

# HOME PAGES

THE QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE POCANTICO HILLS SCHOOL

FALL 2011



## **As the leaves take on the golden colors of autumn and the days**

**become crisp,** Pocantico Hills School is still buzzing with the excitement of a new school year, even as students become accustomed to new friends, new teachers, new routines and new subjects. For all of us, new state learning standards are being implemented that will help guide us as we prepare students for the 21st century. And as we look forward, we also remember the past. This year marked the 10th anniversary of the terrorist attacks of 9-11, and at Pocantico Hills School, a somber Remembrance ceremony encouraged us to be kind to each other, to take care of each other and help when and where we can. That spirit of service is truly the spirit of Pocantico Hills School, and, working together, we are sure a great school year is ahead of us.

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# LETTERS H

HEARING FROM OUR COMMUNITY LEADERS

## FROM DR. DOUGLAS

Dear Residents:



The school year has gotten off to a great start with many new faces and programs. I want to again welcome Lisa Levy, our seventh and eighth grade math teacher, and Blake Burgess, our new Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) teacher to our school. Mrs. Levy and Mr. Burgess are

getting to know and enjoy our students. In fact, I am sure that I speak for all of the Pocantico Hills Central School District, when I say we are all happy to be back in school with our students.

Our staff has been working very hard implementing our new reading program called “Reading Street,” and science program called “Science 21.” Many of you received presentations about these new programs from your child's teacher when you came to the Open Houses. Both of these programs are interactive, and our teachers and staff have been engaging in professional development to develop expertise with these new programs.

This year we also begin implementing new learning standards. They are called Common Core State Standards (CCSS). New York, along with many states, has adopted these Standards, the purpose of which is to ensure that students graduate having experienced a rigorous curriculum with the necessary 21st century skills to compete successfully in a global economy. I want to thank Mr. Steele, Mr. Brown and our teachers and staff for the effort they are making to meet this new mandate.

The beginning of the school year also brings us our fall sports! This year we have boys and girls soccer teams, as well as a girls volleyball team. We also began our Extended Learning Opportunity programs (ELO) which began in early October. The students meet once a week Monday through Thursday from 2:45 -

3:30 p.m., with some classes ending at 4:15 p.m.

Our band and chorus are busy preparing for upcoming concerts. As you recall, this year all students had to take band and chorus. Mr. Lucadamo reports that the students have chosen their instruments and are practicing with gusto! I want to thank Lucadamo and Ms. Stanton for doing such a great job in making this change so quickly.

I want to update you on the work of our Strategic Planning Advisory Committee. Mr. John Conrad has written about this committee and its purpose. We are in the midst of our meetings and have begun to look at data and to understand what the term “21st century skills” means in relation to developing a vision for the education of your children – our students. As Mr. Conrad indicated in his letter, the committee is composed of a cross-section of people from all segments of our community. I am very thankful that our community members are willing to give so much of their time and best thinking to help develop a vision for going forward.

In closing, this year I plan to continue the practice I began last year of having community meetings throughout the fall and winter. Please check the website for my schedule. These meetings are informal and free flowing, as the purpose is to hear your concerns and your compliments. Your input is critical to my work, and I look forward to seeing you at any of these meetings.

I also want to say how honored I am to have my contract extended until 2016 by the School Board in July. I look forward to serving the students, staff, parents and community in the coming years. Please know my door is always open to you.

Sincerely,

**Valencia F. Douglas, Ed.D.**  
*Superintendent*

# OME



## Sun Shines on Annual Foundation Walk at Swan Lake

On a glorious morning in early October, the Pocantico Hills school community stepped out of doors to enjoy the Foundation Walk around Swan Lake at the Rockefeller State Park Preserve. The sun was shining on this annual event that encourages walking as a healthy habit. “Wellness is important, and this is a great way to show the students that exercise – especially with friends – can be fun and healthful,” said Patty Butter-Sabety, co-chairperson. Dr. Douglas hiked, too, and along with teachers and students, enjoyed the event that encourages students to be active. “This is such a fun morning,” she said. “It is great to be out of doors for a brisk walk with students and parents during this spectacular season of foliage change.”



### FROM OUR FOUNDATION

#### Dear Parents, Friends and Neighbors,

On behalf of the Pocantico Hills School Foundation Board, we welcome you to the 2011/2012 school year. The PHS Foundation is looking forward to another year of providing support to our dedicated teaching staff for projects and programs that enrich the educational experience of our children.

In that spirit, we wanted to take this opportunity to share the purposes and mission of the PHS Foundation and how the PHS Foundation supplements and facilitates the mission of our school. The PHS Foundation is a 501(C)(3) charitable organization, founded in 1995, to raise funds and encourage support for educational projects and programs beyond the scope of the school budget. Working in close cooperation with the School Board, Dr. Douglas and others, the PHS Foundation strives to:

- Encourage *involvement* by parents, alumni, the community and local businesses,
- Develop and support *enrichment opportunities* for the students, and
- Provide *financial support* for educational projects and programs

Through the generosity of the Pocantico Hills community, the PHS Foundation has funded grants, programs, materials, projects and scholarships. Examples include: video and audio recording equipment for “The Hawk” newsletter, remote-controlled vehicle program for the middle school, state-of-the-art field microscope that interfaces with SmartBoards, new sound system for the auditorium, video-conferencing system and, this past spring, four \$1,000 scholarships to graduating high-school seniors. This year one area of focus for our fundraising efforts will be to purchase equipment for the new STEM program blending science, technology, engineering and math with a hands-on curriculum that will benefit all of the school’s students.

The PHS Foundation Board is made up of volunteers from the community and is always looking for new members and assistance with our many initiatives. The PHS Foundation typically meets the first Thursday of each month and invites all interested Pocantico community members to join us either as a member or as a visitor. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us or any PHS Foundation Board member.

Warm wishes

**Patty Butter-Sabety and David Zimmerman**  
Co-Chairpersons

[foundation@pocanticohills.org](mailto:foundation@pocanticohills.org)

# LETTERS H

HEARING FROM OUR COMMUNITY LEADERS

## A MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Dear Pocantico Hills Community,

I hope that the new school year has started well for everyone. Once again, our custodial staff did a remarkable job of having our school campus looking beautiful and spotless on the first day of school. We are all very grateful for their hard work. They always make certain that our school campus is clean and safe for the return of our students and staff.

I would like to welcome the many new families that have joined our school community this year. While I had the pleasure of meeting many of them at the recent PTA Welcome Dinner, I want to wish them all well again and tell them how happy we are to have them join our community. I want to also welcome the new members of our teaching staff. It was great to see them at the PTA Welcome Dinner as well, and we wish them much success in their careers at Pocantico Hills. Our new teachers are joining the ranks of a dedicated and professional teaching staff like none other. As a school community, we are very proud of our teachers, and we value them greatly. We appreciate their hard work and dedication to their students. Their enthusiasm toward the education of their students is unsurpassed as we experienced during the recent Open House evenings for our Middle and Elementary schools.

The 2011/2012 school year at Pocantico Hills Central School District will again be a year of strong collaboration with the Board of Education, the Administration team, our teaching staff and the school community all working together with student achievement at the forefront of our collective effort. There are many components to this effort, and I would like to make sure that you are aware of some which have already developed. Stability and excellence in school district leadership is one key component. Recognizing the importance of this key component, at its meeting on July 6, 2011, the Board of Education approved an agreement to provide an extension of employment to our Superintendent of

Schools, Dr. Valencia Douglas, through June 30, 2016. The Board of Education is very pleased that Dr. Douglas will remain with Pocantico Hills and continue as our educational leader for many years to come.

Another component of our collective effort is long-term planning. To further ensure individual student achievement and to move our school district to the next level of excellence, we have embarked on the creation of a five-year strategic plan. The initial steps of the creation of the five-year strategic plan have taken place beginning with Board of Education discussions, presentations by the Administration and approval by the Board of Education to move forward with the process.

The next steps included the invitation of community members from all cross-sections of our school community to join the five-year strategic planning committee and the gathering of feedback from the entire community through an on-line survey. The work of the committee, which will be facilitated by Mr. Art Clark, the consultant appointed by the Board of Education to assist the district with the process, and the gathering of the feedback from the school community are major components of the strategic plan process.

The committee will meet six to eight times over the next few months to analyze educational and community data, discuss their findings and then reach conclusions. This process will culminate with the presentation of a final plan to the Board of Education in the winter of 2012. It is the desired outcome that this plan will be a useful tool for this Board of Education and future Boards as academic, financial, communication and organizational decisions are made.

As each year passes, another component of our collective effort grows stronger and stronger. That component is the spirit of volunteerism and community support that is very much alive at Pocantico Hills. The Board of Education is greatly appreciative of everyone's efforts to help our school district.

# OME

Every year, tremendous contributions in the form of time, funding and special programs are made for the benefit of the students. These contributions are an integral part of our children's educational and social experiences and are driven by the endless efforts of our Parent Teacher Association and our School Foundation. If you haven't had the opportunity to volunteer or you are interested to volunteer more of your time, our school community affords many opportunities for you to become involved. Your time will be well spent and greatly appreciated as a member of our Parent Teacher Association or our School Foundation, as a class parent volunteer, as a member of a specially formed committee or by attending the regularly scheduled Board of Education meetings. Whichever you choose, together, we can work to keep this very important component of our collective effort burning bright at Pocantico Hills.

Lastly, the Board of Education wishes everyone much success this school year. To our students in our elementary school, middle school and at our partner high schools: Study hard, read often and ask many questions of your teachers and parents. To our staff and administrators: We appreciate your hard work and dedication. We value your professionalism and devotion to the children. To our parents and guardians: Please know that the goals and priorities of the Board of Education are centered on delivering the best education for our students and preparing them for an ever-changing and complex world.

Have a great year, and see you at school.

Sincerely,

**John Conrad**

*Board of Education, President*

## FROM OUR PTA

Dear Friends,

Greetings everyone and welcome back to school! The PTA is off and running with a host of programs designed to enhance your child's educational experience while having fun along the way.

Our year began with our annual welcoming Pasta Dinner. This evening is a chance for returning families to catch up and for new families and staff members to be welcomed into the Pocantico community. A delicious dinner was prepared by our own Kelly Owen and Norma DeSousa and served by members of the PTA. Not only did everyone have a great time, but we feel we made a few new friends as well!

Currently, we are in the midst of Picture Day (thank you Bobbi Minerva) and our annual Innesbrook wrapping paper sales (thank you Julie Minerva). It is never too early to start thinking of the holidays, and both of these programs can help you get a start on your gift giving and wrapping needs. And speaking of gift giving, our Kidstuff coupon book sale was so successful last year that we will be running the program again. This coupon book offers discounts on hundreds of restaurants and local activities that we, as parents, use everyday. Please pick up one for yourself as well!

This fall, we will be trying something new and moving our Scholastic Book Fair to the end of October. We have a lot of exciting Halloween events tied in with this move, including Spooky Story Time, a Halloween Pet Parade, Arts and Crafts and a Pie Eating Contest, with samples of the pies we will be selling for our Thanksgiving Pie Drive. Please watch your child's mail for details and support these fun activities.

Lastly, we would like to thank everyone for their continued support of the PTA and its programs. The funds generated by last year's Pocantico Pathway Project will go a long way towards helping teachers outfit their classrooms, take additional field trips, bring in visiting authors and supplement their curriculum with specialized learning opportunities.

Please continue your support by attending our next meeting and becoming a member. We look forward to seeing you!

Sincerely,

**Laura Dineen and Stefanie Zednik**

*Co-Presidents of the PTA*

# PTA Welcome Dinner Serves Up Food, Fun, Friendship



The community came together on Friday, Sept. 23, for the annual welcoming Pasta Dinner hosted by the PTA – a festive evening that was heartily enjoyed by all. The casual fete lasted about three hours and gave residents an opportunity to relax and socialize with neighbors, both old and new. Sharing food is a time-honored tradition that brings people together, one that has proven true many times over here at Pocantico Hills School.

“Welcoming everyone into the Pocantico Hills community is our goal on this evening,” said PTA



Co-President Laura Dineen. “The dinner went very well, and the PTA is pleased to kick off the year on such a positive note,” added PTA Co-President Stephanie Zednick. Kelly Owen and Norma DeSousa prepared dinner – a delicious assortment of pasta and sauces, served with bread and green salad. Other PTA members served up the food; pictured here, Laura Dineen, Stefanie Bartell-Zednik and Dawn Horecky.

“Not only did everyone have a great time, but we feel we made a few new friends as well,” said the co-presidents.



## Welcome Staff Members

### Our District welcomes eight new

**staff members:** (l. to r.) Blake Burgess (STEM), Ilana Brennan (FACS), Axa Quijada (Bi-lingual Teacher), Dr. Penny Knack (Part-time School Psychologist), Eleanor Smith (Long Term Leave Replacement – Reading Specialist), and Lisa Levy (7/8 math).

(right) Kaitlin Rodriguez (Teaching Assistant – Physical Education)

Suzanne Schlanger (Teacher of the Hearing Impaired) was not photographed.



# Students Remember 9-11



“It is important to be kind to each other, to take care of each other and to keep each other safe,” she said. “One good way to do that is to offer help to people when they need it.”

Those who were working that day to rescue others performed truly heroic tasks, she said. “They deserve to be called heroes!” They are heroes, she explained, for not worrying about their own comfort, but instead being unselfishly concerned about others.

She stressed how teamwork was important. “It no longer mattered which agency we worked for or which uniform we wore...we were all a team! We worked together and did everything we could to help. ...We have learned the importance of being helpful to each other, and not to hurt each other. And when we are helpful to each other, we make our country, the United States of America, a safe and happy place to live.”

Her advice was simple: “Each morning as you say the Pledge of Allegiance, also take a moment to pay tribute to the community service workers who are available to help you if you ever need it. I challenge you boys and girls to be a true American and help your classmates, teachers and families this year! I know you can do it!”

In a somber ceremony to remember the tragic events of the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, our students listened attentively as Police Officer Lauren Valentino of the Mt. Pleasant Police Department spoke of the events of that day.



The police officer encouraged students to remember the fallen police officers, firefighters, emergency service workers and rescue workers who made the ultimate

sacrifice that day, and she used the anniversary as a springboard to bring home a message of caring for each other right here in Pocantico Hills.

# Children Learn about Fire Safety

During Fire Prevention Week, Oct. 9-15, Eleanora Smith (our long term leave replacement- reading specialist ) gave the Pre-K through second graders a special demonstration to help them become familiar with fire safety and prevention.

Ms. Smith, a volunteer fire fighter in Patterson, N.Y., presented to three separate groups of students, talking to the children about what it means to be fire safe. This included “Stay Low and Go” and “Stop, Drop, and Roll.”

She also stressed that practicing fire drills at home is very important.



Part of the demonstration involved showing the students what a firefighter in turnout gear would look like.

“This turnout gear can be intimidating,” said Ms. Smith. Familiarizing the children with the gear and putting it on in front of them, piece by piece, shows the children that there is nothing to be frightened of. She also demonstrated what the breathing equipment sounds like.

The demonstrations went very well, with students sitting attentively in a circle with all eyes riveted on her as she moved around wearing the gear. “You would be surprised at what a big difference this type of instruction makes to a child.”

## upcoming dates

### NOVEMBER

- 1 PTA Pie Fundraiser Begins
- 2 Strategic Planning Meeting (6 - 8 p.m.)
- 3 Foundation Meeting (8 p.m.)
- 7 Conversation, Tea, Coffee with Dr. Douglas  
The Hamlet (7 p.m.)
- 8 School Board Meeting - 8 p.m.  
Sleepy Hollow High School Presents
- 9 8th Grade Student/Parent Visit to Briarcliff  
High School (Students 9 a.m. / Parents 7 p.m.)
- 10 8th Grade Parent Visit to Pleasantville (7 p.m.)
- 11 Veterans Day (District Closed)
- 14 Picture Retake Day
- 15 PTA Pie Fundraiser Ends
- 16 Family Geography Night (7 - 8:30 p.m.)
- 18 Parent/Teacher Conferences  
11:30 a.m. Dismissal for Students
- 21 Parent/Teacher Conferences (6 - 8 p.m.)
- 23 11:30 a.m. Dismissal
- 24 & 25 Thanksgiving Recess (District Closed)
- 28 Conversation, Tea, Coffee with Dr. Douglas  
Briggsville (7:30 p.m.)
- 29 8th Grade Student/Parent Visit to Sleepy  
Hollow High School (Students 9 a.m./Parents 7 p.m.)
- 30 Strategic Planning Meeting (6 - 8 p.m.)

For more information,  
please visit our website:  
[www.pocanticohills.org](http://www.pocanticohills.org)

POCANTICO HILLS CENTRAL SCHOOL  
599 Bedford Road  
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Sleepy Hollow, N.Y. 10591

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#### Board of Education

John Conrad, *President*  
David Wilens, *Vice President*  
Joan Cusanelli, *Trustee*  
Frederic Rickles, *Trustee*  
Emily Segal, *Trustee*

## Cast Your Vote!

We have been developing a new look for our hawk and our logo, and we hope you will get involved by helping us in our decision.

Below you see the two images, and we are asking you to choose the one that you feel best represents our school as a logo.



A

**Image A** is the hawk that is familiar to us, but which does not truly identify us as a school.

**Image B** is the hawk slightly redesigned, and with some additional information. Here we see the name of our school and the words "Learning, Achievement, Growth and Direction" framing the circle. We feel the words encapsulate our vision, unify our logo and set us apart as a district of distinction. Graphically, they add motion to the design.



B

Now, we want your feedback! Please indicate whether you prefer Image A or Image B by emailing your choice to Dr. Valencia Douglas, [vdouglas@pocanticohills.org](mailto:vdouglas@pocanticohills.org), or

Gina Downes, [gdownes@pocanticohills.org](mailto:gdownes@pocanticohills.org), by Nov. 30.