

# HOME PAGES

THE QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE POCANTICO HILLS SCHOOL

SUMMER 2021

## Graduates Say Goodbye to Warm, Family-Like Pocantico Hills School

Warm, welcoming, supportive and “like a family” were some of the words eighth-grade student speakers used at graduation to describe classmates, staff and the atmosphere at Pocantico Hills School.

After a successful year of in-person learning during the pandemic, the Pocantico Hills School community said goodbye to 29 eighth-graders during an evening ceremony June 21 that was also livestreamed.

Student Government representative Zachary M. said the school symbolizes friendship and family for him. Graduation was a celebratory but also sad event because the students were leaving behind such a great place.

“While at Pocantico I have learned so much more than the history of WWII, the formation of earth, and how to do MLA (Modern Language Association) formatting,” he said. “I have learned about what it means to be a member of such a close community.”

Zachary and other student speakers thanked teachers, custodians, bus drivers and other staff members who went “above and beyond” for them. One was bus driver Phyllis Benjamin.

“I will never forget Mrs. Phyllis’ holiday playlists and the number of times she has driven back to my house to drop off something I forgot on the bus,” Zachary said. “Mrs. Phyllis was like family to me for my 10 years at Pocantico.”

Student Government representative Galvin N. thanked teaching assistants Zeena Arturo and Karen Smith “for helping all of us out and tutoring us to the sharpest of our ability.” He also thanked Principal Adam Brown for bringing back after-school homework help and for letting music teacher Michael Murray set up live soccer feeds for students to watch in the auditorium.

Counselor James McVeigh read parts of each graduate’s responses to questions about the future as students walked across the stage to get their certificates.

Graduates said they would change the world for the better by doing things like being kind, helping people in need, not spreading hate, helping keep the earth clean, and helping people in need of a friend.

Among their hopes for the future are to be a famous horror author or a well-paid anesthesiologist, a surgeon like Meredith Grey on Grey’s Anatomy (“minus all that random drama”) and a professional soccer player.

Many graduates said what they would miss the most were friends and teachers; being part of a close, supportive and diverse community; and being friends with everyone.

Cate W., who won the Harold Akley Award for best all-around student, said Pocantico teaches students to “make others feel like they belong to this kind community of a school. I have always felt welcomed here at Pocantico, even on my first day.”

She thanked teachers for “putting up with all of us for all these years” and her classmates for being able to make one another laugh. “Thank you,



## CLASS OF 2021



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## Students Earn Awards for Academics, Service, Athletics, Arts, Leadership

Congratulations to Class of 2021 members who distinguished themselves in academics, sports, cultural arts and community service!

Thirteen students with a three-year average of 95 received a Diploma with Excellence and a President's Outstanding Academic Excellence Award. Seven graduates with a three-year average of 90 earned a Diploma with Outstanding Achievement and a President's Outstanding Academic Achievement Award. Fifteen graduates with 25 hours of community service each year of middle school received a Diploma with Distinction.

### These are the special awards the graduates received:

- Harold Akley Award, for best overall student: **Catherine W.**
- PTA/Anne Marie Brown Community Service Award, for exceptional effort and special contribution to school and community: **Michayla B., DinaMarie P., Joshua R.**
- Cab Calloway Band Award, for excellence in instrumental music studies, leadership in the band program, and love of music: **Zachary M., Serena X.**
- Dr. Carolyn Kell Campbell Award, for best overall chorus student during eighth grade: **Ares E.**
- Dr. Caroline Crescenzi Award, for most improved student during middle school: **Eric B.**
- English Award, for highest GPA in English: **Joshua R.**
- Jason Harris Memorial Award, for an all-around athlete who maintains a B average: **Timothy D., DinaMarie P.**
- Humanitarian Award, for a student whose attitudes and activities closely resemble Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s ideals.: **Summer R.**
- Blanche E. Long Award, for a student with a healthy outlook and approach to life: **Ares E.**
- Nancy McDonnell Memorial Award, for highest math GPA: **Joshua M.**
- Missouri E. Leach Award, for the student who has exhibited leadership, self-discipline and perseverance in the face of unusual difficulties: **Zaniyah H.**
- George Morrow Scholarship Award, for the student who most closely reflects the values and judgment of community leader, school board member and school leader George Morrow: **Brady L.**
- Pocantico Hills Teachers Association Special Award, all-around positive class leader in eighth grade: **Kevin G., Isabella P.**
- Nelson A. Rockefeller Award, for exemplifying Rockefeller's spirit of determination, optimism and patriotism: **Aniela M., Byron P.**
- Social Studies Award, for highest social studies GPA: **Katie K.**
- Estelle V. Storms Award, for highest GPA in world languages: **Serena X.** (French); **Katie K. and Catherine W.** (Spanish)
- Raymond B. Walker Award, in honor of the first principal at Pocantico Hills School, who was a Fire Department charter member. The Department selects the student with the best essay; this year's topic was citizenship: **Isabella P.**
- Madeline B. Walsh Award, for the highest science GPA: **Serena X.**
- Nancy Pera Shaul Memorial Award, for a student with an insatiable appetite for reading: **Ares E.**
- Art Award, for an outstanding eighth-grader who has demonstrated a serious commitment, drive, authenticity and creativity: **Catherine W., Serena X.**
- The Pocantico Hills Foundation-David Rockefeller Innovation and Design Award, for students who demonstrate creative thinking and exceptional product design and development:
  - **Amir A.,** Technology
  - **Maggie K.,** Humanitarian
  - **Olivia R.,** Ingenuity
  - **Galvin N.,** Health and Societal Impact

### CLASS OF 2021, continued from page 1

Pocantico, for bringing us some of the greatest memories of our lives and teaching us those lessons we will never forget ... the ones that will shape us into the people that make the world a better place," Cate said.

Student Government representative DinaMarie P. recalled asking eighth-graders at the "Lion King" cast party two years ago why they were so sad to be leaving Pocantico. They said she would understand in a few years. "I always thought about that moment. And now that I am almost done with eighth grade, I don't want to leave," she said. "How lucky are we that we have experienced something so special that now we are sad it is almost over?"

She encouraged her fellow graduates to "make the next chapter of our lives count.

"Let's go out there and make a difference in the world. Let's go out there and show them who we are," she said.

Superintendent Rich Calkins thanked the staff for being so focused on the children during a challenging year, and the students for excelling.



The graduates overcame many obstacles this year, and many more will follow.

"So, my message to you is this: Always do the right thing," he said. "Let's not mince words. The right thing is not the easy thing, it's usually not the popular thing or the fun thing, but it is the right thing."

Principal Brown encouraged students to "hold strong to your core values, your core identity, who you are and what you believe in." He wished them well in their next chapter, which he called "you 2.0."

He brought them back a few years with a few excerpts from E.B. White's *Charlotte's Web*, which they read and performed earlier in their Pocantico careers. The first was about how Wilbur lived up to the messages Charlotte wove in her web – some pig, terrific and radiant. The second was about how Wilbur never forgot Charlotte.

"So, like Charlotte believing in Wilbur, your families, your teachers and your friends have believed in you too," he said. "We've known you're special for a long time and with each arrival of a new classmate, you only got better. You've impressed us all with your spirit, your perseverance and your compassion. You've come such a long way and we are going to miss you."

After congratulating them on their accomplishments, he concluded with "Shine on."



## Poco Offered In-Person Learning All Year

With commitment, creativity, caution and collaboration among staff, students, Board of Education trustees and families, Pocantico Hills was one of few districts in the region to provide in-person learning throughout the 2020-21 school year.

The year flowed with minimal interruptions despite the COVID-19 pandemic, thanks to added safety and protections, advanced instructional technology, more extensive cleaning, and dedicated staff and community members.

Principal Adam Brown said the year was about “getting to ‘yes’ and never just saying ‘no.’”

“Back in August, we could have packed it in, we could have taken the easy way out, we could have just blame COVID and call it another year to forget,” he said in his graduation speech. “But instead, we decided to have a few choice words for COVID and we fully committed from the start to not let it get in our way at all.” Ninety-six percent of Pocantico’s students attended school in person; the rest learned virtually.

Superintendent Richard Calkins said he is grateful to “Team Poco” for being champions

throughout the year, without a break in education, support services, or communication with families.

“What we’ve been able to provide our community, our students, this year has been

truly special and has a direct positive impact not only on this year but on their future lives,” he said, adding that students excelled throughout the year.

There were many bright spots during a challenging school year, Mr. Brown said, such as book-publishing parties that parents were able to attend virtually. “They were able to enjoy themselves in their offices and the participation was higher,” he said. “The kids couldn’t have been prouder.”

Choral concerts took place over Zoom, and students received props like blow-up plastic globe balls and pom-poms to use at home while they performed. When the weather was good, teachers took students outside to practice playing their instruments and singing.

Teachers Ariane Berns and Allison O’Connor guided students in making “Annie JR.” into a Zoom musical – a Zoomsical – that premiered

online. The actors recorded their performances and choreography at separate tablets spaced around the auditorium, and they recorded their songs with instrumental music teacher Michael Murray.

In Family and Consumer Sciences, the school purchased single use materials so children could participate in hands-on projects safely.

The third year of chess lessons took place virtually, with students playing games simultaneously in a classroom and chess master Abby Marshal — an outside instructor who works with students — monitoring via Microsoft Teams. Laptops were trained on the games so she could consult with the students and answer questions.

Mr. Brown said Pocantico’s younger students have accelerated beyond average growth in reading this year. “They’re actually gaining ground, which is amazing because there are kids who lost so much ground in the spring when they just disappeared or couldn’t work well remotely,” he said. “It was just such a challenging time for so many families, but kudos to our teachers, who have really dug in from Day 1 with the kids and really moved the needle this year.”



## PTA Treats Employees on Teacher & Staff Appreciation Day

Teachers and staff members enjoyed delicious food under a tent decorated with flowers, balloons and messages of gratitude from students on Teacher & Staff Appreciation Day on May 4. The PTA sponsored the event, which featured burgers, macaroni and cheese, Tater Tots and more from the Road Grub Mobile. Faculty and staff won gift cards to Starbucks, Dunkin’ Donuts, Amazon and Sundance Deli. Thanks also to the PTA sponsors and volunteers that made the wonderful event possible.



## A Tree Honoring Staff Dedication during Pandemic Will Grow at Poco



The Pocantico Hills Foundation dedicated a tree to the staff on the last day of school. Staff members gathered on the eastern side of the pond for a short ceremony. This is what the foundation inscribed on the plaque for the “October Glory” maple tree:

*A sincere and heartfelt thank you to every member of the Pocantico Hills School staff. You made the 2020/2021 school year possible. Your dedication and commitment in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic not only kept our school going, but served as a source of comfort and inspiration to our students and their families.*

*The Pocantico Hills School Foundation*

## Poco Thanks Retirees for their Service, Welcomes New Staff

Congratulations and best wishes to Pocantico teachers who retired at the end of the 2020-21 school year!

- **Felicia Peterson**, a special education teacher, started with the district in September 1995
- **Denise McGraw**, Family and Consumer Sciences teacher, started in January 2019

The district is pleased to welcome several new staff members:

- **Andrea Coza** – special education teacher
- **Katie Zachensky** – teaching assistant
- **Kevin Carrigan** – teaching assistant

Congratulations to **Brian Geary**, who was elected to the Board of Education in May and began his term in July.

# CONGRATS





## SWIMMING AT POCANTICO

The pool welcomed swimmers for the season on May 29. Many children take lessons during the summer, including kids at Camp Poco. A lightning strike in early July destroyed the main pool's motor, but facilities staff ensured everything was repaired quickly.



## SPANISH CLASS COCINEROS

The smells of rice, beans, chicken stew and other delicious foods wafted out of the FACS room on a Tuesday in June, when Spanish teacher Giovanni Green and his eighth-grade class cooked a feast. They finished lunch with chocolate-dipped strawberries.



## FRENCH CLASS CHEFS

French teacher Katell McNamara and her eighth-grade class cooked crepes and filled them with strawberries, whipped cream, chocolate sauce and more one Thursday in June. They feasted outside on quiche, cheeses, sandwiches, pastries and other delicious treats, all served on French-themed plates.



## EIGHTH-GRADE STAY-TREAT

At the "Eighth Grade Stay-Treat" May 6, students collaborated on fun team-building and communication activities, such as building and racing go-carts and competing to erect the tallest tower structure. They also competed in a Hollyrock Entertainment Gameshow Trivia contest.



## LAST DAY OF SCHOOL

The last day of school was Wednesday, June 23. Students and staff did the Clap Out for eighth-graders, and staff waved goodbye to the school buses. Vocal/music teacher Sheila DePaola took a selfie with some of her students on the last day.



## SPRING CONCERT, GRADES 1-4

Students sang five songs for the concert, including "The World Is Ours," the 2014 FIFA World Cup Anthem, "What the World Needs Now is Love" and Katy Perry's "Roar." They had dance moves and props for their songs, such as a blow-up globe and pom-poms.





**FIELD DAY**

Elementary students played capture the flag, ran relays and played parachute games on Field Day June 18, with eighth-graders running the activities. Students and staff also enjoyed a schoolwide cookout, and a volleyball game in which eighth-graders faced off against teachers.



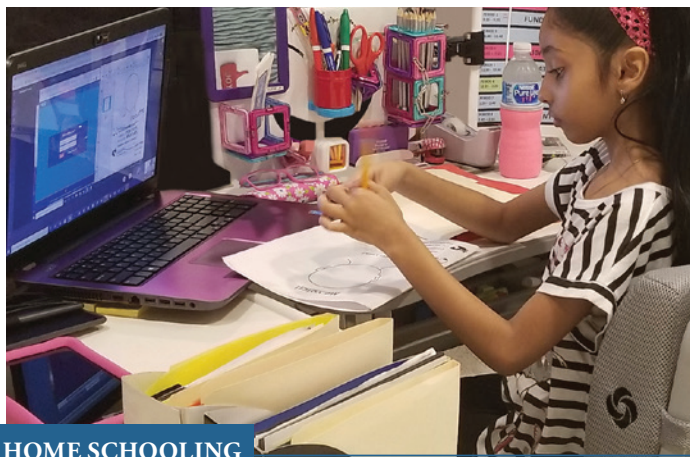
**ANNIE JR.**

A cast of 14 middle school girls performed a Zoom musical – Zoomsical – of Annie JR. in March after practicing for two months. It was filmed and recorded in the auditorium, with social distancing protocols in place, and posted online for friends and family to watch.



**HIKING CLUB**

Pocantico formed an after-school Hiking Club in 2021. Students enjoyed adventures together out on the trails around campus. More than 20 students were involved in the club, which met once a week in the spring and was led by teacher Andrea Coza.



**HOME SCHOOLING**

A number of students and families opted for remote learning in the 2020-21 school year, including third-grader Alana Salfarlie, who is pictured here in her home workspace. Students who were temporarily quarantined due to COVID-19 also spent some time learning from home.



**100 DAYS OF SCHOOL**

Poco's youngest students celebrated the 100th day of school by either dressing up as a 100-year-old or finding 100 stickers, buttons or other items to put on their clothing. Pre-kindergarteners created self-portraits with paper that they crinkled up to "age" their faces.



**OPERATION VALENTINE**

Poco continued a wonderful tradition this year with the seventh annual Operation Valentine, which was founded by now-Briarcliff High School rising senior Ty Amsterdam. Students made a few hundred cards for senior citizens at Atria Briarcliff Manor to enjoy.



# Innovative Projects, Training, Curriculum Advance during Busy School Year

Pocantico Hills School Principal Adam Brown quipped that without all the photos of masked students and staff in his curriculum presentation, an outsider might infer from all the activity and innovation taking place that it was a regular school year.

Unlike most schools, Pocantico was open for in-person learning for the entire 2020-21 academic year.

Mr. Brown recently highlighted many of the initiatives for the Board of Education, such as diversifying books and making the curriculum more inclusive of different perspectives. Fifth-grade social studies/English language arts teacher Angela Ilardi included voices of Panamanian and Caribbean workers in her unit on the Panama Canal construction in addition to the standardized textbook lessons. Students used Rockefeller Archive Center documents about the yellow fever outbreak and how the Rockefeller Foundation's efforts to eradicate the disease.

The school has invested significant funds to diversify its classroom and school library collections. The collections include books in other languages that students can take home and read with their families.

"The rooms really are just kind of exploding with books," Mr. Brown said. "The most important thing though is when kids walk to a shelf, they see themselves on the rack. They see authors who look like them, they see characters that look like them. They see settings that remind them of where their families are from."

Pocantico has a longstanding relationship with the Rockefeller Archive Center that continues to expand. Now children in grades 3-8 are involved with the center, looking at different artifacts and global issues and crises throughout history. Center staff consult with the school's teachers on curriculum.

The school also made progress this year in implementing inclusive practices, Mr. Brown said. Special education and general education teachers are collaborating to build new models inside and outside the classroom that support learning for all children.

Pocantico made significant advances in integrating technology into the curriculum in 2020-21. Mr. Brown showed a photo of students editing video in Adobe Premiere Pro and gave other examples of their facility with technology. Students used the platform Weebly to develop their own websites, and online sharing platforms like Flipgrid and



Padlet. Third-graders learned geometry with the Minecraft: Education Edition. English teacher Andrew Irons' eighth-grade students created podcasts for the National Public Radio Student Podcast Challenge.

Pocantico began using Tinkercad, an app for 3D design, electronics and coding, a few years ago with eighth-graders. Now students as young as third grade have been using the software. In fourth-grade geometry this year, students used Tinkercad to create castles that will be 3D printed in miniature form for them.

"That's really impressive what these kids are doing at this age and that's because our teachers are able to teach them about it," Mr. Brown said. "They understand it and can share their knowledge and we've been blessed with the resources and the creativity to pull it off."

Third-grade teacher Marina Lombardo and French teacher Katell McNamara worked with Education Technology Director Alana Winnick to obtain certification from the International Society for Technology in Education.

Outside of integrated technology, all special education teachers and some general education teachers and reading specialists became certified teachers of the Orton Gillingham Approach to early literacy for students who struggle.

Pocantico started working with Level Up Village and continued its relationship

with the Red Trunk Project. Level Up Village partners classrooms from around the world for STEAM and global citizenship experiences. Poco students connected with children in three different regions of Kenya. "This is something we actually initiated in the time of COVID that we're going to keep moving forward because it's been so enriching for the kids," Mr. Brown said.

Poco students learned about cultures in Mexico and shared details about their lives through the Red (Respect Every Difference) Trunk Project. The organization uses cultural artifacts like clothing and crafts, along with short films, to teach children about other parts of the world. The founder consulted with some of Pocantico's teachers in creating a digital red trunk for use during the pandemic. Poco students created their own red trunks.

Board of Education President Al Pacile praised the Pocantico staff. "We're all very thankful for not only surviving the last year plus, but also thriving, so kudos to you and the team," he said.

## Poco Progress: Tennis Court



## Project Is on Schedule

The tennis court project is progressing on schedule this summer, with paving taking place in early July and court painting in early August.

“It’s going spectacularly,” Superintendent Richard Calkins said. “We’ve got great people on the ground and great people helping provide oversight, so we’re really progressing pretty much on schedule.”

The superintendent said he is confident the school and community will be able to use the courts in the fall. The site will feature four new tennis/pickleball courts, a futsal court and 10 new parking spaces for visitors.

Some of the additional site work includes adding fencing, lights, security cameras, lock systems and sidewalks.

## Teachers Earn Prestigious Educational Technology Certification

For teachers Katell McNamara and Marina Lombardo, the opportunity came at a perfect time. As educators were planning last summer how a socially distanced, more technology-reliant 2020-21 school year would work, they had a chance to pursue International Society for Technology in Education’s (ISTE) certification for educators.

“This was the perfect year to do it,” Ms. McNamara said, adding district Educational Technology Director Alana Winnick facilitated the course.

With some students learning remotely all year and others periodically quarantined at home, teachers had to not only adapt, but transform their practice to make learning more engaging and interactive.

The ISTE Certification for Educators is an internationally recognized credential for educators who have mastered the ISTE standards, which focus on pedagogy over technology tools and devices. The goal of the standards is to deepen educators’ practice by promoting collaboration and challenging them to rethink traditional approaches, and to prepare their students to drive their own learning. The purpose is not to replace a lesson with technology; technology must enhance student learning and empower innovative, creative problem-solvers to become more responsible digital citizens.

The two teachers are now part of a distinguished group of educators that numbers just 1,200 worldwide, according to Ms. Winnick. The coursework and portfolio process are rigorous, and only 70% of educators pass the portfolio the first time around. “These two pushed forward and

passed with nearly a perfect score the first time. I could not be more proud of them,” she said.

Early in the school year, one of Lombardo’s learners discovered he could gain access to Minecraft: Education Edition using student credentials. This led to Ms. Lombardo wondering how to use the tool effectively in her classroom. She learned it can be used in many ways, such as math, science, reading comprehension, visualization, problem-solving, coding and writing. Even more important, building,



maintaining and sustaining a community of learners was necessary, and Lombardo realized that this was a tool that could keep her students connected.

Minecraft.edu changed the learning experience for students who had been quarantining at home and needed to feel connected and engaged, Ms. Lombardo said. One student built a world for our class in Minecraft as a way to have an alternative meeting spot.

“It motivated many during this challenging time,” she said. “Minecraft engaged my students. It got them more involved and supported excitement about learning.”

The teachers began their certification with several synchronous online sessions last summer followed by asynchronous coursework, which included designing instructional lessons that integrated the ISTE standards. They collaborated to design a lesson for third grade in which Ms. Lombardo’s students had to use doughnut magnets to solve a real-world problem. Ms. McNamara and Spanish teacher Giovanni Green would revisit the topic from a world language perspective.

Ms. Lombardo said some of the inventions were using magnets to keep shoelaces tied and creating a structure that would help a student not to lose pencils. “Using a Design-Thinking Framework allowed students to integrate the science concepts around force and motion. It was exciting to see students supporting each other with feedback and questions that could help them make revisions to further refine their creations.”

After they graduated from the coursework, the teachers went through a six-month period to build portfolios. They had to prove how they implemented multiple indicators for each standard into their own practice.

“I think it’s helping me improve my curriculum and my lesson planning,” Ms. McNamara said, adding that she and Ms. Lombardo consulted and brainstormed with other Westchester County educators and will be presenting again at the New York State Association for Computers and Technologies in Education annual conference.

Both said the experience was well worth it because they met other educators, collaborated, and gained ideas to take back to Pocantico. “It was really motivating,” Ms. McNamara said.



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## Fifth-Graders Exchange Homemade Slime, Origami and More on Trade Day

When Andrea Coza was a fifth-grader at Pocantico, she made bracelets out of black and white wooden beads to barter with on Trade Day. Her teachers that year – 2006 – were Laura Garrido and now-Principal Adam Brown.

“It was a project that everybody looked forward to when they got to fifth grade,” she said, adding that it was her “favorite memory of fifth grade.”

As a fifth-grade science and social studies teacher this spring, she brought back the tradition. Her students got to create whatever craft they wanted. They came up with paper boomerangs, popsicle catapults, paper fortune-teller games, stress balls, key chains, pillows, slime, duct tape wallets and more. They laid out their goods on towels near the pool on Trade Day, along with signs to market their wares.

The event was the culmination of a social studies unit on the western hemisphere that included learning about the importance of trade in the Aztec, Mayan and Incan economies. They learned about economic concepts like needs versus wants and supply and demand.

“I’m just really excited to be teaching in the school that I went to and continue to carry out the traditions that I got to experience when I was there,” Ms. Coza said.



# TRADE DAY



## Kids, Staff: Camp Poco's 65th Anniversary Season Was a Blast

Campus was bursting with activity and excitement as hundreds of campers swam, crafted, cooked, hiked, laughed and played together for Pocantico Hills Day Camp's 65th season.

“It’s been a long time since we’ve been all together and the energy and the excitement are just amazing,” said camp Assistant Director Kerry Papa, who runs the program with Director Ryan King. “You can feel it when the kids arrive in the morning. Everybody’s just really full of excitement and energy.”

Total enrollment was 332 children, although not all attended all six weeks. There were plenty of on-campus activities, visits, theme days and trips for campers. For example, the Bubble Bus kicked off Color War Week; the Harlem Wizards and the Sandbox Theatre performed at Pocantico; and younger campers took part in on-campus “sleep-under’s.”

Rising seventh-grader Kieran D. sported a green party hat for Crazy Hat Day as he played gaga ball in early July. “Camp is really awesome because there are so many activities that keep us active,” he said. “There’s never a time where we’re bored. It’s always really fun.”

This year, the camp unveiled its new mascot – Big Skye – who made appearances at arrival and dismissal, morning meetings and special events. She is the grown-up baby hawk Little Skye that first arrived on campus in 2019 and was named by campers. Staff members hid the stuffed animal around campus each day, and campers raced to find her to win a prize.