



## 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.

Dr. David Fine,  
Superintendent of Schools

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### Superintendent's E-Corner, November, 2016

*"There is No Substitute for Hard Work." Thomas Edison*

This past weekend Dr. Margie Daniels and I had the honor to share one of our programs (Summit Academy) at the New York State School Boards Association conference in Buffalo. It was a proud 90 minutes as we discussed our process, vision, and work as an educational community. Thank you to the board members who were present as well as the many other board members, superintendents, and educators from around our great state that joined our session. We ended with the video that we shared on the first day, which moved many of our participants as evidenced by our post-presentation discussion with many of them. The individualized attention we are focused on with respect to, "Every student; Every day" drives our vision and our explicit planning for our system. Talking and walking; pen to paper; living and learning. Strategic thinking, examining data, and working together is what we are all about. Please take a few moments to examine the graphic below as we not only identify our needs but our journey together towards our board/district goals and work as a system. Great quotes like, "without struggle there is no progress" by Frederick Douglass and Michael Fullan's, "change is a process" encompass our mission, one day at a time. #peekskillpride

Features of schools which achieve, sustain and share excellence, drawn from the 12 outstanding schools		
Achieving excellence	Sustaining excellence	Sharing excellence
Having vision, values and high expectations	Continuity of leadership	System leadership
Attracting, recruiting, retaining and developing staff	Maintaining a strong team culture	Partnering another school facing difficulties and improving it
Establishing disciplined learning and consistent staff behaviour	Continually developing teaching and learning	Acting as community leader to broker relationships across other schools
Assuring the quality of teaching and learning	Developing leaders	Developing and leading a successful school improvement partnership
Leading, and building leadership capacity	Enriching the curriculum	Working as a change agent or expert leader: National Leaders of Education
Providing a relevant and attractive curriculum	Improving literacy	
Assessment, progress-tracking and target-setting	Building relationships with students, parents and the community	
Inclusion: students as individuals	No student left behind	

**Congratulations:** Congratulations to Vernon "Kiki" Merriweather and Staci Woodley who were recognized by our local NAACP chapter for leadership, excellence, and remaining change agents for our community (unsung hero and yes we can education awards). It was a beautiful evening and I was honored to be there and share in all of our work as a community and educational system. It truly takes a village of supportive, engaged, passionate, creative, and positive individuals. Great work by all!

**Videos:** Two pretty amazing videos when you have a moment:

1. Never say never: (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mmtt8mlXIMA>)
2. Our work is more than the words in a textbook and the content on our boards. Raising a human filled with justice, awareness, and connection is just as vital and part of our everyday work. Our staff/student connection is paramount. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o0tJVlgKPHA&feature=youtu.be>)

**Excellent Job:** Well done Courtney Simon, LEAP coordinator on her leadership regarding the, *Making Strides Against Breast Cancer Awareness Month*. We raised approximately, \$1,200. Thank you for your passion and communication throughout and thank you to all that participated and contributed.

**Copeland House:** Entering into our 2<sup>nd</sup> year Peekskill continues to shine as they promoted our work in their newsletter. *During the 2016-17 academic year, we not only return to Peekskill High School with our What's the Score? program (composer commissions for student ensembles), but will also fan out through the entire district for various in-school programs at every school in the city! 2016 CULTIVATE Fellow DANIEL SCHLOSBERG (in photo behind choral director, Lawrence Del Casale seated at the piano, conducting) is seen during his first visit to the school, where he and the students began by exploring the possibilities of finding a suitable text for the work he'll compose for the school chorus and band. Watch this space for updates on Dan's progress as his composition begins to materialize.*

**STEAM:** Congratulations to our HS, Mr. Vidrini, and Mr. Hubbard on not only obtaining \$8,000 from Entergy, but hosting our 1<sup>st</sup> Robotics competition this year, December 3<sup>rd</sup>. Volunteers are needed so check out the HS website to sign-up and volunteer. In addition, thank you to all the staff, Mr. Callahan, and individuals behind the scenes to make this happen.

**Washington:** Back on the map for Peekskill. Great work to all of our HS staff and students that worked to bring this trip back. We will continue to examine opportunities whereas our students/staff have experiences beyond the walls of the classroom. If not us, then who! Nice job and super work. So proud to see all the pictures!

**Excited:** He is very excited to start the 4<sup>th</sup> grade. A wonderful video by a 1<sup>st</sup> year teacher. Enjoy <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XBLcuGunRxU>

**Reading and Literacy:** Our schools will be presenting their School Comprehensive Educational Plans to the board over the next couple of months. Uriah Hill and Woodside went already and highlighted positive data, which is a direct result of the work within the classrooms and our system. In addition, they shared gaps/needs, which require additional attention/intervention. Second only to safety, ensuring our learners literacy skills are developed, challenged, and supportive is paramount. We begin and end with reading. Examining data to show growth as well as drive our decisions and instructional approaches.

**Content/Language Objectives:** An aligned approach to what our students will learn each day as well as the language process (speak, read, write, listen, etc) is paramount with regard to our planning and collaborative approaches forward. Nice work systemically speaking with regard to the PD discussions last week. Have a great school year; making each day better than the next in a respectful, transparent, and progressive manner.

**5k Fun-Run:** Thank you to all of our volunteers, walkers/runners, sponsors, maintenance/custodial teams, 5k council, and community for a wonderful and healthy morning. Below is a link to the results. Congratulations to the MS, winners of the Cheer Station as they will hold onto the trophy and represent it well. Start getting ready for next year! [http://results.active.com/event\\_collections/peekskill-superintendent-s-5k/2016/expanded](http://results.active.com/event_collections/peekskill-superintendent-s-5k/2016/expanded)

**March 10<sup>th</sup>, PLA:** I am proud and excited to share that we will be hosting Dr. David Kirkland during this PLA in the MS. His works aligns to our growth mindset, systemic thinking, and focus on literacy.

**Boston Basics:** We are partnering with Dr. Ron Ferguson on a collaborative program called, Boston Basics. It truly takes a village and this program is guided by five principles. We will be designing a council consisting of various stakeholders in our schools and community to discuss how we create this for Peekskill. See video for a brief introduction as more is to come: <http://bostonbasics.org/>

1. Maximize Love and Manage Stress
2. Talk, Sing, and Point
3. Count, Group, and Compare
4. Explore through movement and play
5. Read and Discuss Stories

**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:

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.