

HOMEPAGES

THE QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE POCANTICO HILLS SCHOOL

FALL 2016



Harvest Festival Serves Up the Season's Bounty

The Harvest Soup Festival has turned into an annual Pocantico Hills School autumn tradition. Students, parents and staff participated in weeklong activities that culminated in a “seed-to-table” feast on Oct. 14, with soup, bread and pesto served to the entire school.

At the Children's Garden at Kykuit on Thursday, Oct. 13, students in grades one through four picked organic carrots, squash, celery, beans, tomatoes, leafy greens and herbs that were washed, chopped and simmered into soup on site. The Children's Garden is part of the Pocantico Center tended by volunteer gardeners who assisted the students and instructed them at different stations. These included learning about parts of a plant, pollination and composting.

“The program ties to all parts of the curriculum, including and especially science,” said Family and Consumer Science

(FACS) teacher Ilana Brennan, who has been directing the program in recent years. “This event is one of the high points of our year.”

Grades five and six harvested tomatoes and beans from our school-based garden and prepared them for the soup in the FACS classroom earlier in the week. Seventh graders used fresh herbs to prepare bread and pesto to accompany the soup.

“It is a pleasure to watch the children learn this way,” said Susanne Pandich, manager of public programs for the Pocantico Center.

Mrs. Brennan thanks everyone who helped, including all the volunteers, and especially the Rockefeller Brothers Fund that provides the enriching opportunity at the Children's Garden and custodian Jose Zamora who generously maintains the school-based garden.

WHAT'S INSIDE:

- Letters Home...page 2-4 • Fire Prevention...page 4 • Meet Kassie...page 5
- Swan Lake Walkathon...page 6 • PTA Author Visit...page 6
- Halloween Festivities...page 7 • Pocantico Pride...page 8 • Upcoming Dates...page 8



LEARNING • ACHIEVEMENT • GROWTH • DIRECTION



LETTERS HOME

HEARING FROM OUR COMMUNITY LEADERS

A Message from the Superintendent

Dear Pocantico Hills Families,

There are many wonderful aspects of student life here at Pocantico Hills. What a joy it is to visit our classrooms and see children actively engaged in exciting lessons: learning about themselves and the world they live in, growing skills, developing abilities and embracing big ideas. There is much to be proud of. Harnessing our strengths to build a comprehensive plan for continuous improvement is something we can also feel good about. Our faculty and staff are reflective practitioners; together we are engaging in careful review of the work we are doing well, where we need to take it next and how best to get there.

We are living in a time of increasing accountability, where tracking performance patterns and drawing conclusions about teacher and school effectiveness based on student test scores and other quantitative data is a recurring theme receiving a great deal of national, state and local attention. While there are mixed points of view on the value of mandated testing, we continue to benefit from gathering and comparing information, identifying patterns and measuring achievement through formal assessments that can inform decision-making on how we organize and plan for classroom instruction and individual student support. "Hard" data, such as test scores, are valuable resources for us to use to drive school improvement. Equally important is our ability to go beyond this data and monitor qualitative indicators that are critical to fostering achievement, such as a healthy school climate and our ability



to personalize learning for all students. As a District, we are committed to continuing to develop our capacity to use every tool at our disposal to inform our practice and provide the best possible education to the young people we serve.

This school year we have established goals for our instructional program in those areas where we are focusing our growth efforts, including:

- Increasing student performance on New York State English Language Arts and Math assessments by improving the alignment of our curriculum with new state standards.
- Strengthening our writing program by adopting a consistent school-wide process.
- Developing written curriculum documents that outline key standards, goals, strategies and assessments at every grade level.
- Exploring our understanding of how emotions drive learning, decision-making, creativity, relationships and health so we can teach children to develop their emotional intelligence and make positive shifts in school culture.

We invite you to partner with us in celebrating our successes and helping our District continuously grow and learn at every level of the organization.

Carol Conklin-Spillane
Superintendent of Schools

Reminder: Help us decorate the Board Room!

If you have some school memorabilia for the new Board Room – whether it is a document, a photograph, award, letter, newspaper article or other relevant artifact, we ask that you consider donating it to the school so it can be properly shared with the school community. Please contact our district clerk, Gina Downes, if you are interested in donating an article. Thank you for helping in this fascinating project; it promises to be educational and lots of fun for students, parents and staff.



LETTERS HOME

HEARING FROM OUR COMMUNITY LEADERS

From Our PTA

Dear Pocantico Families and Community Members,

The PTA is off to a great start this year!

We kicked off the school year welcoming the newest members of the Pocantico Family, our PreKindergarten students! Eager four-year-olds, together with their parents, joined PTA members, teachers and administrators for the PreK Meet & Greet! The PreK students had a chance to meet their teachers and new classmates, become familiar with the school and take a bus ride together with their parents around the community to learn all about bus safety. The PTA also provided T-shirts for each child to show their Poco pride!

We also welcomed our new superintendent, Mrs. Carol Conklin-Spillane at the PTA's Welcome Back Social. At a magical summer-like night we welcomed new families and staff and brought the community together for dinner, dessert, companionship, fun, and yes, a bit of real hocus pocus! The event featured Richie Magic along with his wife, Barbara, and David Schwall, all magicians from the Hocus Pocus Shoppe in Dobbs Ferry, who entertained students and their families with non-stop magic of all kinds. From card tricks to disappearing doves and flaming wallets, the show captured the attention of the children (and their parents) and had the crowd mesmerized and mystified. Administrators and teachers were on hand to partake in the fun. It is at events like this, where the closeness and warmth of our community shines, that we are all fortunate to call Pocantico home!

We also launched POCADEMY this fall—our after-school enrichment program. The PTA proudly partnered with Curious-on-Hudson via their nonprofit arm, Curiositas, to offer STEAM-(science-technology-engineering-applied arts-math) based after-school enrichment classes for grades K-8. Classes are off to a great start and our students are enjoying classes such as DaVinci Creative Workshop, Survivor Pocantico, Comic Book Workshop, Stop Motion Animation and much more.

Our Annual October Book Fair had students selecting wonderful books from an incredible selection of books for all ages. Our middle school students enjoyed coming in during their free time to browse our selection and pick out great books. Always a Poco favorite, the book fair helps foster a love of reading, all while supporting the PTA. We thank all



our families for generously supporting the book fair and our volunteers for making the event possible!

There's nothing quite like Halloween in Sleepy Hollow and our Halloween Costume Dance was quite the party! Children, parents and staff came in their Halloween best, and the DJ kept everyone dancing all night. Costumed contestants paraded around the gym, as the judges had the difficult job of deciding the winners—truly everyone was a winner. One lucky family went home with big winnings from the 50/50 raffle! Thank you to all our parent and teacher volunteers and everyone in the community who came out to support our PTA.

In the beginning of November, the PTA sponsored a visit with acclaimed author and illustrator, Peter Catalanotto. (See story, p. 6).

We hope you enjoyed the School Pictures, Family Portraits with Dana Yu Creative and Holiday Pie fundraisers we offered this year and we truly appreciate everyone's participation.

Every year our students experience many wonderful programs and activities sponsored by the PTA thanks to contributions

Continued on page 7

LETTERS HOME

HEARING FROM OUR COMMUNITY LEADERS

From the Foundation

Dear Parents and Friends,

The members of the Pocantico Hills School Foundation would like to wish everyone a huge welcome back for the 2016-2017 school year! We hope that all of the students are having a wonderful start to their new classes, and that all the parents and loved ones are also adjusting to the new schedules, activities, and of course, helping with school work.

The Foundation has already sponsored a great event to start the year, "Walk Around for Our Playground," and it was a huge success. Our annual fundraising walk at Swan Lake raised over \$4,000 for desperately needed new playground equipment! The children were out and enthusiastic as ever, perhaps even more so this year with the promise of a pizza party for the "winning" class. Mrs. Hongell's first-grade class and the combined seventh-grade classes shined brightly, each with over 75 percent pledge participation!! Enjoy your parties, children, and special thanks to ALL of the teachers who

helped us so much, as always. To the Pocantico community—We Thank You For All Your Support!

There will be other Foundation events and programs planned that we will talk about as the year goes on, including the Sundae Serenade, the college scholarships, our annual gala and the School Directory (it is going to print!). But for now, we would like to reach out to see if anyone would like to get involved or would like more information about the Foundation. If so, please contact any Foundation board member, or you can call me at 914-924-3596(c) or email to ericlebenson@gmail.com. Please also check out and "Like" our Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/PocanticoFoundation/>.

We wish everybody continued success in school!

Warmest Regards,

Eric Le Benson

Pocantico Hills School Foundation Chair

Local Firefighters Visit during Fire Prevention Month

Firefighters from the Pocantico Hills Fire Department came to our school to talk about fire safety on Oct. 14. The school-wide presentation (PreK to eight) took place in the gym throughout the morning and gave students a chance to learn about fire safety and see a firefighter in full gear.

Firefighter Jennifer Gill Mahood, who was wearing her firefighter suit, stressed that becoming familiar with the appearance of firefighters is so important. "We want children to know what we look like in our turnout gear, and not be afraid of us," she said. "So many children perish during a fire because they are afraid and hiding," she said. "Kids need to remember not to hide and to get out safely before worrying about their pets or anything else," she said. Students were also encouraged to handle the mask apparatus during the event.

Pocantico Hills Fire Chief Joe Mahood reminded students to talk with their families about an emergency plan, having a fire drill as a family, and replacing the battery in their smoke detectors. Students and families are encouraged to pay a visit to the firehouse to explore and learn more; just call ahead to schedule.



It's Kassie in the Kitchen!

The District welcomes Pocantico's new lunchtime chef, Kassie Arcate, to our school and to our kitchen! However, it would be more accurate to say, "Welcome back!" since Kassie is a Pocantico alum (2001). After graduation, she went to Sleepy Hollow High School, where Mrs. Conklin-Spillane was then principal.

"Working here is like a homecoming," said Kassie, smiling broadly. Her mother, Tina Arcate, is pleased with this development, too, since she worked in the kitchen as a lunch lady. "My mom's proud of me," said Kassie.

Before training at the Culinary Institute of America (CIA), Kassie obtained a BA in liberal arts from Wells College in upstate New York. She has always been interested in cooking. She comes from a family that has 100 percent cooking participation—from her Nana, who is an avid admirer of Julia Child, to her nieces, who help as prep chefs with peeling carrots and stirring.

During a CIA externship, she worked for a school catering service and found her niche. She was working there when she heard about the opening at Pocantico Hills, and the rest is history.



In her role here, she makes school lunches from scratch using fresh, healthy ingredients, and shies away from pre-packaged food. She believes in giving the students choices. "Vegetables have been a success," she said. "Items like bagels, which don't meet nutritional standards, are being replaced with the cheese sandwich on whole grain bread, and Wowbutter, a non-GMO soy spread, is a peanut butter alternative. Students really like carrot fries, too."

Parents are pleasantly surprised to see their children eating new items like chicken Caesar salad and baked sweet potatoes.

"The challenge is to find out what students want to eat, or will eat," said Kassie. "What's most satisfying is to give it to them and then hear them ask for it again."

Popular items include green beans, spinach salad with strawberry vinaigrette, seasoned black beans, and mac & cheese, which has some sneaky vegetables hidden inside.

The most awkward part of the job is getting used to calling her old teachers by their first name. "Maybe someday I will, but I can't yet, although it is nice to know them as an adult!"



The study of fermentation never tasted so good!

A recent collaboration by Mr. Cook, Ms. Arcate and Mrs. Brennan gave eighth graders a taste of fermented foods that served as an extension of the science curriculum taught in Mr. Cook's class.

Held in the Family and Consumer Science (FACS) classroom, the lesson first reviewed that fermentation is a process used to produce energy without using oxygen to create foods. Then Ms. Arcate explained why fermented foods are important: They are nutritious and can aid in digestion because they have lots of healthy bacteria.

She also discussed how people in ancient times used fermentation to preserve foods, for example, turning cabbage and vegetables into sauerkraut and kimchi and create others, like cheese, tempeh and soy sauce. Some examples of fermented foods were served during the class, including sauerkraut, kombucha (fermented sweet tea), and sourdough bread. "Fermented and cultured foods aren't fad foods," said Ms. Arcate. "Humans have been fermenting and preserving for thousands of years. Today, we have just lost touch with the techniques, but it's easy and simple to learn the recipes of our ancestors."

Swan Lake Walkathon Supports School Playground



Pocantico Hills School is fortunate to be in the glorious Hudson River Valley and able to take advantage of all the opportunities the area offers. The annual school community walk around scenic Swan Lake on the grounds of the Rockefeller State Park Preserve is one of those.

The Foundation's Swan Lake Walkathon offers students an afternoon of vigorous outdoor exercise, camaraderie and an opportunity to support a good cause. This year, it took place on the beautiful afternoon of Oct. 20 and supported the playground, providing a safe and healthy place for our students to stay active, improve their social skills and engage in free play.

The event has school-wide participation, and students walk on the mile-long Brothers Trail once, twice or three times based on their grade level. Middle school students earn two hours of community service.

The Foundation thanks the teachers, administration, community, volunteers and, of course, all of the students who make the annual Foundation Walkathon a brilliant success!



'What is a story?'

Author and illustrator Peter Catalanotto got our students thinking as he asked them, "What is a story?" during his visit to our school on Nov. 1. His dynamic presentations to grades PreK–2 in the library engaged students in his creative process as he drew illustrations using a kindergarten pencil, as he always does, a fact that delighted the youngsters. Along with his explanation, his drawings showed how he moves from inspiration to final book.

His answer to "What is a story?" was simply stated so that students could understand and remember: "A story is about a character who wants something, but there's a problem." Knowing that, students just have to add a little imagination, by asking the next question. "There are two words all writers use to get ideas," he said. "What if . . . ?"

Mr. Catalanotto has visited more than 1,500 elementary schools in 40 states, and he currently teaches the first children's book-writing course at Columbia University. The event was made possible with the generous support of the PTA.

HALLOWEEN IS A TREAT FOR EVERYONE

From our youngest students in PreK, who enjoyed a fabulous party in the cafeteria, to our students who celebrated at the dance—and all the grades in between who walked in the Halloween parade, everyone had a happy Halloween!

The sun was shining, and the last period of the day was a treat for everyone, including our teachers and administrators, who enjoyed the costumes and spirit of the festivities.



For more photos and details on the stories in this newsletter, please visit the Pocantico Hills PTA Facebook page.

Continued from page 3

LETTERS HOME From Our PTA

HEARING FROM OUR COMMUNITY LEADERS

to our annual membership drive and fundraising efforts. All the money we raise goes right back into the school. We distribute funds to the classrooms that go toward class trips and classroom supplies, bring in special guest speakers, sponsor author visits, fulfill teacher grants, host events such as Back to School Social, Family Circus Night, Family BBQ and much more. Your help has always been appreciated, and we urge you to continue the support you have shown in the past with our new fundraising projects this year: KidStuff Coupons and Seed Sale. Look for more information in the coming months for how you can participate!

Haven't joined the PTA yet? Please become a member and support our annual membership drive.

Don't miss out on any news or events from the PTA! Send an "opt-in" email to the PTA's new email address: PTA@pocanticohills.org. You can also find us on Facebook at www.Facebook.com/PocanticoHillsPTA.

Thanks to YOUR involvement in the PTA's fundraisers and events, we're off to a great year!

Sincerely: PTA Executive Board • Annalisa Altieri • Lauren Amsterdam • Jennifer McNerney • Kristen Hawkins • Susan Burlazzi • Francesca Cruz • Maureen Garrett

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Frederic Rickles, Vice President

Peter Basha, Trustee

Joan Waters Cusanelli, Trustee

Charlie Minton, Trustee



upcoming dates

November

- 23 11:30 a.m. Dismissal
- 24–25 Thanksgiving Recess (DISTRICT CLOSED)

December

- 26 DISTRICT CLOSED (Observance of Christmas)
- 26–30 Holiday Recess (School Closed)

January

- 2 DISTRICT CLOSED (Observance of New Year's Day)
- 9 Foundation Meeting – 8 p.m.
- 10 Board of Education Meeting – 7:30 p.m.
- 12 PTA Meeting – 7 p.m.
- 16 DISTRICT CLOSED (Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day)
- 20 Deadline for High School Selection
- 23 After-School "POCADEMY" Winter Term Begins (Grades K-4)
- 24 Board of Education Meeting – 7:30 p.m.

February

- 6 Foundation Meeting – 8 p.m.
- 7 Board of Education Meeting – 7:30 p.m.
- 9 Jump Rope for Heart – 10 a.m.
- 20–24 Winter Recess
- 20 DISTRICT CLOSED (Observance of President's Day)
- 28 Board of Education Meeting – 7:30 p.m. (Budget Work Session)

For more information, please visit our website: www.pocanticohills.org

POCANTICO PRIDE

GREAT ACHIEVEMENTS AND NEWS FROM STUDENTS, ALUMNI AND TEACHERS

Sabrina Conrad participated in the Westchester County Swimming Championship, "the Counties," at Rye Playland pool over the summer. She came in 3rd overall receiving a Bronze medal for the 50-yard butterfly (for 12 and under girls), as well as a 3rd overall receiving a Bronze medal in the 200 individual medley (13 and under girls). **Congrats Sabrina!**

BB tips and tricks from the Magic Masters

There were some pretty tall basketball players on the outdoor courts during recess this month! They were a few of the Harlem Magic Masters who came to spend some time with Pocantico Hills students on Tuesday, Nov. 1.

Using their amazing slam-dunks and ball-handling skills, the three basketball stars—Tiny (7'5"), Super Mario, (7'3") and Speedy (who is just really fast!)—entertained and interacted with students in grades 1–8 in preparation for their fundraiser game held at Briarcliff High School. Their visit to Pocantico Hills School was sponsored by the Briarcliff Manor Rotary and organized by Eric Levenson, a long-time Rotary member and our Foundation president. All proceeds from the game went toward community service scholarships and other programs for BHS students.

