

It feels like the year has just begun and yet we have already approached the half-way point! I feel it is moving even faster than last year!

While we have not had any major snow this year, we still may; consequently, I want take a moment and remind everyone how we will communicate school closings and/or delayed openings/early dismissals during this winter season. The decision is dependent upon the weather conditions and the conditions of the roads. The safety of our students and staff is the primary factor. However, I prefer not to close school and, if possible, will have a “delayed school opening” of one to two hours. We will communicate closings or delayed openings (using ConnectEd) in the following ways:

1. We will call homes and leave a message -- you will receive calls by 6:15 a.m. at the latest. In the message we will state whether school is closed or that there will be a one or two hour delay.
2. We will post this information on the District’s website: [www.pocanticohills.org](http://www.pocanticohills.org).
3. We will send this information to the local television and radio stations.

### **January Activities:**

Many activities occurred during the month of January. For six weeks, beginning December 15 and ending January 27, the Pocantico Hills community engaged in its first Pocantico Hills Reading Challenge, a joint venture between the Pocantico Hills School and the Pocantico Hills P.T.A. The goals of this Reading Challenge were threefold: First, increase the amount of time our students spent reading for pleasure in their after-school hours; second, use Pocantico Hills’ parents and staff as models of good reading habits for our students; third, add an element of excitement and fun in reading for our students.

I am happy to report all three goals were met. The Pocantico Hills community read for an amazing 609,595 minutes over the six weeks! Our students won the Reading Challenge by logging 279,840 minutes of reading, while our parents read for 236,480 minutes, and Pocantico Hills’ staff read for 93,275 minutes. The top three readers in each class were awarded a special Reading Certificate. Special thank you to Mr. Steele for his leadership in this.

On Friday, January 27, over 200 parents, students and staff participated in a PTA-sponsored Family Night Pizza Party and Open Gym to celebrate the successful conclusion of the Reading Challenge. The Pocantico Hills Foundation generously donated four Kindles that were raffled off to reading participants. Three Kindles were raffled off to all those who participated in the Challenge and one Kindle was given to the top student reader. The Pocantico Hills Girl Scouts also had a stand at the event, where they sold superb brownies and pink lemonade to raise funds for the troop. I am proud to say that I contributed to this worthy group by buying a big plate of the best brownies I have eaten in a long time!!

This Reading Challenge is a great example of the Pocantico Hills community working together for the good of our students. The students truly won!

Our middle school students also experienced mid-term exams. Our wonderful staff of teachers and teaching assistants worked very hard to ensure that our students were challenged to do their best. Middle school report cards will arrive in the mail beginning next week.

Our eighth grade students recently completed their high school selections. All three high schools will have incoming students from Pocantico Hills next year. As in past years, we will be meeting with the guidance counselors from each of the schools over the coming months to finalize all of the details.

### **February Activities:**

During the month of February we will be rehearsing for this year's school play, **Cinderella**. Ms. Stanton will co-direct with one of our newest teachers, Mr. Burgess, our S.T.E.M. teacher. Mr. Burgess double-majored in theatre and mathematics while at Muskingum University, and I anticipate that he will add much to the team. He and Ms. Stanton are excited to be working together.

We will also present the Five Year Strategic Plan to the Trustees at the **February 7<sup>th</sup>** Board meeting. The thirty-three members of the Strategic Planning Committee spent over five months reviewing information, discussing ideas and developing the plan. We have identified three main goals and seven strategies to help focus the work of the District over the next five years. I invite anyone who is interested to attend the Board meeting, which will begin at 8:00 p.m. in the school library.

At that same Board meeting, we will also premiere the video that Jay Scotto-Friedman, Debra Keiser and I recently filmed to discuss the new tax cap legislation. This new legislation is very complex and complicated, and there are new formulas and exemptions that are confusing. The sound bites and interviews from various governmental personnel have led us to believe certain things that are not accurate. The video clears up some of the misinformation we have all been exposed to and clarifies exactly how the new law will impact our budget and the budget process. After we present the video, we will also make it available on the website and we will have copies for community members to take home and look at with their family and neighbors.

In the coming weeks we will be developing the budget, and I urge you to attend future Board meetings and to visit our District website for updated information.

On **February 16<sup>th</sup>**, we will also have our annual "Jump Rope for Heart." Mr. Dan Linehan and Miss Kaitlin Rodriguez will sponsor the event in the gym. We will send out requests shortly for volunteers to help with the activities. If you are able, please plan to come and volunteer.

On **February 17<sup>th</sup>**, school is closed for our students while our staff participates in Superintendent's Conference Day. We will spend the day in professional development regarding our new teacher evaluation model.

**February 20<sup>th</sup>-24<sup>th</sup>**, school is closed for winter break. Enjoy your winter break and be safe.

On **February 27<sup>th</sup>**, we all return to school.

As you know, February is Black History Month. I am proud to state that, throughout the year, our staff curricula and materials are diverse and reflect the accomplishments and impact people of color have had on a particular idea or subject being studied. Whether in social studies, mathematics, science, or literature, our staff infuses their curriculum with accomplishments of these great Americans. As a special tribute to Black History Month, I want to invite our community to the **February 28<sup>th</sup>** Board meeting. We will celebrate Black History Month with presentations from Mrs. DiMaritino's students, who have been researching various famous African-Americans in American history. Ms. Stanton's students will also perform songs.

### **March Activities:**

We will have many opportunities to support the students in the coming weeks. Chief among them is the Pocantico Hills Foundation fundraiser. Please mark your calendar and plan to come to "LIFE" on Saturday, March 3<sup>rd</sup>. The Foundation is raising funds for the Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics (S.T.E.M.) Program. The fundraiser will include a silent auction.

In the coming weeks you will receive an invitation. Please plan to come and have a fun-filled evening with family and friends. If you do not receive an invitation, please e-mail Gina Downes at [gdownes@pocanticohills.org](mailto:gdownes@pocanticohills.org) or call 914-631-2440 x103 and we will send you one.

Finally, the transportation department has asked us to remind our parents that the bus driver is instructed to wait no more than three (3) minutes at any one bus stop, so please try to be on time. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated.