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# POCANTICO HILLS CENTRAL SCHOOL

599 Bedford Road • Sleepy Hollow, N.Y. 10591 • 914-631-2440 • fax 914-631-3280 • [www.pocanticohills.org](http://www.pocanticohills.org)

August 15, 2018

Dear Families,

With September around the corner, the excitement for the start of the approaching school year begins to loom before us, and with it, the opportunity to share the good work that has occurred over these summer months in preparation for another successful school year.

## Staffing

We have several new members to our school community that join us with impressive experience and who look forward to supporting our students at Pocantico.

- Mr. Andrew Irons will be teaching 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade English Language Arts. A graduate of Skidmore College, Mr. Irons previously taught high school English at Bronx Envision Academy. He also has a background in theater as a playwright and continues to work as an instructor for Theater O in Ossining where his wife is the Artistic Director.
- Ms. Elizabeth Ciriaco also joins our middle school as our new specialist working to support the needs of our students in an inclusive co-taught model. Also a former high school teacher at Bronx Envision Academy, Ms. Ciriaco previously taught algebra and special education. A graduate of Towson University, Ms. Ciriaco will be working with both Ms. Levy and Mr. Irons to provide support in our ELA and math classrooms.
- Still an active and visible face in our middle school community, Mr. Suarez will be assuming a new role in our school community as the lead teacher in our new therapeutic support program. Because of his reassignment, we welcome Ms. Emma Goodman to our 5<sup>th</sup> grade team as our new math and science teacher. A graduate of Gettysburg College, Ms. Goodman previously taught 5<sup>th</sup> grade math in the White Plains Central School District.
- Mr. Cesar Sanchez comes to us from Woodlands Middle School as an experienced Spanish teacher. A graduate of Manhattanville College, Mr. Sanchez will also be assuming the role of co-Athletic Director for our student-athletes.
- Ms. Allison O'Connor joins our 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade team as our new specialist who will work closely with Ms. Bryce and Ms. Illardi in 1<sup>st</sup> grade and Ms. Baer in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. Formerly a 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teacher at St. Ignatius Loyola School in Manhattan, Ms. O'Connor is a graduate of Boston College.
- Additionally, Ms. Angela Ilardi will be assuming a leave replacement role for Ms. Bryce in 1<sup>st</sup> grade through December. Ms. Ilardi has previously been a leave teacher in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten as well as a Teaching Assistant.
- Finally, Ms. Betsy Greene who worked last year as a leave replacement teaching assistant in physical education, returns to our school community as a part-time physical education, health and family and consumer science teacher. Ms. Greene was formerly a PE and health teacher in Queens. Prior to her teaching career, Ms. Greene was a trained culinary baker. She is a graduate of Adelphi University.

Indeed, we are excited about the experience that each of these candidates bring to Pocantico and look forward to their good work with our students during the approaching school year.

## Schedules

Hiring new staff aside, much thought and effort went into the construction of our student schedules. First, it is important to note that a 9-period day was constructed to accommodate the various needs of our middle school students while supporting a diverse and rigorous program. While seven of the nine periods are a traditional 42 minutes of instructional time, two 30-minute periods were infused into the schedule to support several areas of the students' academic and social-emotional program.

- Band and choir students will meet during one of these scheduled periods. The rationale for this was twofold. In the past, students missed a core academic subject once every six days for choir and/or band rehearsal. This is no longer the case, as students will have a regularly scheduled band and/or choir rehearsal during this 30-minute period. Second, this regularly scheduled period ensures more rehearsal time for each of these programs. As a result, it demonstrates our recognition of the importance music is in a students' school program and further supports students' growth in each of these programs. General music is scheduled for those students who choose not to participate in either band or choir.
- Music aside, a regularly scheduled art period has been restored to the 8<sup>th</sup> grade program. All 8<sup>th</sup> grade students will have a formal art class with Ms. Morotti during the second semester. This will allow students to prepare a final art piece for presentation to the community as a culminating project prior to graduation.
- In addition to art, 8<sup>th</sup> grade students will be scheduled for health during the first semester and 7<sup>th</sup> grade students during the second semester. In part, the health program will utilize the *Second Step* curriculum to emphasize positive decision-making and healthy choices. The curriculum is organized into five main units—mindsets and goals, values and relationships, thoughts, emotions and decisions, and serious peer conflicts.
- Our Innovation and Design course through our STREAM initiative continues to grow in 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade. All students are scheduled for this inquiry-based exploration in innovation two to three days in a six-day cycle during one of these 30-minute periods. Additionally, What I Need (WIN) has been scheduled during this 30-minute period to provide students with targeted intervention and additional enrichment.
- Finally, it is important to note that breakfast will be served during a “0” period prior to 1<sup>st</sup> period. Students will have an opportunity to secure breakfast between 8:15 and 8:30 before the school day begins. Ms. Arcate, our cafeteria supervisor and head chef, has worked diligently with me to establish a morning routine for breakfast that ensures access for all students during this time. This morning routine should further provide structure to our arrival procedures as we settle into our school day each morning.

## Discipline Committee & Emotional Intelligence

In addition to staffing and scheduling, I am pleased to share that a great deal of thought and energy has gone into revising our *Plain Language Code of Conduct*, continuing to rollout our work with the *RULER* framework through the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, and establishing a clearer understanding of respective roles and procedures related to students' behavior in the building. As we continue to nurture a culture of kindness, respect and perseverance, a committee of teachers and I have worked on each of these areas during the summer months in anticipation of the coming school year.

Several activities are planned during the first week of school to communicate expected behaviors in the building, universal procedures, the importance of emotional intelligence and the value of community building. By the conclusion of the first week of school we expect to have a universal character pledge that will be recited each morning as part of our morning announcements. Additionally, we look forward to rolling out more formalized work with our *Mood Meter* where we anticipate collecting data on students' emotions during the school year.

It is important to remember that the District was charged with implementing the Anchors of Emotional Intelligence through its *RULER* framework. In part, this framework is intended to nurture and support a healthy school climate and recognize the role emotions have in students' ability to learn. The program provides a framework to support students' emotional intelligence to better manage conflict resolution, support more empathetic and positive relationships and reduce students' stress. The demonstration of pro-social skills through a *RULER* approach, an acronym that teaches students to recognize, understand, label, express and regulate individual emotions, is rooted in research and provides specific resources to

help support students' emotional intelligence. This framework is part of a balanced-approach to student behavior in the building that was shared during a spring Board of Education meeting.

One critical resource is the *Mood Meter* that allows students to recognize the relationship that the mind and body has in shaping individual emotions and their impact on behaviors and decision-making. We expect the use of this tool to become part of our daily practice as a learning community, having students check in on the *Mood Meter* each morning. Additionally, the *Blueprint for Solving Problems* is a resource that provides a scripted approach to mediating conflict. This critical resource is in each teachers' classroom to support a common approach and consistent vocabulary in mediating conflict between students.

### **Standards-based Report Cards**

Finally, our new standards-based report card in grades PK – 4 will be rolled out this fall. An overview of these changes will be shared with families during our Back-to-School Night. It is important to note that a standards-based report card is intended to provide accurate information and feedback to students and their families on progress towards standards, illuminating specific skills within the content areas. Academic skills aside, the report card also recognizes the importance of students' social-emotional learning, providing consistency across grade levels in such areas as perseverance and pro-social behaviors such as kindness and respect.

### **Transportation**

It is important to note that updated transportation routes and information will be posted on our website at the end of the month. Any questions should be directed to Ms. Jane Anastasi at ext. 707.

### **First Day Items**

It is important to note that **the first day of school (Tuesday, September 4<sup>th</sup>) will begin with a delayed opening**. The purpose of this delayed opening is to allow staff to prepare their classrooms and provide a gradual transition to the start of the school year for our students.

Apart from pre-kindergarten, all students will arrive at 10:15 and report to their classrooms. Middle school students will report to the auditorium for an introduction and welcome back before transitioning to their classrooms. Pre-kindergarten students will arrive with their parents at 11:00 for an introduction and meet and greet with their teachers. This program will conclude by 1:00. *The first full day of school will begin on Wednesday, September 5<sup>th</sup> for all students with a regular start time.*

In closing, I am looking forward to a successful start to the school year. We have several activities planned during the first week to help with a smooth transition. Various activities and presentations will take place to effectively communicate school procedures, behavioral expectations and community responsibilities. I look forward to sharing the success of these activities with you as we conclude our first week of school and settle into a successful school year.

Should you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to me directly.

With Warm Regards,

Brent B. Harrington  
Principal