



**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.*

**Rodney Arthur  
Principal**

**Peekskill High School, 1072 Elm Street • Peekskill, NY 10566-3499**  
**(914) 737-0201, FAX: (914) 737-2550**  
**E-mail: [rarthur@peekskillcsd.org](mailto:rarthur@peekskillcsd.org)**

April 1, 2017

Dear Parents/Guardians,

As the Principal of Peekskill High School, one of my greatest joys is getting to know your children on a personal level and seeing them flourish as they pursue their dreams. It is equally gratifying for me to witness students, who may have had a slow start to meeting academic expectations, demonstrate improvement. As parents and educators, although we may have the same expectations for all students, every student is different and their approach to achieving our expectations may be different too.

As a father of four children, I can attest to this experience on a personal level. My two youngest daughters are 17 months apart, but are different socially, academically and athletically. Nonetheless, they both received the same level of support and encouragement from my wife and me at an early age. As they approach their teenage years, their differences are less pronounced but still noticeable. For us, the key ingredients for our daughters' achievements have been our consistent support of them and promoting hard work (*effort*), commitment and resilience (*grit*).

Unfortunately, at the high school more than 10% of our students have been late to school each morning since September. Despite meeting with students and conferencing with parents and students, the pattern continues. We have a large number of students who have been absent or missed a class twenty or more days since September. Not only is this unacceptable because it is contrary to the New York State Education Department mandate of promoting good school attendance, but it is impossible for students to be successful in school when they are excessively absent or routinely miss a class. The suspension of students from school for these infractions is not a meaningful approach nor is it a practice that I support.

As a school district we are working collectively to adhere to the good school mandate. In an effort to increase our communication with parents, the Board of Education of the Peekskill School District has approved a district-wide attendance letter that has been mailed to parents of students who have unexcused absences or missed **5, 10, 15 or 20** days of class. Please help us to ensure that your child attends class regularly and timely. You are urged to sign up for the parent portal, in the guidance department, to monitor your child's attendance. It is my belief that we can break this cycle and create a new mindset for students by strengthening the partnership between school and home, and school and the community.

When I was hired in June 2016, I knew that having a strong school and community partnership would be critical to our students' success. For this reason, I pledged to establish and sustain positive relationships

with local community partners. With the explicit goal of impacting the lives of students and their families in a measurable way, Peekskill High School has collaborated with the Peekskill chapter of the NAACP on several initiatives. Most recently, we worked closely with the NAACP Civic Engagement Committee and conducted a second voter registration drive. As a result of this initiative, we successfully registered twenty new voters and five student volunteers. This is an extraordinary accomplishment that promotes *purpose, empowerment, commitment and responsibility* for students. To that end, the NAACP and the high school have taken additional steps to ensure that we achieve our goal. On Friday, April 21, students, families and staff will receive a powerful message on empowerment and resilience from Mr. Ameer Baraka. Mr. Baraka is well known today as an actor, author and guest speaker. However, his early years were very different. Born in New Orleans, LA, Ameer had a very difficult childhood experience which lead to him being incarcerated for several years. However, with support and encouragement of others and a strong spiritual conviction gleaned from reading the bible, Ameer has transformed his life. He is a guest speaker on national networks on issues relating to student empowerment ad civic engagement. He consults with community leaders and local governments. Recently, he worked closely with the Baltimore Police Department to assist them with training of officers. Please see the attached clip.

<http://video.foxnews.com/v/5391670676001/?#sp=show-clips>

While this measure is meaningful, as a school community we have to find other measured ways to teach our students the valuable lessons of commitment and determination (*grit*). We must also acknowledge, honor and celebrate their successes, even small ones. Let us all adopt a mindset of encouragement and fully engage in a practice, at home and school, of praising students each and every day by offering them compliments and words of encouragement. *“Even a small act of kindness can make a big difference in someone’s world.”* Our children will benefit greatly when we embrace this approach and employ it consistently. As expressed by Senator Elizabeth Warren, *“It’s a simple idea: We all do better when we work together and invest in our future.”* Our children are our hopes, dreams and future. Let’s encourage them and provide them with a solid foundation to dream and accomplish the extraordinary.

As we transition into the spring season and observe the new beginnings, our seniors are preparing for their own transitions. Thus far, we have three students who have been accepted and received full scholarship to attend New York University. One of our students is waitlisted for Harvard University and is expecting to receive an acceptance letter shortly. Another amazing senior has been accepted to Georgia Tech University (*Georgia Institute of Technology*) to pursue engineering. As you may know, Georgia Tech University is listed as one of the top five engineering schools in America. Some of our students will be the first in their families to attend college. This is an extraordinary achievement that will impact many lives.

The Turner Construction Company is interested in selecting five to eight Peekskill High School seniors who are in good academic standing to participate in a 5 week internship experience (**May to June**) at their main site located in NYC. The students are required to apply for the position online, submit a cover letter and resume and sit for an interview in the Turner Construction Company Westchester office. If granted the opportunity, interns will attend the field experience daily. The company will provide students with a monthly metro card, but students will be required to purchase their own lunches. According to a representative, the company has never denied an internship field experience to a qualified student. After completing the internship, as college students, the participants will have the opportunity to return to the company in the summer to work and earn \$20.00 per hour. Moreover, they will have the opportunity to be hired as full-time staff members after graduating from college. The Turner Construction Company hires over 500 individuals annually. This is a valuable opportunity for our students. Over the last three weeks,

Mr. Vidrini, Robotics Teacher, has worked with six candidates to prepare their portfolios for submission on April 17. We wish our students well!

While we continue to help our students look toward, and prepare for, end of year transitions and future endeavors, the daily events of school continue. Some of the highlights during March and April are as follows:

On **Tuesday, April 4**, the freshmen students enjoyed the performance of “Romeo & Juliet” performed by the Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival. Thank you Mr. Todd Newby, English Department Chair, and the teachers of the English Department for coordinating and providing our students with a rich and engaging experience.

On **Sunday, April 2**, the Peekskill High School Robotics Team participated in the Rube Goldberg High School Engineering Expo at White Plains High School. This was a 7 hour event that started at 8 a.m. In preparation for this event, Mr. Vidrini worked with students after school and on weekends. Students were inspired by Mr. Vidrini’s commitment and leadership. They demonstrated grit in their determination to beat the odds and succeed. As a result, they achieved their goals and earned first place in all three categories, receiving the *Creative Award, Teamwork Award, and Rube Goldberg Award*.

On **Thursday, March 30**, we held our first Senior Day achievement celebration ceremony. The event was marked with students reflecting on their educational journey and the friendships they have developed along the way. The students highlighted their achievements and post-secondary plans. We wish them the best of luck in their future endeavors.

Special thanks to Mrs. Josephine Williams for leading the Agricultural Literacy Week, which began **March 21<sup>st</sup>** and ended **March 24<sup>th</sup>**. The event was highlighted by visiting an elementary school to share this experience with them. The students in our Environmental and Gardening Club read books and engaged in lab activities with our young learners. During the 2015-16 school year, the club focused on an apple theme titled, *“From the Tree to Your Table”* and shared this experience with first graders at Woodside Elementary School. This year, the club will continue working with these students who are now in the second grade at Oakside Elementary School. The club visited Oakside on **Tuesday, March 21<sup>st</sup>** and shared the book titled, *“The Grapes Grow Sweeter”* by Linda Tuft. The students also engaged in lab activities.

On **Thursday, March 23**, Mrs. Moore, Mr. Cabassa and Mrs. Torres welcomed the parents of our freshmen class. We had an excellent turnout and the information shared was well received by parents. The presentation was scheduled for an hour (6 p.m. to 7 p.m.), but with the parents’ interest, we continued to address questions well after 8 p.m.

On **Friday, March 24**, the school counselors visited the middle school and provided the graduating class with a special presentation on the expectations of high school. The presentation was well received by students and staff. Thank you, school counselors, for making a difference!

On **Saturday, March 25**, a basketball clinic was held for students with special needs. Special thanks to our student athletes who volunteered their time. We had representation from the Peekskill High

School Boys Varsity Basketball and Girls Basketball teams. This singular event created a special memory for students with disabilities and their parents.

Mrs. Janice Reid, Director of Technology, conducted the Clarity Technology Survey from **March 13<sup>th</sup>** to **March 24<sup>th</sup>**. The information collected from the survey will assist the school district in evaluating and updating the district's technology plan. The survey is also a requirement for the school district to receive any funding for technology from the federal government and the New York State Department of Education.

As I close, the third marking period ended on **Friday, April 7**. We have 10 weeks remaining in the school year and the New York State regent exams are scheduled to commence on **Tuesday, June 13** and will conclude on **Friday, June 22**. You are strongly encouraged to review your child's attendance records and report card grades. You are asked to make an appointment to meet with your child's teachers or school counselor. Your involvement is significant to your child's success in school. By working together and adopting the mindset of collective ownership, our school culture will change. Education is empowerment! Let us build on our partnership to empower our children and help them accomplish their dreams and goals.

Sincerely,

Rodney Arthur  
Principal