As they move up to partner high schools that are larger than their entire home district, eighth-graders reflected at graduation on the value and uniqueness of the small, close-knit Pocantico community whose members have become like family.

Student speaker Dylan Z. said family was the first word that came to mind to describe the school. “Throughout my 10 years of attending Pocantico Hills School, I have created forever friendships with so many people,” she said. “Even though many of us are sadly parting ways into different high schools, I know we will never forget each other.”

Dylan, who received the Harold Akley Award for best overall student, joked that the school community is “one big happy, occasionally dysfunctional family” whose members sometimes drive one another crazy. “But in the end, I’ll always love them like my brothers and sisters because that’s what they are.”

The 31 students in the Class of 2019 graduated during an evening ceremony on June 24. It was the final graduation for Principal Brent Harrington and Superintendent Carol Conklin-Spillane, who left the district at the end of June.

Ms. Conklin-Spillane said she continually sought to “know it all” during her school years, just as she believed her teachers did. Ultimately, she realized no one could know everything. Learning never stops, she said.

“Tonight we don’t celebrate all that you have learned,” she said. “Rather, we celebrate all that you have yet to learn.”

Counselor James McVeigh and science teacher Vincent Cook introduced graduates with excerpts from self-reflections they submitted. Students said they would remember fondly Pocantico’s “amazing and caring teachers,” the eighth-grade trip to Washington and “hitting the (candy) dish” in teacher James Cioffi’s class.

Among their hopes for the future are to be on Broadway, play for the NBA, work for UNICEF, join the United States Air Force and become a filmmaker.

Class President Peter A. said he and his classmates “made unforgettable memories and built a truly family-like bond with each other, and with the wonderful faculty,” he said.

He recalled former Principal Stan Steele telling students they “don’t have to be friends with everybody, but everybody has to get along.

“I think the Class of 2019 will agree that we did more than get along – we laughed, we played, we grew, both physically and emotionally,” Peter said.

Mr. Harrington urged graduates not to allow someone else’s actions to turn them into victims, and to be brave, strong and poised. He asked them to take a quote by Eleanor Roosevelt to heart: “No one can make you feel inferior without your consent.”
Dear Pocantico students, staff, parents and community members, or as I refer to you, “Team Pocantico,”

With exactly one month under my belt, I can honestly say that a day has not gone by that I have not been in awe of this amazing district. I am so thankful for the many people who make this an incredible place. Thank you for making me feel so welcome!

I need to express my appreciation to the Board of Education and the educational community for allowing me to serve you. It is an incredible honor and I could not be happier.

To date, I have had the pleasure of meeting over 75 staff, parents and community members. No matter whom I speak with, there is one recurring theme: pride. Your commitment and love for this school, community and, most importantly, the students is outstanding. We are so fortunate to have dedicated people working together with our students’ best interests at heart.

I look forward to the start of the school year with great anticipation. I would like very much to meet you all, so please feel free to reach out to Carolina Reason, my administrative assistant, to set up a time to chat.

As we work together now and in the years to come, please know that you have my commitment to always do the right thing, to be honest and to put the needs of all of our students first, as they are the reason that we do what we do. We owe them the very best that we have.

With gratitude,
Rich

The district is pleased to welcome several new staff members. They are:
- Lisa Raymond, assistant superintendent for business and operations
- Ariane Berns, grade 1 teacher
- Jessica DeGennaro, grades 5-6 special education teacher
- Anne Krissoff, math specialist
- Kristen Mueller, Spanish teacher

Congratulations to Susan Burlazzi, who started her first full term on the Board of Education July 1, and Joseph McGrath, who began his first term.

School Board Thanks Retiring and Current Staff Members for Service

Board of Education members last month honored 12 staff members for a combined 180 years of service. They also thanked Superintendent Carol Conklin-Spillane, school board member Fred Rickles and teacher Lory Rollman, all of whom left their positions at the end of June.

The board gave Ms. Conklin-Spillane a plaque in honor of her three years as superintendent. “You’re leaving after three years of incredible hard work and dedication and energy, and you’re leaving on a high note,” Board President Alfred Pacile said.

The board and superintendent also recognized Mr. Rickles for his nine years on the board.

“He has been a great part of the team,” Ms. Conklin-Spillane said. “He has always been here to do what the district needs and he always made decisions based on what is right for kids.”

Ms. Rollman, who retired after 22 years with the district, said it was an honor and privilege to serve the community.

“We love your children, we do, and not just for the year that we have them in our care, but also for many years beyond that,” she said. “We care about your children deeply.”

Welcome to New Staff, School Board Members

The eSchoolData Parent Portal allows for instant access to your child’s report card, schedule, teacher’s gradebook, attendance records, assessments, etc. It can be accessed three ways: through the Parents tab on the school website; directly at https://esdparentportal.lhrinc.org/pocanticohillsccsd; or through the Pocantico Hills CSD app. For assistance, please contact Norma DeSousa at 631-2440, ext. 153, or ndesousa@pocanticohills.org.
Students Earn Awards for Academics, Arts, Leadership, Service

At the Middle School Awards Ceremony on June 13, teachers, administrators and families celebrated students’ accomplishments in academics, the arts, community service and school attendance.

Sixteen seventh-graders and 19 eighth-graders were honored for their membership in the National Junior Honor Society. Many students received awards for community service and Math Olympiad. A few earned awards for perfect attendance. Others were recognized for making All County Chorus, All County Orchestra, All County Band, and other New York State School Music Association awards.

The Pocantico Foundation awarded High School Senior Scholarships to Shane M., Regine N. and Jason O.

The following eighth-graders received special awards:

**Sedge A.**
- Cab Calloway Band Award
- Nancy McDonnell Memorial Award (math)
- Art Award
- The Madeline B. Walsh Award (science)

**Peter A.**
- David Rockefeller Innovation and Design Technology Award

**Alice C.**
- Carolyn Keil Campbell Award (chorus)

**Josiah “Jojo” D.**
- Humanitarian Award

**Jordyn E.**
- Nancy Pera Shaul Memorial Award (love of reading)
- David Rockefeller Innovation and Design Ingenuity Award

**Steven E.**
- Nelson A. Rockefeller Award (determination, optimism and patriotism)

**David F.**
- David Rockefeller Innovation and Design Technology Award

**Nicolas G.**
- George Morrow Scholarship (honesty, leadership and kindness)
- The Raymond B. Walker Award (Pocantico Hills Fire Department)
- The Estelle V. Storms Award (highest GPA in Spanish)

**Stephanie J.**
- English Award

**Rahul K.**
- Dr. Caroline Crescenzi Award (growth during middle school)

**Adel P.**
- Dr. Caroline Crescenzi Award (growth during middle school)

**Erin Q.**
- PTA/Anne Marie Brown Community Service Award

**Fariha R.**
- Pocantico Hills Teacher Association Special Award (leadership)
- Blanche E. Long Award (healthy approach to life)
- Art Award

**Dayla R.**
- David Rockefeller Innovation and Design Health/Societal Impact Award

**Saydee S.**
- Social Studies Award
- David Rockefeller Innovation and Design Health/Societal Impact Award

**Mia T.**
- Missouri E. Leach Award (perseverance in the face of difficulties)
- David Rockefeller Innovation and Design Humanitarianism Award

**Dylan Z.**
- Jason Harris Memorial Award (athletics, academics, leadership and character)
- Estelle V. Storms Award (highest GPA in French)
- David Rockefeller Innovation and Design Humanitarianism Award
- Harold Akley Award (best overall student)

Pocantico Earns National Award

The district recently received an award of merit in the National School Public Relations Association’s 2019 National School Communication Awards contest. The award is in the print newsletter/newspaper category for the fall 2018 and winter 2019 newsletters.

Athletes Honored for Skills, Sportsmanship and Spirit

Congratulations to the students who received sports awards at the June 5 ceremony!

**Girls Soccer**
- Olivia P. — Most Energetic Award
- Saydee S. — Best Sportsmanship Award

**Boys Soccer**
- Austin L. — Team Spirit Award
- Michael L. — MVP Award

**Volleyball**
- Mia T. — MVP Award
- Fariha R. — All-Star Award

**Girls Basketball**
- Dylan Z. — MVP Award
- Maryum F. — Most Improved Award

**Boys Basketball**
- Massimo S. — Most Improved Award
- Terique R. — MVP Award

**Boys Baseball**
- Gerald N. — Heart and Hustle Award
- Max H. — Team Spirit Award

**Girls Softball**
- Stephanie J. — All-Star Award

Pocantico’s High School Graduates:

- Anna A. — Fashion Institute of Technology, SUNY
- Yashawini A. — Penn State University
- Francesca A. — High Point University
- Sierrc B. — Buffalo State University
- Alexander B. — University of Southern California
- Anand B. — Mercy College
- Aaron C. — Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University
- Athaena C. — SUNY University at Buffalo
- Maximilian D. — Keene State College
- Leila F. — an international university in Germany or Switzerland
- Matthew G. — United States Army
- John H. — University at Albany, SUNY
- Jaren H. — SUNY Cortland
- Palma H. — Fordham University
- Jadon K. — Westchester Community College
- Marc K. — Wilkes University
- Livia M. — University of Vermont
- Shane M. — SUNY College of Oneonta
- Kymorah M. — New York University Tisch School of the Arts
- Danny M. — Springfield College
- Lyndsey M. — Coastal Carolina University
- Regine N. — Pratt Institute
- Bryan N. — University at Albany, SUNY
- Alyssa O. — gap year
- Jason O. — Binghamton University, SUNY
- Harsha P. — Rochester Institute of Technology
- Tucker P. — Tufts University
- Sean R. — unknown
- Zara S. — Ithaca College
- Taajon T. — Dutchess County Community College
- Charles V. — Tompkins Cortland Community College
- Jaden W. — Westchester Community College
- Abigael W. — Savannah College of Art & Design
- Da’Quon W. — University at Albany, SUNY
- William Z. — Wake Forest University
Pocantico students who are not native English speakers come from all over the world. Each spring, the school celebrates the diversity of families’ backgrounds, and the strides students have made in learning English. The luncheon event took place June 14.

Forty second-graders dressed up Fern, Charlotte, Wilbur and other denizens of Zuckerman Farm June 7 to perform “Charlotte’s Web.” The show has been an annual tradition for 20 years. This was the final year teachers Lory Rollman and Martina Baer coordinated it. Both left Pocantico at the end of the school year.

Children’s author and poet Janet Wong visited children in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade during National Poetry Month in April. She let children select items from her Chinese grandfather’s suitcase to guide her in choosing what to read – from a turtle stuffed animal to uncooked noodles. The PTA sponsored the visit.

Eighth-graders had a great time on the annual three-day trip to Washington. Some of the sites they toured were the National Museum of African American History and Culture, the National Aquarium, Arlington National Cemetery and George Washington’s Mount Vernon.

Each pre-kindergarten through grade 4 class created a works of art that was auctioned off at the Pocantico Hills School Foundation Fundraiser Soirée in May. Every piece included an inspirational quote. For example, first-graders made a floral collage with the words “With heart and helping hands … a child can accomplish anything.”
Before graduating from one of three partner high schools in June, seniors returned to Pocantico for a reunion pizza party June 17. More than a dozen students attended the event, which school counselor James McVeigh organized. After lunch, they visited some of their former teachers.

On the last day of school June 25, students visited their teachers for the 2019-20 academic year. They cleaned out their lockers and cubbies and said goodbye to friends, teachers and other employees for the summer. As is tradition, staff members walked outside to wave goodbye to the school buses.

In their June 20 “Hawk Talks,” fifth-graders made persuasive arguments for protecting health, life and the environment by using electric transportation and biofuels; running a zero-waste system; saving endangered species; and taking other pro-active measures. Students centered their presentations on the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals.

On Truck Day May 17 was a success, with children learning about emergency vehicles, tow trucks, tractors and buses. Presenters included Empress Ambulance; Westchester County, Greenburgh and Mount Pleasant police departments; Glen’s Towing; Pocantico, Elmsford, Sleepy Hollow and Tarrytown fire departments; New York State Police; Stone Barns; Bee-Line Bus System; and more.

On June 20, children enjoyed greens from the school garden during the annual Salad Harvest Celebration. Parents served up several varieties of lettuce. Special thanks to gardener José Zamora; Chef Kassie Arcate; and curriculum and development Director Adam Brown, who leads the garden program.

On Field Day June 24, children played Gaga ball, basketball, soccer and other games. Students gave artwork they created to teachers and administrators who left Pocantico at the end of June: Superintendent Carol Conklin-Spillane, Principal Brent Harrington, and teachers Lory Rollman and Martina Baer. They also participated in a student video.
Crews Clean, Make Building Improvements over the Summer

Staff members, summer employees and contractors have been hard at work sprucing up the school building for when students and teachers return next month.

They have painted, wiped down desks, cleaned windows and kept the pool and grounds well maintained.

Employees have done an extensive amount of work on the second floor of the southern wing, known as the 1954 wing. Most notably, they ripped up carpeting in the hallway and classrooms to make way for long-lasting composite flooring. It is a continuation of the new floor covering that was installed earlier this year elsewhere in the school.

“We are a team and without this summer work, we can’t open our doors for our students,” Superintendent Richard Calkins said. “Our staff is the best and is greatly appreciated.”

Staff members recently received training on a new floor-scrubbing machine that will greatly cut down on cleaning time.

New Panels Capture School’s History, Beauty

Ingenuity, Grit, Passion and Gratitude. Those are a few of the inspiring words that surround stunning photos of the school’s architecture on the new acoustic panels that line the auditorium’s back wall.

The Pocantico Hills School Foundation provided the funding and creative work to bring the panels to life. Foundation Co-President Lauren Amsterdam, who is a creative director, designed the panels and worked with Dana Yu, a photographer and fellow Pocantico mother. The design concept brings together the history and details of Pocantico’s historic architecture combined with key words reflecting its mantra and culture.

“It is a beautiful example of a school-community partnership through these two professionals whose children are here and are so committed to the district,” said now-former Superintendent Carol Conklin-Spillane.
Eighth-Graders Design Solutions

Eight-graders identified challenges in life and developed potential solutions in this year’s Innovation & Design class, developing prototypes for a breathable shin guard, a shoe alarm, a car safe for a phone and other products. The course exposes eighth-graders to the process of invention, design and entrepreneurship. The students identify a problem, develop an idea for how to remedy it, and create a prototype.

“You have demonstrated that you are actual creative problem-solvers, that you do more than talk about something, that you can wrestle with an idea, get ugly and see it through to fruition,” now-former Superintendent Carol Conklin-Spillane said at the June 11 Innovation & Design Expo.

Two high school students from the Pocantico district rated each individual or group on products’ practicality, usability, pricing methodology and other factors. The winners received David Rockefeller Innovation and Design Awards in different areas. On the same night, the eighth-graders displayed their paintings for art class and autobiography projects for English class.

Peter A. and David F. received the Technology Award for Game Track3r, an app that tracks athletes during practice to help athletes and coaches analyze their performance. "Coaches have a limited view of the field,” Peter said. “This allows them to get a bird’s eye view of everything.”

Liam W., Josiah “Jojo” D. and Arthur C. created a strap with a fan and a USB charger that attaches to a backpack. They said the invention is simple and efficient. “Imagine a hot day and you’re walking around and you have a low battery phone. What do you do?” Jojo asked. “The best thing to do is to buy the Strap-O-Fan.”

Jordyn E. received the Ingenuity Award for a safe to lock a cell phone in when someone is driving. She wants to help reduce the number of deaths from distracted driving, especially among teens.

Dayla R. and Saydee S. won the Health/Societal Impact Award for their Brite Blind Nite prototype. The cane has a light on the bottom so blind people who are walking at night are visible to drivers. Products currently on the market have lights or flashlights on top to help people with impaired vision see at night.

Mia T. and Dylan Z. won the Humanitarian award for their “Meals in Action” vending machine. In addition to nutritious, long-lasting food products, the machine would vend medical kits, blankets, hygiene kits and other items.

“It contains the necessities without having to do a lot of work to get them,” Dylan said.

Many Students Participate in Music Concerts, Competitions

The Music Department is pleased with the high level of participation from students this year in New York State School Music Association concerts and competitions.

In May, 25 children participated in NYSSMA’s instrumental and piano festivals. They worked diligently to prepare solo pieces for adjudication by an outside judge, practiced scales and challenged themselves in sight-reading, said Sheila DePaola, vocal/music teacher. They received many hours of coaching by instrumental music teacher Michael Murray.

“We are delighted with students’ dedication to practice and the results they earned at the festivals,” Ms. DePaola said. “We are looking forward to including even more students next year.”

On March 15, 62 sixth-, seventh- and eighth-grade choral students performed in Albany for Music in Our Schools Month. Pocantico Hills was one of 50 school groups from the state selected to attend.

Chorus members gave a 45-minute performance in the concourse level of Empire State Plaza. Sixth-graders sang a Japanese folk song called “Hitori” and “Thula Klizeo,” a Swahili piece with body percussion. Seventh- and eighth-graders’ selections included “Everybody Rejoice” from “The Wiz.” The three grades combined to perform “Will There Really Be a Morning?” an Emily Dickinson poem set to music by Craig Hella Johnson. The finale was “Circle of Life” from “The Lion King.”

Sixth-grader DinaMarie P. said she enjoyed the trip to Albany, which included a tour of the state Capitol. “I was proud to be a part of the Pocantico Hills Chorus and sing for state representatives and workers in the building,” she said.

Now-former Superintendent Carol Conklin-Spillane said the music program is thriving. “It is impressive to see way to see the way it is growing, evidenced by the challenging repertoire and the high numbers of children participating in NYSSMA,” she said.

National Group Honors Carol Conklin-Spillane

Now-former Superintendent Carol Conklin-Spillane received a Distinguished Service Award for Service to Education at the 2019 National Principals Conference in Boston July 17.

“The Board of Directors, representing practitioners from across America, joins me in extending great thanks to you for your dedicated efforts on behalf of the nation’s educators and the students they serve,” JoAnn Bartoletti, executive director of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, wrote in a letter congratulating Ms. Conklin-Spillane.

Ms. Conklin-Spillane retired at the end of June after 40 years as an educator. She capped off her career as Pocantico’s superintendent for the past three years.

She began her career teaching in the Abbott Union Free School District in Irvington. She went on to teach special education and work as an assistant principal and then as a house principal in Rockland County.

In Westchester County, Ms. Conklin-Spillane was principal of Sleepy Hollow High School from 1994 to 2006. She has held numerous leadership positions in regional, state and national education groups.
Students Expand Their Musical Horizons in Jazz Ensemble

In 2018, instrumental music teacher Michael Murray formed the Pocantico Hills Jazz Ensemble more than a year ago for middle school students who wanted to stretch their talents and learn new musical genres.

Josiah "Jojo" D., who just finished eighth grade, joined because he loves music, including jazz. He was one of 16 students in the group this year.

“I like how I get to exercise my knowledge of the drums and get to learn more about jazz because Mr. Murray’s teaching me stuff,” he said.

The ensemble is an auditioned group that meets once a week after school. Members – who are in grades 5-8 – focus on advanced instrumental techniques and learning a variety of styles, including jazz standards, Latin jazz, blues, and jazz fusion, which is a blend of jazz, rock and fun music made popular in the late 1960s and 1970s, Mr. Murray said.

"Jazz Ensemble is a great way for students to learn about a diverse population of musicians and composers who come from all walks of life, and how they helped to create a style of music that started in America and has since traveled to every part of the world,” he said.

The ensemble played during the second half of the 2017-18 and 2018-19 academic years, said Mr. Murray, who hopes to run the group all next year.

“I think it’s a good outlet for students who want to push themselves and learn different styles of music,” he said.

In the 2018-19 school year, students learned three pieces: “Song for San Miguel” by Mike Steinel; “Mercy, Mercy, Mercy” by Joe Zawinul; and “Doxy” by Sonny Rollins.

They worked on improvisational skills and had the opportunity to improvise solos during each song.

Rising eighth-grader Christina H., who plays the trumpet, said she likes the harmonies in the arrangements the ensemble plays and how she and other musicians sound together.

“I wanted to experience what it’s like playing a different genre of music and I think jazz is really cool,” she said.