



**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.*

*Dr. David Fine,*  
**Superintendent of Schools**

*Administration Center, 1031 Elm Street • Peekskill, NY 10566-3499*  
*(914) 737-3300, ext. 302 - FAX: (914) 737-3912*  
*E-mail: [dfine@peekskillcsd.org](mailto:dfine@peekskillcsd.org)*

## **Superintendent's E-Corner, June 2016**

*"The great thing in this world is not so much where we are,  
but in what direction we are moving." Oliver Wendell Holmes*

Yesterday at Westlake High School I walked around the MS and HS gym examining 100's of Science Projects. Each aisle was filled with some amazing boards, information, pictures, and bright-eyed HS students. Better yet, I saw 26 of our Applied Science Research youngsters along with their teacher Erum Hadi and many Peekskill staff to be judges. This is the first time we had this opportunity and the last time we will be missing these chances for our students, community, district, and future. These experiences are what we are all about (plus having an amazing prom, which occurred this past Friday as well). It happens because of adults doing what is required to improve our system; add value; and create equity for all of our learners. Peekskill pride was in full effect across the county; ranging from the art show on Saturday, prom, retirement celebrations, and the Science fair, plus more. There is so much we have done this school year and as we reflect be proud of how you changed a life, made a difference, and remained part of the solution. Keep up the good work; those that matter notice and remember that extensive change is a process. Stay cool and enjoy!

**Making a Difference:** Congratulations to Franklyn Vazquez who was recognized by his musical/professional peers with a lifetime achievement award. I am not doing this award justice as it truly is equivalent to a Grammy in many respects. Great work Franklyn and congratulations. Nice work to our HS advisors and staff who put on a wonderful Prom.

**APPR:** Thank you all staff and administrators who have been part of our APPR conversation since July. As you know the state has coupled our aid with the submission of our APPR plan, which is to be submitted by July 1<sup>st</sup> as recommended by the state. We have an attainable, professional, and aligned plan. In the end our work and progress begins with our learners and their respective needs. These discussions kept our students and our work at the forefront.

**Staffing:** Our teams are working hard to fill various positions in district. We were able to post earlier than ever before and get a really wonderful "jump start" on this process. See your building leaders with any questions.

**Lead Testing:** This has been a hot topic in our region and in a pro-active fashion we will be testing this week. Thank you Carmine and the custodial/maintenance team for their diligence and partnership with our professional testers.

**Retreats, FYI:** Our administrative retreat will begin on July 11<sup>th</sup> and go through July 21<sup>st</sup>. Our focus of every student; everyday continues in a growth mindset manner. Finding a way to yes and focused on equity as we remain explicit with our youngster's opportunities and equity that we create for our entire system. This

summer we continue with our curriculum work, leadership focus, summer programs, orientations, scheduling, mindful planning for 16-17, and continued professional focus. Our work must be explicit, purposeful, planned, and aligned throughout our system. It is a process; sometimes it is messy and other times pretty; regardless I am proud of the work to date and honored to serve and support one day at a time.

**Video:** Check out this video that artist Lance Johnson just our Art department. It is a nice cumulative video that touches on all of the amazing projects and events that our district has gotten to take a part in with the museum. <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=q2m1Uz781kg>

**FAMILY ENGAGEMENT:** [http://www.edutopia.org/blog/8-ways-encourage-family-engagement-secondary-schools-heather-wolpert-gawron?utm\\_source=twitter&utm\\_medium=socialflow](http://www.edutopia.org/blog/8-ways-encourage-family-engagement-secondary-schools-heather-wolpert-gawron?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=socialflow)

## 8 Ways to Encourage Family Engagement in Secondary Schools

We cannot have a serious talk about student achievement without having a serious talk about engaging our students' families. But this talk needs to go beyond the movie night or spring carnival. It must be about creating an environment where all families feel embraced by a school's culture, not just invited to attend its events.

Many times there's a tapering off of family engagement between elementary school and the secondary levels. Some of that is due to the teachers themselves. It's as if once we don't have holiday parties to organize, we don't seem to reach out as often to our students' families.

Some of it is also due to the families themselves. Maybe they represent a minority group in the school, a fact that can be intimidating for both the students and their parents. Maybe they themselves don't have a high level of schooling, and are not totally comfortable in a school environment. They might also be experimenting with backing away from their student. However, there's a fine line between encouraging independence and disengaging from the school all together.

And some of it is also due to a school's lack of effort in actively reaching out to all families, not just equitably, but with determination.

### Why It's so Vital

We all know the impact that a school and its teachers can have on a student's growth. However, as stated by The U.S. Department of Education, "Raising the next generation is a shared responsibility. When families, communities, and schools work together, students are more successful and the entire community benefits."

If a school makes the decision to actively engage its diverse community of families, the possible benefits far outweigh the effort. According to [DropOutPrevention.org](http://DropOutPrevention.org), studies show that with more family engagement:

- There is greater student achievement.
- Student attendance is higher.
- Graduation rates are higher.
- Alcohol abuse is lower.
- Students from diverse backgrounds and who are farthest behind benefit.

So how do we walk this tightrope of asking for age-appropriate involvement? It all begins with communication.

### Taking Action: Family Engagement

Earlier this year, I spoke to educational consultant Lisa Dabbs about family engagement, primarily for our non-English speakers and underserved demographics. Our conversation spoke of the need for schools to reach out, not

just fairly, but in a determined way. It isn't just about ensuring a family has the opportunity to learn about the school; it's about ensuring we are doing everything we can to encourage those conversations to happen.

### *1. Engage Families in Their Elementary School First*

Secondary schools tend to have larger gatherings, and this can be intimidating to many families who aren't already actively involved in a school. Seed the transition between elementary and middle school by having administration visit the elementary sites with PTA parents in tow. A multilingual PTA parent can help translate during an informal meeting or be available for breakouts after a larger gathering.

### *2. Create a Parent Advocacy Group*

Identify parents who speak particular languages and help train them in facts about the school. Perhaps those parents are given a badge of sorts to identify them as go-to parent leaders. See if any of these willing parents would host an informal **Coffee with the Principal** event in their home. Ensure that there are some parent leaders that share the demographic of those who are least engaged.

### *3. Take School Information on the Road*

Find out the churches or community centers where groups of families congregate. See if that location can host a meet-and-greet with admin and parent leaders. Meet families where they are rather than expecting them to always come to the school. For many of our families, the school environment can be a scary place. Help them get to know the players in the school, and the school site itself might become more comfortable in the future.

### *4. Utilize Your Local Businesses*

Ask to set up and maintain a bulletin board in local markets, bakeries, and restaurants. Advertise an upcoming event or celebrate a student's accomplishments.

### *5. Find Out What Your Families Need*

Conduct a needs assessment (available in different languages) during registration. Set up a station of computers manned by student or parent leaders to help family members set up email accounts if they don't already have them. Have them fill out a quick survey asking how they would like to best be reached throughout the school year and what concerns them the most. Have these topics become the themes for Coffee with the Principal get-togethers.

### *6. Reach Out to Families Just to Build a Relationship*

So many times we reach out to families because of discipline issues, but a little proactive positivity can go a long way in building trust and comfort between a parent and school.

### *7. Provide Trainings*

Schools can help ensure that families know how to access information online. Host a night where the school website is introduced. Demonstrate Google Translate to model how a web page can be easily translated. Embed student-hosted videos on the school website that are in different languages. These can be clicked on for reminders of where to find staff contact numbers, event information, and homework pages.

### *8. Host an EduCamp for Parents*

Host an un-conference for parents that can involve staff, and even students, as well. Use topics that are developed by the parents based on the earlier needs assessment or on-the-spot surveys of questions and interests. It's vital that families feel their input is heard and that they are able to take part in developing their school's culture.