are a common sight in the westernmost desert of southern Africa. Name the desert. Namib
- Name the South American country which became landlocked after losing a war with Chile. Bolivia



EXPANDED FOREIGN LANGUAGE, Continued from page 1

Ms. Seewald, who is the owner and author of MARACAS Language Programs and Learning Kaleidoscope Educational Consulting. Examples could include recycling, conservation and equality.

"By understanding the lives and challenges of the people and places around the globe, global citizens can equip themselves to help, protect, respect and act in their own homes, schools and communities, as well as reach out to others," she said.

The teaching also connects content in French and Spanish curricula to what students are learning in science, math, language arts and social studies.

The World Languages Program focuses on developing proficiency, and the study of grammar is embedded where appropriate, Ms. Seewald said. "Proficiency focuses more on what you can do in the language and demonstrating your ability to compare and contrast, your ability to ask questions, form a statement and string together statements," she said.

Developing linguistic proficiency at an early age makes a big difference in a program's success, Ms. Seewald said. Before this year, all students were taking French or Spanish by sixth grade. There was a more limited introductory program for grades 3-5.

This year, children in kindergarten through second grade have French or Spanish every day for 20 minutes. Forty-minute classes are held every other day for grades 3-7 and every day for eighth grade.

Second-graders Danny M. and Rhea N. said they are having fun learning a new language and showing off their skills to parents and siblings. One of their favorite things about French class is learning songs in the language, such as one about the four seasons.

"I like to speak it at home and challenge my mother," said Danny, who would also like to learn how to speak Russian someday.

Rhea initially chose Spanish but changed her mind. When she's hungry she likes to say it in French, which is "J'ai faim." She's also partial to "Je n'aime pas," which means "I don't like."

"I want to go to France," she said. "I want to go to Paris."

Chess Masters Teach Pocantico Students about Strategy, Focus, Sportsmanship

Alanna Katz of Growing Minds Chess Academy, who has been playing chess for 27 of her 30 years, describes the game as the “ultimate mental sport.” Her colleague, five-time National Chess Champion Abby Marshall, said she’s still learning new strategies after 20 years studying the game.

“I like chess because it’s a way to crush somebody using your mind,” said Ms. Katz, one of the top 100 female chess players in the country.

The two women are sharing their knowledge and love of chess with Pocantico students in a pilot initiative for grades 1-6. The Pocantico Hills School Foundation provided funding for the program, which began in November and may be expanded to include middle school grades.

Chess helps children develop their critical-thinking skills and builds their confidence, Ms. Katz said after a class in January for sixth-graders. “If they succeed in chess, they can succeed in life,” she said.

The game fosters logical and strategic reasoning skills, said Principal Brent Harrington, who brought the chess program to Pocantico and would like the school to host a regional chess tournament. With the focus, concentration and sportsmanship chess requires, it also connects with the district’s emotional intelligence initiative.

“All the logical, sequential thinking that a successful chess player employs certainly supports a lot of math achievement,” he said.

“The game also helps build a sense of self-regulation and impulse control for students.”

In the recent sixth-grade class, Ms. Katz and Ms. Marshall spent the first part of the period reenacting a famous chess game played by

Napoleon. They used a hanging canvas banner with clear pockets over the squares and moveable cut-out pieces. “It’s a way to sprinkle in a little history with chess,” Ms. Katz said.

Afterward, students paired up to play. Ms. Marshall, a senior instructor with Growing Minds, jumped in on a few games. Ms. Katz, co-founder and lead instructor of the New York City-based organization, had to break some bad news to one pair of

sixth-graders.

“It’s a rule. If you do the same exact thing three times in a row, it’s a draw. I counted,” she said, and they groaned in response.

Sixth-grader Gerald N., 12, said he has been playing chess since he was 9. He usually loses against his sister, who is 13, but maybe that will change. “I like chess because it builds up my ability to use strategies,” he said.

Classmate Mariah N., 11, is a beginner in chess and is enjoying herself as she learns. “It’s just fun having the experience of going against everyone to see how well you can do,” she said.



Fifth-grader Wins Statewide Arbor Day Poster Contest

Congratulations to Pocantico Hills student Sydney S., who won the state Department of Environmental Conservation’s annual Arbor Day Poster Contest for fifth-graders!

The DEC will recognize Sydney in a local ceremony, and a tree will be planted in her honor at Pocantico. She and her class are invited to Albany to celebrate Arbor Day on April 27. The celebration will include a tree planting at the state capitol.

This year’s poster theme was Trees for Bees. The DEC received more than 100 submissions from across New York.

Sydney drew a honeycomb, three bees and a branch of a pink magnolia tree on her poster. She used watercolors, colored pencils

and chalk in her creation. Her artwork will be printed on the New York State Arbor Day bookmark and made into a children’s poster to be distributed statewide.

“Bees are very important,” Sydney said. “They provide us with so many great things.”

Sydney said her parents are both artists and passed on that passion to her. “I love drawing and painting,” she said.

Art teacher Jolene Morotti said she is thrilled Sydney won the contest. “She is an amazing artist who is extremely talented,” Ms. Morotti said. “I hope this will just be the beginning for her and that she will continue to pursue her artistic endeavors and show off her talent.”



Girls Continue Strong Year with Successful Basketball Season

About 30 seventh- and eighth-graders participated on the boys and girls basketball teams during the winter season at Pocantico Hills.

The girls basketball team ended the season with a solid 8-3 winning record, continuing the strong dominance of Pocantico girls from the fall season. The girls soccer, volleyball and now winning

basketball team have collectively posted an overall record of 28 wins, 4 losses and 1 tie.

The boys basketball team posted a season record of 3-8. The team was led by the strong play of several eighth-graders who will be missed at Pocantico next year. However, there are also several developing

seventh-graders who will have their opportunity to lead the team next year.

The spring sports season gets underway March 26. Pocantico will be fielding a boys baseball team and will be the host school in a Pocantico-Briarcliff merged softball program. A few students will be playing lacrosse with the Pleasantville lacrosse program.

Good luck to all student athletes this spring!



INTELLIGENCE, Continued from page 1

implementing such strategies to avoid making poor choices when they experience strong and negative emotions. The nonprofit Playworks, which is part of the emotional intelligence initiative, has taught children some strategies and problem-solving skills. For instance, rather than argue when two students landed on the same square during a recent game of Switch, they played a round of Rock, Paper, Scissors to resolve the issue.

"We didn't want to fight over it," third-grader Meadow G. said. "You let it go and move on."

Emotional intelligence is an umbrella term for teaching students skills specific to impulse control, self-regulation and managing emotions, Mr. Harrington said. Research has shown that developing emotional intelligence in school leads to increased attention, memory and learning; better decision-making; improved relationship quality; and better physical and mental health.

"If we're able to recognize one another's feelings, articulate how we might be feeling in a moment and develop appropriate

strategies, then we're in a better place to learn," he said.

Teachers started learning about the Yale program over the summer. The overarching ideas are included in the acronym RULER, which stands for Recognizing, Understanding, Labeling, Expressing and Regulating emotions. The RULER has four key tools: the Meta-Moment; a charter that spells out how the school will ensure a positive and supportive environment; a Mood Meter that identifies emotions in four quadrants that relate to energy in the body and "mind pleasantness," a Yale term; and a Blueprint for solving conflicts.

The school has been receiving help with the initiative from Playworks and Project Adventure, which promotes experiential education as a catalyst for positive and lasting growth.

The work at Pocantico began with staff members developing a school charter. After that, they started to study the Mood Meter and recognize that emotions are both the mental and physical reactions individuals have. The meter is a visual representation of the mind and body's degree of pleasantness with respect to emotions. Emotions that are typically most conducive to learning are

in the green quadrant, where the body is relatively at rest and the mind is pleasant. Conversely, the red quadrant shows emotions that are high in energy but low in "mind pleasantness," such as enraged and worried.

Staff members have been receiving training on the RULER tools throughout the school year. Recently, two teacher leaders, Lisa Levy and Amie Doane, started sharing explicit classroom lessons for colleagues.

Mr. Harrington uses the Blueprint to solve discipline problems, but it isn't in place school wide yet. Students are asked to recognize and label how they feel; understand what caused their feelings and those of anyone else who is involved; and explain how they expressed and regulated their feelings. Finally, they reflect on how they could have handled the situation better, and what they can do moving forward.

"The better and more consistent and more invested you are in the work of emotional intelligence, the more the culture shifts to a place of restorative justice as opposed to punitive consequences," he said.

Author Inspires Students with Personal Story and Advice



Forty-three years ago, Croton author Thanhha Lai and her family were forced to flee Vietnam and ultimately made their way to Montgomery, Alabama. The 10-year-old didn't speak any English and had to get used to many changes, including going to school for longer hours and not eating lunch at home.

"The first thing my mother told me when I landed in Alabama is there are no more naps. I thought my world ended. I loved napping," said Ms. Lai, who kept the seventh- and eighth-graders engaged and laughing.

"So that's why I'm in a bad mood – because they just took my naps away," referring to a picture in her slideshow of family photos. "And they took my snacks away."

Acclimating to the life in Alabama with her mom, six brothers and two sisters was difficult for her in other ways. She was the only Asian in her class and students made fun of her name – Hà, which she changed to Thanhha by combining her first and middle names. Her father went missing in action in 1966 and was never found.

Ms. Lai took those experiences and wrote "Inside Out & Back Again," a semi-autobiographical novel that chronicles the

experiences of 10-year-old Hà and her family as they escaped Vietnam and settled in Alabama. The 2011 novel won a National Book Award and was a Newbery Honor Book. It is part of New York's eighth-grade curriculum.



The PTA provides financial support for author visits like Ms. Lai's to expand children's understanding of what they're learning in the classroom.

Ms. Lai said it took 15 years to develop the style and voice she used in "Inside Out." She wrote it as a prose poem because Vietnamese is very poetic and visual. "For the longest time I wrote in prose, in long

sentences, just like you would in English. It didn't work because Hà isn't thinking in English," she said.

Ms. Lai's second book – "Listen, Slowly" – is about a Laguna Beach, California, girl who travels to Vietnam with her grandmother. Her third book is forthcoming.

Ms. Lai founded Viet Kids Inc., an organization that gives bikes to poor students in rural Vietnam who live two hours walking distance from school.

When seventh-grader Stephanie J. asked Ms. Lai what advice she would give to aspiring writers, the author recommended reading prolifically.

"When I say read, I don't mean 100 books. I don't even mean 1,000 books. I mean get your hands on a million books. That is your goal," she said.

Stephanie had a list of questions for Ms. Lai and planned to pass on the responses to her older sister, who wants to be a writer. "It was so inspiring," she said of Ms. Lai's talk.

Classmate Fariha R. said she enjoyed learning about Ms. Lai's life and writing. "She's so funny. She's one of the best authors I've met," Fariha said. "I really want to read all her books."

Parents need school supplies too.

(Luckily, it's just a single download away.)

Download the official **Pocantico Hills CSD app** today for access to your school's— student info, calendars, and much more!



POCANTICO HILLS CENTRAL SCHOOL
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District Creates Diversity Committee to Ensure Student Equity

The district recently created a Diversity Committee to chart ways the Pocantico Hills School can celebrate diversity and ensure each child has an equal opportunity to learn and thrive, regardless of racial, cultural, religious, linguistic or socioeconomic background.

The Diversity Committee is led by Pocantico Hills Principal Brent Harrington and includes administrators, teachers and parents. At the first meeting in January, Mr. Harrington said the panel would create a vision and roadmap for what to accomplish.

"This is great, hard, complex work," he said. "I think we need to also recognize what we can identify as measurable so that we feel like we're reaping the fruits of our labor over the course of the year."

Superintendent Carol Conklin-Spillane said there are a lot of places to jump in. "I'm confident that together we'll figure out what are reasonable starting points and actionable things that we can do," she said.

The Diversity Committee created a visual display for Black History Month. The school had daily announcements about important historical events and significant contributions by African Americans. Pocantico concluded the month-long celebration with a performance by the Bokandeye African-American Dance Theater of Yonkers. The panel followed a similar structure for Women's History Month in March and will identify other months when the school can celebrate its rich diversity.

To guide the committee in its work, the superintendent and principal

distributed the Equity chapter from "Breaking Ranks: The Comprehensive Framework for School Improvement." The publication states that an educationally equitable school provides each student and adult with access to learning through high expectations; personalized learning and culturally sensitive pedagogy; and equitable structures and policies that ensure each person is treated fairly and has equal access.

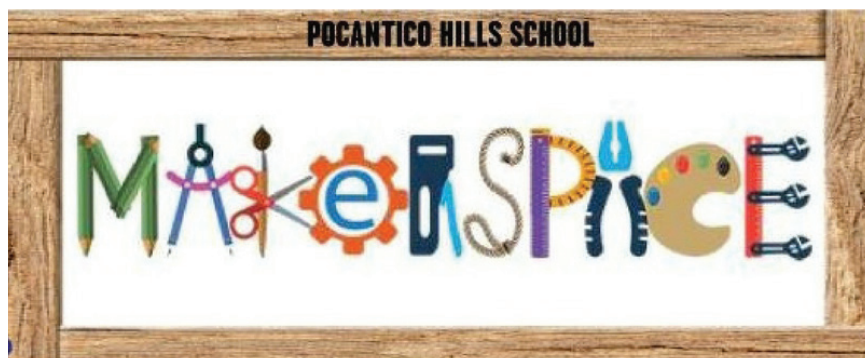
Concrete actions districts can take to improve equity include reviewing curriculum design and student placement; and training staff in cultural competency and the importance of operating from a growth mindset. A growth mindset means believing that each student is capable of continued academic and intellectual growth, regardless of past performance.

The district may seek the assistance of an expert in the academic world who can help guide the Diversity Committee.

Pocantico Hill School has a diverse population. The racial and ethnic breakdown in the 2016-17 school year was 42 percent white, 21 percent Hispanic, 18 percent Asian or Pacific Islander, 16 percent black and 4 percent multiracial.

Parent Joanna Ewing said after the committee's first meeting that she wanted to join to be an advocate for her daughters. She has a girl in seventh grade, one in second grade and one who's not in school yet.

"I think it's great that they have the initiative," she said.



Save the Date

Please join the Pocantico Hills School Foundation April 20 at Captain Lawrence Brewery to raise money for the school's new Makerspace.

Enjoy unlimited local beer and wines, gourmet food and music. The event starts at 7 pm and features a silent auction and an opportunity to buy something for your child's class from the Teachers' Wish List.

For tickets, visit:

<https://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/3319099>