



Peekskill City School District
A System Focused on Every Student; Every Day

The Mission of the Peekskill City School District is to educate students in a caring, inspiring environment characterized by a spirit of excellence and high expectations; prepare graduates to meet or exceed standards; graduate students who respect and appreciate cultural diversity; and prepare students to pursue adult lives as contributing citizens of our local and global community.

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Superintendent of Schools*

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Superintendent's E-Corner, March, 2017

"The nice thing about teamwork is you have others on your side." M. Carty

It's a bird, it's a plane, it's a-a---- it's a drone! That is right. Drone technology has hit our HS program. Our children, staff, and system deserve every experience, which provides them with engaging, motivating, fun, and cutting edge opportunities. Last week we had drone training, which will be incorporated into our Robotics program. This program requires a drone/modified flight license; plus PD around the technology and curricula. Carlo and friends plan to do some "drone flights" over our field once the weather gets warmer to generate excitement for the course. It is very exciting and we are proud of every aspect of our improved programming. It takes a village and happens with explicit planning and support throughout. Prior to break there was another exciting "sighting." Our very own Elton Brand showed up to Woodside for a guest appearance. Ms. Holloman's class presented their biographies to their classmates, families, and various community members. I knew that one of the children was presenting on Elton Brand and his inspiration in his life. As I walked up to the front door of Woodside I turned and saw Elton step out of the passenger side of a car. I guess Bridget saw him too and ran outside with such excitement. It really was a special moment for Peekskill Woodside, and especially that young man, Elton loved it too!

Educational Planning and Budget: Our theme this year is, "Enhancing equitable opportunities for every student; every day." In the next month, I will be coming around similar to last year, presenting proposed elements of our educational planning and thinking. Ms. Zimmerman will join me as we share the process as well as the advocacy work. Please remember that our advocacy and voice is paramount with respect to our growth, needs, and work.

Life: Over the break a sad and unfortunate event occurred at TZ high school during our girls varsity basketball game. Since that evening we have worked 24/7 in a diligent, mindful, and respectful fashion regarding all elements of this complex situation. It was not your typical, "one child had an issue with one child, and dispose a consequence." It involved numerous levels of individuals in and beyond the team. It also included an in-depth examination of our athletic history, expectations, and program as it relates to proactive, student/parent/coach/district/community expectations, support, and more. As I mentioned in both press releases, these are good children and this incident does not define who we are. Mistakes were made; and in life, you live/learn, progress, and make each day better than the next. Thank you to all the staff, coaches, administrators, and board members that joined me over the break to discuss at length every detail of this important and nationally recognized situation. We will get this right; we will be better; and we will be a model of excellence for others to follow.

Peekskill Basics: We had our internal and external planning meetings, which went really well. Thank you to our staff involved as well as our wonderful community. This work truly takes a village and will get all of our children that much more prepared for Pre-K and K. We are excited as a community for the kickoff event on April 29th.

SEPTO “Hoop it Up” Clinic and SPED Olympic Trials: Also, reminder, April 22nd, SPED Olympic Trials. Great job Cami and Ellen, we have a Peekskill team as discussed on the field last year!

Also, March 25th SEPTO is hosting their 2nd **annual Basketball clinic** whereas our student/athletes work with children on their court. It is a great event, check out our website for more information.

Tac-D Work, now recognized and newly named as, “The Equity Council”: *We are all the guardians of equity!* Our Equity Council met a few weeks ago with Patrick from NYU. I will say that it was an amazing two-days of transparent, open, honest, and respectful conversation around race, religion, gender, gaps, needs, expectations, bias, and more. The Equity Council will meet a few more times this year, planning for turn-key training within our system, which is already happening in some buildings. Each school should be discussing Equity committees, which represent the work and thinking of the council and cultural competence. Dr. David Kirkland will be joining us on March 10th during our PLA (schedule to follow). This is great stuff everyone and I am proud to be a part of it with you! Game-Changer!! Keep it real--

Policy: At a recent board meeting we passed a resolution regarding the assurance that the Peekskill City School District continues to be a welcoming community of learners. That we shall not use funds or resources for, or otherwise assist in, the enforcement of federal immigration law unless such assistance is required by Federal or State statute, regulation, or court decision. Immigration law is a federal concern and our district seeks to keep its students, faculty, staff, and visitors safe and seeks to ensure that they are treated equally regardless of immigration status. In addition, we will be reading a policy on transgender students and accommodation within our school district. We meet monthly to discuss policies as well as update work. Any questions contact district office about this or another other expectation, policy, statute.

Press: This year we made some friends in the press and they have done the “right things” with respect to who we are and what we do, day in and day out. The work around our newcomers, food program, and Summit Academy happens by the sweat, tears, persistence, and passion by many! Congratulations to Peekskill for these prideful-moments!

Don’t Forget, great reminder and videos: The Hidden Curriculum: He is very excited to start the 4th grade. A wonderful video by a 1st year teacher. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XBLcuGunRxU>
Plus, Jordan is the man: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VxyxwShewI>

Restorative Justice: Our attendance matters council is not only aligning our attendance protocols and policies we will be looking at our code of conduct this year so as it aligns to our work as system. Contact Margie, Kent, or Staci for more information.

By Heather Wolpert-Gawron

With the right training and support, restorative justice can prove more effective than traditional discipline measures in building a stronger school community

I’m going to simplify the new school management term *du jour* (that’s actually been around for awhile): restorative justice. Google the term and you’ll see restorative justice is defined as “a system of criminal justice that focuses on the rehabilitation of offenders through reconciliation with victims and the community at large.” It may sound like a term used in a prison. (It is, actually). But let’s state it in the way it is being used in our schools. In sum, restorative justice helps a student to own what she/he did, make it right for those hurt or affected, and involve the community in helping both the victim *and* the offender. Restorative justice acknowledges that those who do wrong need healing as well.

The myth is that restorative justice replaces harsher consequences. The truth is that restorative justice represents the steps that lead up to more harsh consequences, should they be necessary.

The Process of Restorative Justice

Sometimes in educational discipline we whip out the cannons of suspension first. But with the right training and support from all stakeholders, restorative justice can prove much more effective in building a stronger school community. And, let's face it, the challenge of making amends is a task that, for many kids, is far harder than just staying home for three days. According to [Howard Zehr, a recognized founding father of restorative justice](#), the concept is based on three pillars:

1. Harms and needs
2. Obligation (to put right)
3. Engagement (of stakeholders)

In other words:

1. Empathy for all and by all. There must be awareness that while harm was done to a victim -- and possibly a larger community -- there may also have been past harm done to the accused as well, and that harm may be a factor in his or her behavior.

2. A mumbled “sorry” is not enough. There must be a process, a moderated one, which helps the accused somehow right the wrong that was committed.

3. Everyone is involved in the healing. There must include a dialogue with all parties -- victim, offender, and even community -- in order to genuinely move on and have an impact.

How About the Term *Restorative Justice*?

While I think the strategy of restorative justice is one that many schools should be using, I think the term isn't great. I don't have anything against the individual words per se. After all, the words *restorative* and *justice* sound lovely by themselves. When I hear the word *restorative*, I think about building back one's strength after a sickness. I think about honoring one's dignity and helping to rebuild what was taken away. When I think about *justice*, I think about fairness, equitable opportunities, and using the strength of a system to stand up for what is right.

But somehow, when you put the two words together, they take on a different sound that does a disservice to the term's intention. Why use such a loaded term? I think -- and I'm just musing here -- that it has to do with critics of “softer” discipline. I believe restorative justice is a term meant to instill toughness, while really meaning empathy and using more compassionate steps before utilizing more stringent ones.

But, the fact is, restorative justice is a vital component in any larger discipline plan. Schools must have strategies whereby they help students work out their differences and their arguments. Schools must play a part in helping students understand *why* they do things and *how* to think beyond their emotional impulses.

Restorative Justice Supports Student Brain Development

And this isn't just fluffy thinking here. We're talking about brain development and acknowledging that when we ask students to make good decisions, their brains might not yet be wired to do what we are asking of them. That doesn't mean we don't have rules or expectations. It doesn't mean we don't give consequences for not functioning within those rules. But it does mean that we must acknowledge that, as the book by the National Institute of Mental Health says, children's brains are "[still under construction](#)."

We know, for instance, that the part of the brain that houses impulse control is one of the last parts of the brain to become fully formed. And it doesn't really finish its neural-evolution until the early 20s. We also know that poverty, hormones, and [poor nutrition](#) and hunger can play a role in one's brain development.

Heck, even a fight with your best friend can influence a decision that can put a kid on the naughty list. So for all of those reasons, we can't assume "criminal" intentions of our students without providing the steps to help see them through the gloom that can simply be defined as childhood and adolescence.

Some, like me, may consider the term restorative justice a little harsh, but the goal of utilizing restorative justice before harsher methods of discipline is, for lack of a better word, just.