

**CFE Evaluation of Poughkeepsie City School District  
Final Report In Lieu of Direct Testimony  
Maisto v. State of New York  
Dr. Peggy J. Wozniak  
December 2014**

I, Peggy Wozniak, Ed.D., prepared the expert report regarding the Poughkeepsie School District, on behalf of the plaintiffs in the above-referenced case. I bring to the task the following background experience:

I have been in the field of education for over 40 years working as a teacher and an administrator in both California and New York State. I have experience in rural, suburban and small urban school settings. My 28 years as a school leader include assistant principal at the elementary level, and school principal at both the elementary and secondary levels. I was the Superintendent of the Mammoth Unified School District in California for 5 years, and the Superintendent of the Binghamton City School District, a Small City School District, for 10 ½ years until my retirement in January, 2013. In 2007 I was appointed by former Governor Elliott Spitzer to the Advisory Board of the Governor's Children's Cabinet.

Upon my retirement I worked as an Education Specialist for the New York State Education Department, served on the faculty for the Transition to the Superintendency Program, and presented on the Superintendency and the Board of Education throughout New York State. I will be teaching graduate level courses in the Department of Educational Leadership at the University of Nevada, Reno as an adjunct faculty member beginning in January 2015. I also serve as a dissertation advisor in the Organizational Leadership Department of Brandman University, Irvine California.

In 2000 I was named the Superintendent of the Year by the Association of California School Administrators. In 2008 I received a distinguished achievement award from my alma mater, Alfred University, and in 2009 was inducted into the Alumni Hall of Distinction by the Commission on Independent Colleges and Universities. In 2013 I was the recipient of the Educational Leadership Award from the New York State Association of Small City School Districts. I was a member of the Association of Small City School Districts and served on its board throughout my years as the Binghamton superintendent.

## **Purpose of the Final Report**

This final report presents the findings and conclusions from my assessment and evaluation of whether the Poughkeepsie School District is currently providing the resources determined to be necessary to provide the District's students a sound basic education under the New York Constitution by the New York Court of Appeals in the Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE) rulings. This final report is based upon an initial report completed in 2013 - attached to this report -- and updated to reflect current - 2014-15 -- conditions in the district. This Final Report is presented to the Court in lieu of direct expert testimony on behalf of Plaintiffs at trial of this matter.

## **The CFE Evaluation Framework**

I am familiar with the Court of Appeals rulings in the Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE) case, most importantly Campaign for Fiscal Equity v. State, 86 N.Y.2<sup>nd</sup> 307 (1995) (CFE I), which established the basic standards and requirements for a sound basic education; the decision of Judge Leland DeGrasse applying those standards to the evidence presented in the trial concerning the deficiencies in funding and resources for New York City students, 187 Misc. 2d, 1 (2001); and Campaign for Fiscal Equity v. State, 100 N.Y.2<sup>nd</sup> 893 (2003), the Court of Appeals ruling upholding and affirming Judge DeGrasse's findings and conclusions of the failure of the State to provide the funding and resources necessary for a sound basic education for New York City students.

I have used the constitutional standard and essential elements established by the Court of Appeals in the CFE rulings as the basis for my evaluation of whether the Poughkeepsie School District (PCSD) is providing students a sound basic education. Specifically, I examined the educational opportunities available to students in PCSD against the elements of the evaluation framework established by the CFE rulings, as follows:

- 1) Constitutional Standard: CFE defines a sound basic education as an education that provides all students with the opportunity for a "meaningful high school education."
- 2) Essential Inputs: CFE identifies a "template" of essential resources that the State must ensure are available in districts to provide a meaningful high school education, specifically a) sufficient numbers of qualified teachers, principals and other personnel; b) appropriate class sizes; c) adequate and accessible school buildings, with sufficient space for appropriate class size and sound curriculum; d) sufficient, up-to-date books, supplies,

libraries, technology and laboratories; and e) suitable curriculum, including an expanded platform of programs for at-risk students; (f) adequate resources for students with extraordinary needs; and (g) a safe orderly environment.

3) Outputs: CFE identifies State assessment results, high school graduation rates, drop-out rates and other performance measures to determine whether districts are providing students a meaningful high school education.

4) Causation: CFE requires demonstration of a causal connection or link between the deprivation of essential inputs and sub-standard outputs and inadequate school funding, resulting in a failure to provide students the opportunity for a meaningful high school education.

My evaluation of Poughkeepsie School District focused mainly on the availability of essential CFE inputs in district schools and recent performance outputs of district students. However, I also examined relevant factors related to the district's basic community, school and student profile and fiscal capacity and funding levels.

My evaluation consisted of the following: 1) review of data; 2) visits and interviews with district officials; 3) follow-up with district personnel; 4) review of appropriate literature on New York school finance and educational research and policy, as set forth in the Appendix of my initial report; and 5) review of NYSED accountability reviews which were required due to low student achievement.

## **Key Findings**

The following are my key findings based on my initial October 2013 report, updated, where appropriate, for the current school year.

### Community, District and Student Profile:

1. Poughkeepsie is a "small city" located in Dutchess County, with a population of approximately 32,790 residents. Like many of New York's Small City School Districts, PCSD serves a very challenging population with many of the same characteristics as large city school districts, including higher percentages of disadvantaged students, English language learner students, students who drop out of school, and students with special education needs. According to 2012 Census Bureau statistics, Poughkeepsie' per capita income is \$23,526, with 25.9% of the

population living in poverty, compared to Dutchess County's \$33,037 per capita income with 9.1% living in poverty. Poughkeepsie had a 6.7% unemployment rate as of August 2014, compared to the County average of 5.3%

2. Census Poverty Data from 2012 indicate that the rate of poverty among children is 34.2% in Poughkeepsie, compared to only 9.4% in Dutchess County. Poughkeepsie suffers from concentrated poverty, with 27% of Poughkeepsie's impoverished population living in three extreme poverty areas, defined by the Brookings Institute as "Census tracts with poverty rates of 40% and over."

3. PCSD provides free public education to children residing in Poughkeepsie. PCSD has an enrollment of 4,724 students, pre-K through grade 12, in the 2014-15 school year. Unlike other districts in Dutchess County, whose student population is expected to decline through 2020, Poughkeepsie's school population is expected to grow by 1.44%. According to the 2012-13 School Report Card 85% of PCSD's students are low income as measured by eligibility for the federal free and reduced priced lunch program (FRL). 80% of PCSD's students qualify for free lunch, and 11% qualify for reduced priced lunch. FRL eligibility is used by the State Education Department to measure student poverty in New York school districts from year-to-year. To qualify for Free Lunch, a family of four must have an income less than 130% of the federal poverty level, or \$28,665, and to qualify for reduced priced lunch, a family of four must have an income less than 185% of the federal poverty level, or \$40,793. In contrast to Poughkeepsie's FRL rate of 85%, Dutchess County districts with more than 1100 students that have achieved a graduation rate over 80% have 16-22% FRL eligibility.

4. 15% of PCSD students are classified as students with disabilities (SWDs), requiring special education programs and services.

5. 13% of PCSD students are white, 58% are African American, and 28% are Hispanic. 10% of students are classified as English Language Learners (ELLs).

6. PCSD measures as a very low wealth school district. New York State utilizes a measure of school district wealth called the Combined Wealth Ratio (CWR) to compare the wealth of school districts. This ratio equally weights a school districts' per pupil income and per pupil property value. The districts wealth in each of these areas is compared to the state average for these measures resulting in an indexed local

wealth measure where 1.000 represents the wealth of a school district with state average wealth. PCSD's CWR of .58 is below the state average and significantly lower than the CWR of comparison districts in the region.

7. PCSD is classified as a "high need/resource capacity urban-suburban school district." This classification is based on a need/resource index over 70%. The index is a ratio of the estimated poverty percentage to the CWR.

8. PCSD operates seven schools for its 4,724 students.

9. PCSD operates four elementary schools, each with grades 1-5. As of the most recent School Report Card, from 2012-13, Krieger School served 586 students, Clinton School served 466 students, Morse Magnet School, served 377 students, and Warring Academy served 331 students. It also operates an Early Learning Center (ELC), serving 507 students in pre-K and kindergarten in 2012-13.

10. The district operates Poughkeepsie Middle School, serving 973 students in grades 6-8 in 2012-13, and Poughkeepsie High School, serving 1,136 students in grades 9-12 in 2012-13.

#### Essential Inputs

##### **A. Qualified Teachers, Principals, and Other Personnel**

11. A 2008 Audit of Curriculum (AOC) of PCSD was conducted by the New York State Education Department (NYSED). Many of the same needs continue to exist and have been identified by subsequent NYSED accountability reviews. The 2008 AOC noted that staff are needed in the following areas: dually certified special education and English as a second language teachers, ELA coaches, support staff, ESL district director.

12. The 2008 AOC also revealed that district and school personnel request and need professional development regarding SWDs, ELLs, differentiated instruction, use and evaluation of data for instruction, and new teacher mentoring.

13. PCSD has eliminated 115 staff positions in the last three years due to budget issues. In 2013-14, 1 administrator and 9 support staff were eliminated. In 2014-15, staff cuts included 10.5 teachers, 1 administrator, and 9 support staff. (Documentation provided by the district.)

14. There is one literacy coach and one math coach assigned to the ELC. I recommend hiring at least one additional literacy coach and one additional math coach to mentor and support teachers in improving instruction. I also recommend additional literacy and math coaches at the elementary, middle, and high school levels.

15. I recommend providing additional professional development for all staff in effective practices for teaching pre-K and primary grade students.

16. A recent School Quality Review (SQR) of Clinton Elementary reported that professional development should be provided to all staff on differentiated instruction and research based teaching strategies and that staff should be trained on the curriculum that is aligned to the CCLS ELA shifts. I recommend professional development in all areas cited in the SQR.

17. The new middle school principal understood the needs of the students and the school. She was working very hard, however was overwhelmed trying to meet all the needs with limited resources. I recommend assigning a leadership coach to support and develop the new principal in meeting the challenges of leading and improving student achievement in an urban school.

18. In the middle school, professional development is needed in Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and new Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) for teachers, the principal, and other administrators.

19. The high school principal shared that budget cuts have led to the loss of three security staff. I recommend reinstating at least some of the security positions that were cut. A large high school in an urban core needs sufficient security personnel to insure a safe environment for all students and staff.

20. There is one social worker assigned to the ELC for two days per week. A full time social worker needs to be assigned. There is currently one social worker assigned to the high school. I recommend adding another social worker full time. The school reports that there are 5 social workers in the district, which is a ratio of 855:1 based on an enrollment of 4278 per the most recent school report card. The National Association of School Social Workers suggests a ratio of 1:250, and 1:50 for students with intensive needs. (NASSW, 2012).

21. Professional development is needed for all staff in effective instructional practices and behavior management for working with students in poverty, students with disabilities and English language learners.

## **B. Suitable, Up to Date Curriculum**

22. There is a district-wide need for training on CCLS. Clinton Elementary and middle school staff were identified as needing such training in their NYSED reviews. The 2012 NYSED review of Poughkeepsie Middle School reported that faculty acknowledge the need for curriculum alignment to be ongoing work in which all instructional staff participate. This was not occurring as of my initial site visit.

23. Due to budget cuts, there has been a reduction in extracurricular activities (\$50,000 cut in 2013-14) and sports programs. For example, extracurricular programs in the middle school, including yearbook and football, have been cut. The school should provide extra-curricular activities for students that help them connect to the school.

24. Only 5 AP classes were offered in the high school. It should offer additional AP classes and encourage students to enroll without prerequisite requirements (open enrollment).

25. As a result of the designation of Focus District, Focus Schools and Priority Schools the District, and each school in the district, must now develop and write new improvement plans using the Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness (DTSDE). These plans must include alignment of curriculum to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and professional development for staff in the implementation of the CCLS. This is an additional burden of time and resources and is in addition to previously required written improvement plans.

### **C. An Expanded Platform of Services for At-Risk Students**

26. The ELC principal feels the Pre-K program should be expanded and also a 0 to 3 year old program implemented. The implementation of these programs is essential to the large demographic living in poverty who are served by the district.

27. The kindergarten program across the district was reduced from full day to half day due to budget cuts. The principal of the ELC shared that 100 kindergarten students are "missing" due to the reduction of kindergarten to a half-day program. Parents find it difficult to access daycare for half day. The reduction of the kindergarten program to only half-day, however, may negate the gains made in pre-K, or at least minimize them. The loss of a half day of instruction in kindergarten will likely cause the students to enter first grade behind and not ready to meet the expectations of a first grade curriculum. One of the most critical needs of the district is to implement full day kindergarten.

28. The SQR of Clinton Elementary reported that teaching and learning strategies are needed to support the development of reading comprehension skills across all content areas for all students, and the school leader should ensure that at-risk students receive adequate academic support prior to grade three. In addition to the recommendations in the SQR, I recommend two full time literacy and math coaches to work on improving basic skills for all students.

29. The 2012 evaluation of Poughkeepsie Middle School reported that limited opportunities exist for after-school academic and extra-curricular programs due to budget constraints.

30. In the middle school, I observed that there were not sufficient staff to offer Math AIS to all students who qualify. Currently the average class size for AIS at the elementary level is 11, at the middle school level is 17, and at the high school level is 11. (Documentation provided by the district.) PCSD should provide sufficient staff to meet all of the AIS needs in Math as well as other core subjects in classes of no more than 10 students.

31. The middle school Homework Center is no longer open for drop in help by teachers.



32. Literacy coaches should be hired to work with staff and students in the middle school. It is critical to address the literacy needs of middle school students before they move to the high school level. Inadequate reading ability is one of the primary causes of failure in middle and high school.

33. I recommend that the middle school implement extended day, extended year programs for remediation and enrichment.

34. The high school principal stated that the School Improvement Grant (SIG) had provided some resources including summer school for incoming 9th graders to improve literacy, extended day (10th period), 2 academic intervention support (AIS) teachers for ELA, credit recovery program, Regents review program in January and June, and double period for social studies. He believes the resources provided by the grant are helping make progress in student achievement. The grant, however, is one-time money. The need for these resources will be ongoing after the grant ends.

35. I recommend that the high school maintain the successful interventions implemented under the SIG. These include literacy summer school program for incoming 9th graders, Regents Review in January and June, additional ELA teachers for AIS, credit recovery program, double period for 9th grade social studies, extended 10 period day, and an additional assistant principal to oversee smaller learning communities.

36. The principal shared that budget cuts led to loss of the alternative program for students with significant behavioral issues. I recommend that the high school establish an alternative education program to meet the needs of the most behaviorally and socially challenged students.

37. The high school should hire literacy and math coaches to assist teachers in data analysis and incorporation of effective instructional strategies in their classes.

38. The high school should also hire a parent and community liaison to encourage parent engagement and improvement of student attendance.

#### **D. Adequate Resources for Students with Extraordinary Needs**

39. Budget cuts resulted in the elimination of the Director of Pre School Special Education position in 2013-14.

40. There is not adequate staff to meet the needs of the ELLs at the Early Learning Center, where they make up 15% of the student body. Additional resources (teachers, appropriate materials) should be added.

41. The recent SQR of Clinton Elementary found there was little evidence that data for students with disabilities, English language learners, and economically disadvantaged subgroups have been analyzed to plan interventions.

42. The 2012 evaluation of Poughkeepsie Middle School reported a consensus among faculty that the needs of English language learners and research-based strategies to support learning is an area of high priority and great need. The report stated that there is limited availability of instructional materials to support learning for students with disabilities and students with language-based needs.

43. The 2008 Audit of Curriculum revealed that increased access to the general curriculum is needed for SWDs and ELLs. More staff and more professional development are needed. That report identified the most significant needs in the areas of ELA, SWDs, and ELLs.

44. The AOC also reported that technology is not being used extensively at any grade level, including with students with disabilities.

#### **E. Class Sizes/Instructional Grouping**

45. Class size averages 16 in pre-K and 23 in kindergarten, according to the 2011-12 SRC.

46. The average class sizes in PCSD elementary schools for 2011-12 ranged from 21-26. Average class size reported on the most recent School Report Card (2012-13) is stated as "common branch" grades K-7, with an average of 25 students per class. These class sizes are too high.

47. The current average class size for the middle school is 17 for all classes combined. However, 109 classes out of a

total of 564 classes had 23 or more students. (Source: Poughkeepsie central office staff.)

48. High school class sizes are too high, averaging 25 to 26 students in many of the core classes. The principal said budget cuts had led to reductions in staff and therefore higher class sizes. The current average high school class size is 19, with 147 of the 585 total classes having 25 or more students. (Source: Poughkeepsie central office staff.) This means that many classes are too large at the secondary level.

49. I recommend reduction in class sizes in grades pre-K to 12. The research cited in my report recommends no more than 13-17 students in a K-3 class and further states that minority and inner-city children gained the most from reduced class size.

#### **F. Instrumentalities of Learning**

50. There is no dedicated library in the ELC. A library should be added with adequate print material and technology. The play equipment is not age appropriate. The playground should be renovated to include age-appropriate equipment for young children.

51. The SQR of Clinton Elementary reported that there is one computer lab at the school. There are a limited number of desktop computers (one to three) in classrooms. There is limited access to updated technology and resources in classrooms across all grade levels and content areas. There is a need for more computers and handheld devices in classrooms.

52. The 2012 Middle School evaluation showed that there is limited access across all grade levels and content areas to updated technology and resources in the classroom. The middle school library media center had inadequate resources. The collection of books is outdated and technology for student use is limited. A desktop computer is needed in each classroom and laptop computers or ipads available to students in each classroom. These may be provided on carts that could be shared with other classrooms as the need arises. Every classroom should have a smartboard. The library media center needs to be transformed into a 21st century resource center with appropriate technology, adequate staff and space to accommodate the needs of all the students in the school.

53. I observed that the middle school science labs were outdated and lacked sufficient equipment.

54. Middle school textbooks are outdated.

55. Middle school fine arts material and equipment is outdated or lacking.

56. In the high school, supplies and materials in general were greatly lacking.

### **G. Safe and Orderly Environment**

57. The middle school suspension rate in 2011-12 was 33%. The 2012 evaluation of Poughkeepsie Middle School reported that school leaders and teachers recognize the need to address discipline issues across all settings in order to regain structured, predictable environments conducive to learning.

58. A 2011 progress review of the high school by the NYSED revealed that school-wide behavior issues and school improvement initiatives prevented administrators from conducting the appropriate number of classroom observations, student attendance was a problem, a change in the alternative learning situation for the district meant recently-incarcerated and socially-challenged students were now mainstreamed in the high school, leading to an increase in disruptive behavior, and Poughkeepsie Police Department officers were no longer on-site due to district budget constraints. The report stated that student behavior, as well as inconsistent classroom management techniques, instructional practices, and behavioral expectations, were adversely affecting the school's improvement efforts.

59. During my visit, the principal reported that the inclusion of the most difficult students in the regular high school following the closing of the alternative school led to an increase in serious behavior problems. I recommend the establishment of an alternative education program and reinstatement of security staff to insure a safe environment for all students and staff.

60. The annual high school attendance rate reported on the most recent school report card is 88%. The expected attendance standard for NY schools is 95%.

## **H. Adequate and Accessible Facilities**

61. Budget deficits and cuts led to closure of one elementary school in 2012-13, relocating kindergarten to the ELC and the other grades to the remaining four elementary schools.

62. In the middle school, custodians were cut from 2 full time to 1 full time. The cleanliness and maintenance of the facility reflected the reduction in custodial staff.

63. The Assistant Superintendent for Business stated that there is a constant need for repairs and renovations to the aging facilities and schools in the district. The current Capital project is not sufficient to meet all of the needs. He estimates an additional \$70 million is needed to address all the identified repairs and improvements.

64. One of the most critical needs is the repair and/or replacement of the steam heating systems in many of the buildings. Following my visit, a boiler failure caused the closing of one of the schools resulting in an unplanned expense and loss of instructional time for the students in the school.

#### Outputs

65. PCSD was identified as one of 70 Focus Districts in New York State, placing it among the 10% lowest performing districts in the state. Four of the five PCSD elementary schools (all except the ELC) are focus schools. The high school and the middle school are priority schools, defined as schools that are low achieving and making low progress, performing among the lowest 5% of schools in the State.

66. According to the 2011-12 School Report Card, no student accountability group in grades 3-8 made adequate yearly progress (AYP) in ELA or Math as measured by the Performance Index (PI). While all accountability groups at the secondary level made AYP in ELA, only the students with disabilities and the economically disadvantaged groups at the secondary level made AYP in Math by achieving the Safe Harbor target in their performance index. The most recent School Report Card posted on the NYSED website (2012-13) shows that only the multiracial accountability group in grades 3-8 made adequate yearly progress (AYP) in ELA or Math as measured by the Performance Index (PI). While all accountability groups at the secondary level made AYP in ELA, only the Hispanic Subgroup at the secondary level made AYP in Math by achieving the Safe Harbor target in their performance index.

67. In 2011-12 (SRC), only 1/4 to 1/3 of the students in grades 3-8 scored at or above the Proficiency Level 3 on the State Assessments. The majority of the students

scored at the failing Levels of 1 and 2. Results ranged from a high of 37% proficiency in 4th grade ELA to a low of 22% proficiency in 7th grade Math.

68. There was a significant decline in the performance of Poughkeepsie students on the state assessments from 2011-12 to 2012-13. While the state average student performance also dropped, Poughkeepsie experienced a more significant decline in the percent of students achieving proficiency. The statewide drop in state assessment results was due to the revision of the assessment to reflect the CCLS which have not yet been fully implemented and taught in schools across the state. While all districts are challenged to meet these new more rigorous standards the burden is greater for a low wealth/high need district like Poughkeepsie with fewer resources and greater pupil need than average or above average wealth districts.

69. Less than 10% of the students in grades 3, 5 and 7 were proficient on the 2012-13 ELA State Assessment, and only slightly more than 10% were proficient in grades 4, 6 and 8. The State average was 31%.

70. Even fewer economically disadvantaged students in grades 3-8 achieve proficiency on the 2012-13 ELA assessment, from a low of 6% in fifth grade to 11% in sixth grade. In grades 3-8, no ELLs achieved proficiency on the ELA assessment except for 3% in grade 5, and almost no SWDs achieved proficiency.

71. The math results were even lower than the ELA results, with less than 10% of the students in all grades, except 4th, scoring proficient on the 2012-13 Math State Assessment. The state average was 36%.

72. The percentage of economically disadvantaged students achieving math proficiency was lower than the overall percentage in each grade, 3-8. Of grade 3-8 ELLs, none achieved proficiency on the 2012-13 math assessment except for 4% in grade 6, and no SWDs achieved proficiency except for 2% in grade 6.

73. On the 2011-12 Regents exams, the pass rates (score of 65% or better) for the English exam were 85% of all students but only 60% of students with disabilities. The pass rates for the Integrated Algebra exam were 42% of all students, and only

18% of students with disabilities. (SCR 2011-12.) On the 2012-13 Regents exams, the pass rates for the English exam were 70% of all students, 38% of students with disabilities, 20% of ELLs, and 68% of economically disadvantaged students. The pass rates for the Integrated Algebra exam were 40% of all students, 23% of students with disabilities; 23% of ELLs, and 36% of economically disadvantaged students. (2012-13 SRC)

74. School Report Card data shows that, as compared to districts in Dutchess County that achieved at least an 80% graduation rate, PCSD falls far behind in measures of student performance. The percentage of PCSD students who receive an advanced designation Regents Diploma in 2013 is 6%, whereas 40-57% of students did so in the comparison districts. The percentage of PCSD students who scored 65% or better on the Regents Comprehensive English exam is 70%, with districts in the comparison group scoring between 88% and 98%. The percentage of students who scored 65% or better on the Regents Integrated Algebra exam is 40%, with districts in the comparison group scoring between 89% and 99%.

75. The 2012 PCSD graduation rate was reported in the most recent School Report Card at 61% overall, which is well below the 80% Regents Standard. The 2013 four-year graduation rate was 50.6% for all students, 39.7% for students with disabilities, 10% for ELLs, and 47.4% for economically disadvantaged students. None of the subgroups in the PCSD made AYP for either the 4-year or the 5-year graduation rate.

76. According to data from the Rural Schools Association Cornell website, the 2008 cohort had a dropout rate of 26.2%. The 2009 cohort's dropout rate was 25%.

#### Budget and Funding (Causation)

77. According to the most recent SRC, PCSD spends \$11,931 per pupil for general education and \$28,831 for special education. Poughkeepsie spends less per pupil than the average of districts statewide and significantly less for students with disabilities (SWD), a subgroup for which it has been consistently in a negative accountability status. In researching the challenges in an urban district like Poughkeepsie, I believe student need requires expenditures greater than the statewide average in order to provide a sound, basic education for all students.



78. PCSD has a combined wealth ratio of .58, about half the state average and significantly lower than the CWR of comparison districts in the region. Poughkeepsie's current tax rate is \$12.54 per \$1000 of assessed property valuation. Although this tax rate is lower than that of comparison districts, Poughkeepsie cannot sustain a higher tax rate due to the extreme poverty of the community, meaning it must rely more on State aid. The district is dependent on state aid for approximately 64% of its general fund budget and has a limited tax base from which to generate the remaining 36% of its budget.

79. The amount allocated to school districts had been frozen at the 2008-09 level until the enactment of the 2013-14 State Budget which provided a minimal increase to Foundation Aid. If Foundation Aid had been fully phased in as planned, as of 2013-14 the Poughkeepsie School District would have cumulatively received an additional \$64,552,342 in State Aid since 2007.

80. The Gap Elimination Adjustment has resulted in a cumulative loss of \$16.5 million in state aid to Poughkeepsie since the 2010-11 budget. The enacted State Budget for 2013-14 included a partial restoration of the GEA. After applying the \$1.4 million restoration figure Poughkeepsie still lost \$2.7 million in state aid for the 2013-14 budget. That equals a \$621.30 loss per pupil due to the GEA, above the state average and significantly higher than any Dutchess County district with a CWR of 1 or greater.

81. In addition to flat state aid and the GEA, a tax levy limit was enacted for the 2012-13 budget year. Under the tax levy limit, Poughkeepsie raised its tax levy by only 2% for the 2012-13 school year and enacted a 2.99% levy for the 2013-14 budget. Poughkeepsie's allowable levy increase for 2013-14 was 4.96%, however the district did not propose the larger levy due to the difficult economic conditions in the community. The current tax levy for 2014-15 is 2.94%.

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on my assessment of PCSD under the CFE evaluation framework, I conclude:

1. PCSD serves a lower income community, with low property wealth. The community cannot sustain a much higher tax rate due to its extreme poverty. Compared to other small cities I have examined, the relative poverty in Poughkeepsie is greater, meaning it has even less ability to go to the community for support through taxes. Despite these factors, PCSD makes a substantial local effort to support its students and schools and lacks the local fiscal capacity to make needed improvements to its school buildings and educational program or to support the district's significant number of at-risk students.

2. A significant portion of PCSD students are low income and academically at risk. These students need an expanded platform of essential services to provide the opportunity for a meaningful high school education.

4. PCSD has significant deficits in essential CFE inputs, as follows: qualified teachers supported with necessary professional development and training; sufficient social workers, guidance counselors and other support staff; class sizes at appropriate levels, especially in the elementary grades; and an expanded platform of services for low-income, academically at-risk students, including AIS services, instruction before and after school, textbooks, technology and other instrumentalities of learning, a suitable curriculum, and adequate facilities.

5. PCSD students are, at all grade levels, performing well below State proficiency standards. The significant portion of low-income (at risk) students are performing even further below State standards than PCSD students overall.

6. PCSD graduation rate is well below the State standard.

7. PCSD has experienced significant reductions in state aid under the GEA mechanism, resulting in cuts to necessary programs, staff and services.

8. PCSD is not providing students with the essential CFE inputs, nor is the district meeting State-established proficiency levels and graduation rates.

9. PCSD is not providing its students, particularly its sizeable population of students at-risk of academic failure, with the opportunity for a meaningful high school education, the standard for a sound basic education.

# **Maisto v. New York State: The Case for the Poughkeepsie City School District**

## **Introduction**

### School District

The Poughkeepsie City School District is a small city school district of approximately 4724 PreK-12 students located in Dutchess County in the Mid-Hudson Valley approximately 75 miles north of New York City. It is one of three school districts in New York State that are coterminous with the boundaries of the city in which it is located. There are 57 small city school districts in New York State. According to the New York State Association of Small City School Districts, small cities often have similar demographic characteristics as the five large city school districts in New York State, including “higher percentages of disadvantaged students, limited English proficient students, dropouts and students with special educational needs.”

The demographics of the Poughkeepsie District support this definition of a small city school district. The percent of Economically Disadvantaged students, as defined by federal income guidelines for poverty and reported in the 2012-13 School Report Card, is 85%. This is the highest rate of poverty in the region far exceeding other area districts whose poverty rates range from 12% to 21%. The most recent 4-year graduation rate figures for the Poughkeepsie 2009 cohort are 52.8% for all students and 39.7% for students with disabilities, 47.4% for Economically Disadvantaged students and 10% for limited English proficient students. 15% of the enrolled students are students with disabilities, exceeding the 13.1% average for all school districts in New York State and 12.6% for similar school districts. 10% are English language learners.

While enrollment in Dutchess County schools is predicted to experience a 10% decline through 2020, Poughkeepsie is predicted to grow in enrollment, with a 1.44% increase.

### Community

Poughkeepsie, with a population of approximately 30,639 (2013), has a 6.7% unemployment rate which is higher than Dutchess County’s 5.3% rate (8/14). Like many upstate Small Cities the assessed value and the tax base are decreasing. In my visit to the school district I observed a downtown with pockets of redevelopment on its main street. The majority of the downtown however continues to be run-down with older buildings either vacant or in need of repair and renovation. Citywide blight, indicative of a declining community, was evident. In 2011 the Brookings Institute published a report, “Re-emergence of Concentrated Poverty,” which featured Poughkeepsie as an area in the United States of concentrated poverty. 27% of the impoverished people in Poughkeepsie live in three extreme poverty areas of the city. The report found that being poor in a very poor neighborhood is even more

difficult than dealing with individual poverty. The report listed one of the outcomes is a limitation on educational opportunity. The Brookings Report states:

“Children in high-poverty communities tend to go to neighborhood schools where nearly all the students are poor and at greater risk of failure, as measured by standardized tests, dropout rates, and grade retention. Teachers in these schools tend to be less experienced, the student body more mobile, and additional systems must often be put in place to deal with the social welfare needs of the student body, creating further demands on limited resources.”

Children living in poverty can be successful and graduate with a meaningful high school education if the school district has the added resources needed to provide the sound, basic education they need and have a constitutional right to receive.

As established by the court ruling in the Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE) Case all students in New York State have a constitutional right to a sound, basic education and a meaningful high school education that adequately prepares them for civic participation. The educational challenges in a poor district like Poughkeepsie, located in a city with one of the highest rates of concentrated poverty in the country, make it impossible to provide these basic rights to every student without adequate state aid funding. The district is not achieving an 80% passing rate on State Assessments, including five Regents Exams in high school, nor is it achieving an 80% graduation rate for all students.

The following sections of this report will detail the demographics, student performance, staffing, facilities, and budget issues in the Poughkeepsie City School District. Comparisons will be made with districts in the region that are achieving the standard of an 80% or greater graduation rate. Conclusions will be reached about what is lacking in this school district to provide a sound basic education for all of its students.

## **District Information and Data**

### Demographics

The **enrollment** in the Poughkeepsie District is 4,724, Pre-K-12, for the 2014-15 school year.

The **race and ethnic background** of the students is as follows: African-American, 58%, Hispanic, 28%, Asian, 1%, White, 13%. The classification rate for **students with disabilities** is 15% as reported in the most recent school report card (2012-13). This is above the state average of 13.1%. 10% of the students are **limited English proficient**.

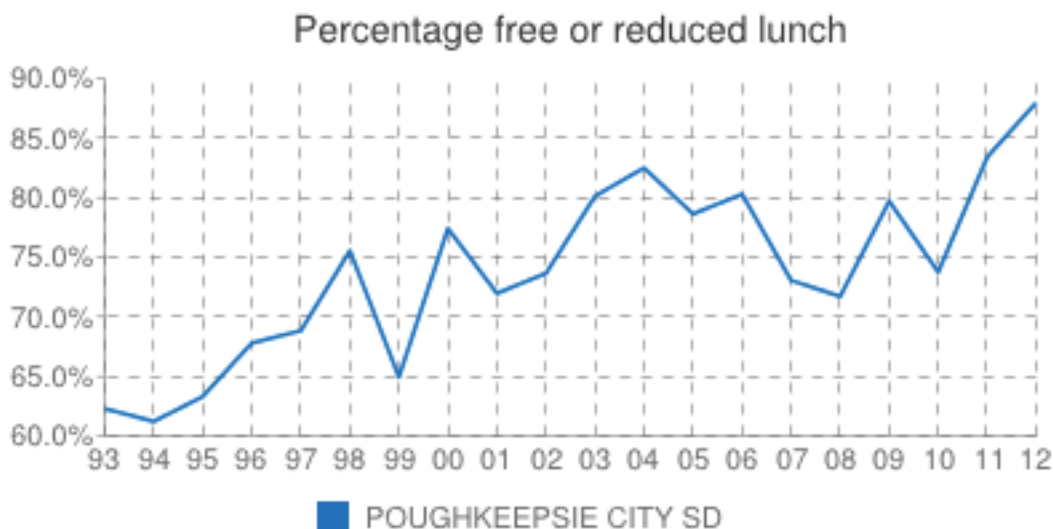
The percent of students in Poughkeepsie identified as “economically disadvantaged,” or living in **poverty**, is high even for Small City School District standards. A disadvantaged student is one who qualifies for a free or reduced school lunch by federal standards. In Poughkeepsie **85%** of the student body are considered in the accountability subgroup “**economically disadvantaged**” due to their socio-economic status. There has been a significant increase in poverty in the district since 2010. Ruby Payne and other researchers write about the tremendous challenges schools have in educating children from poverty. These challenges imply not only different pedagogical approaches, but also greater expenses to level the playing field for children from poverty and provide them with a sound basic education.

As illustrated in the chart below, Poughkeepsie is the most diverse district with the greatest poverty in Dutchess County when compared to districts with 1100 or more students in the region who have achieved greater than an 80% graduation rate.

**Poughkeepsie and Comparison Group Demographics-2012-13 (SRC)**

	Poughkeepsie	Arlington	Red Hook	Spaenkil	Pawling	Rhinebeck	Wappingers
Enrollment	4724	9179	1988	1551	1289	1120	11872
Poverty	85%	18%	17%	18%	18%	16%	22%
Black/Af Am	58%	7%	2%	9%	2%	2%	6%
Latino	28%	10%	5%	11%	10%	6%	12%
Asian	1%	4%	2%	14%	2%	3%	6%
White	13%	78%	90%	64%	85%	89%	76%
LEP/ELL	10%	1%	2%	2%	4%	1%	1%

Poverty in the Poughkeepsie School District is significantly higher than the regional comparison school districts. The chart below illustrates the growth in poverty in the Poughkeepsie District since 1993 to 2012. ([nyruralschools.org/w/data-tools/](http://nyruralschools.org/w/data-tools/))



## Student Performance

The Poughkeepsie District has consistently been unable to achieve levels of student performance that would place them in a positive accountability status as defined by State and Federal standards.

Under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) federal regulations the district, and most of its schools, were identified as needing improvement, and as a result have had various State Accountability Reviews followed by required written improvement plans.

Under NCLB regulations all schools and districts must be proficient by 2014. New York State Education Department recently received the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Flexibility Waiver from the federal government that extends the time for all students to reach proficiency. Under these new regulations the Poughkeepsie District was identified as one of 70 Focus Districts in New York State. This places the district among the 10% lowest performing school districts in the state. There are 221 priority schools in the State. Poughkeepsie Middle School and the high school are both identified as Priority Schools. A Priority School is defined as a school that is low achieving and making low progress. The 221 identified Priority Schools are among the lowest performing 5% in the State in terms of combined English Language Arts (ELA) and Math performance, as well as those schools that have had graduation rates below 60% for the last several years. Four of the five elementary schools in Poughkeepsie are focus schools, while only one elementary, the Early Learning Center, is identified as in good standing for accountability purposes.

The most recent School Report Card posted on the NYSED website (2012-13) shows that **only the multiracial student accountability group in grades 3-8 made adequate yearly progress (AYP) in ELA or Math** as measured by the Performance Index (PI). This group achieved the safe harbor target. While all accountability groups at the secondary level made AYP in ELA, only the Hispanic Subgroup at the secondary level made AYP in Math by achieving the Safe Harbor target in their performance index. None of the subgroups in the Poughkeepsie District made AYP for either the 4-year or the 5-year Graduation Rate.

### **English Language Arts (ELA) State Assessment Results All Students (2011-13) Poughkeepsie Compared to State Average (NYS School Report Card)**

There was a significant decline in the performance of Poughkeepsie students on the state assessments from 2011-12 to 2012-13 (see following chart). While the state average student performance also dropped, Poughkeepsie experienced a more significant decline in the percent of students achieving proficiency. **Less than 10%**

**of the students in grades 3, 5 and 7 were proficient on the 2012-13 ELA State Assessment, and only slightly more than 10% were proficient in grades 4, 6 and 8.**

Grade	% Proficient <b>Poughkeepsie</b> 2011-12	% Proficient <b>State 2011-12</b>	% Proficient <b>Poughkeepsie</b> 2012-13	% Proficient <b>State 2012-13</b>
3	35%	56%	<b>9%</b>	31%
4	37%	59%	<b>11%</b>	30%
5	30%	58%	<b>7%</b>	30%
6	25%	56%	<b>13%</b>	30%
7	28%	52%	<b>9%</b>	31%
8	24%	50%	<b>11%</b>	34%

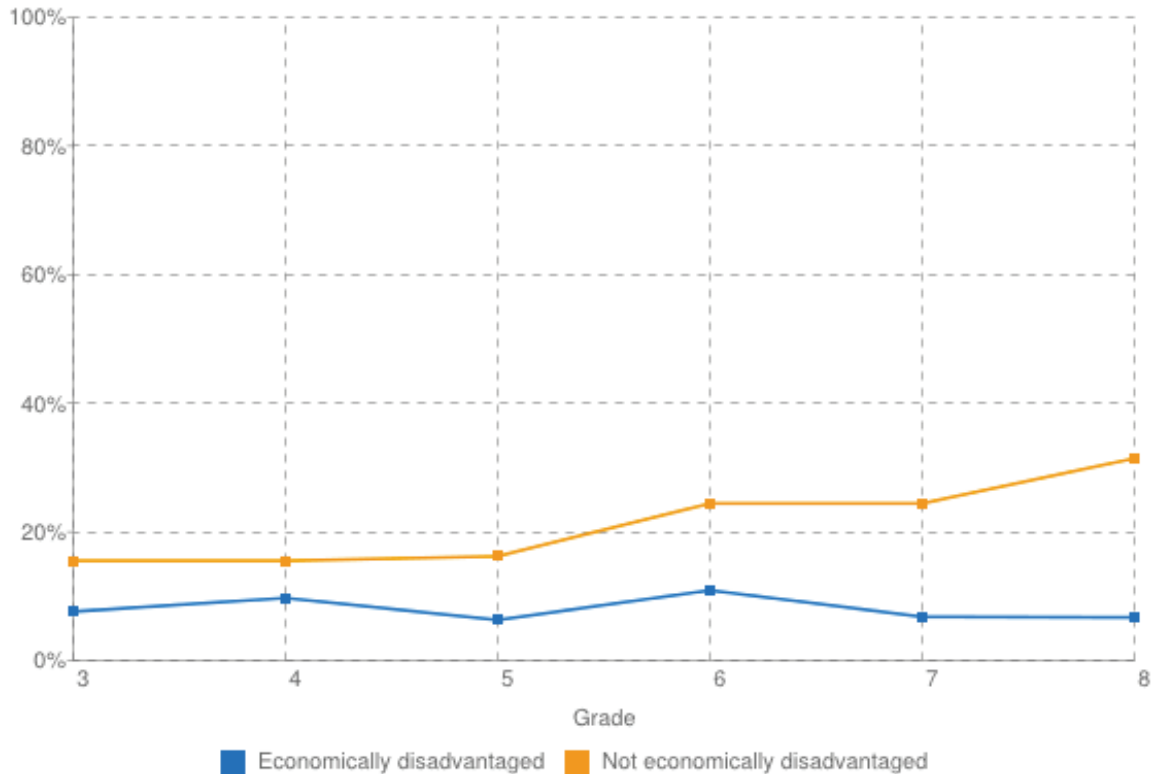
**State Assessment Results ELA Grades 3-8 (2012-13) Poughkeepsie All Students compared to LEP Students, Students with Disabilities and Economically Disadvantaged Students** ([nyruralschools.org/w/data-tools](http://nyruralschools.org/w/data-tools))

On the 2012-13 state assessment, only a few ELL students in grade 5 achieved proficiency with no ELL students being proficient in grades 3, 4 and 6-8. Only a few SWDs achieved proficiency in grades 4, 6 and 7 with no SWDs proficient in grades 2, 5 and 8. The results for the ED students were similar to the All Student Group. This is not surprising since 85% of the All Student Group is Economically Disadvantaged. However when comparing the economically disadvantaged with the not economically disadvantaged a more significant gap is present as illustrated in the following charts. An achievement gap is also present for the students with disabilities and the limited English proficient subgroups.

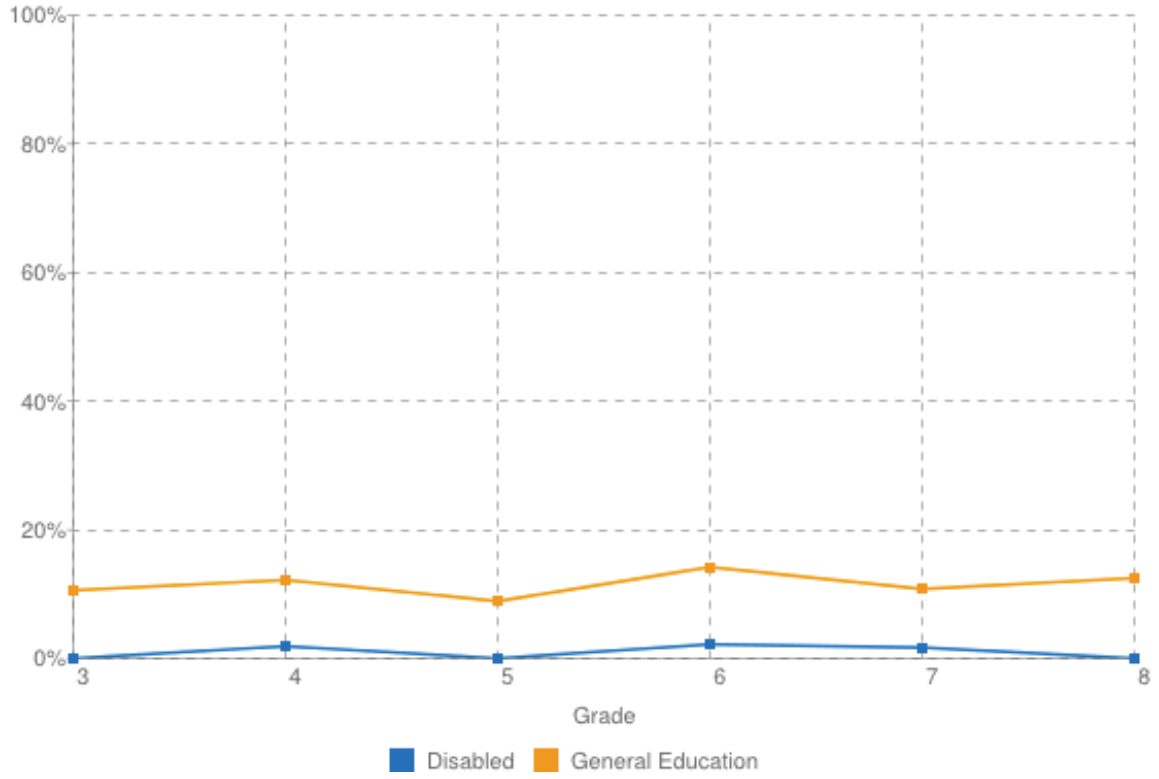
Grade	% All Students Proficient 12-13	% ELL Proficient 12- 13	% SWD Proficient 12-13	% ED Proficient 12- 13
3	9%	0%	0%	8%
4	11%	0%	2%	10%
5	7%	3%	0%	6%
6	13%	0%	2%	11%
7	9%	0%	2%	7%
8	11%	0%	0%	7%



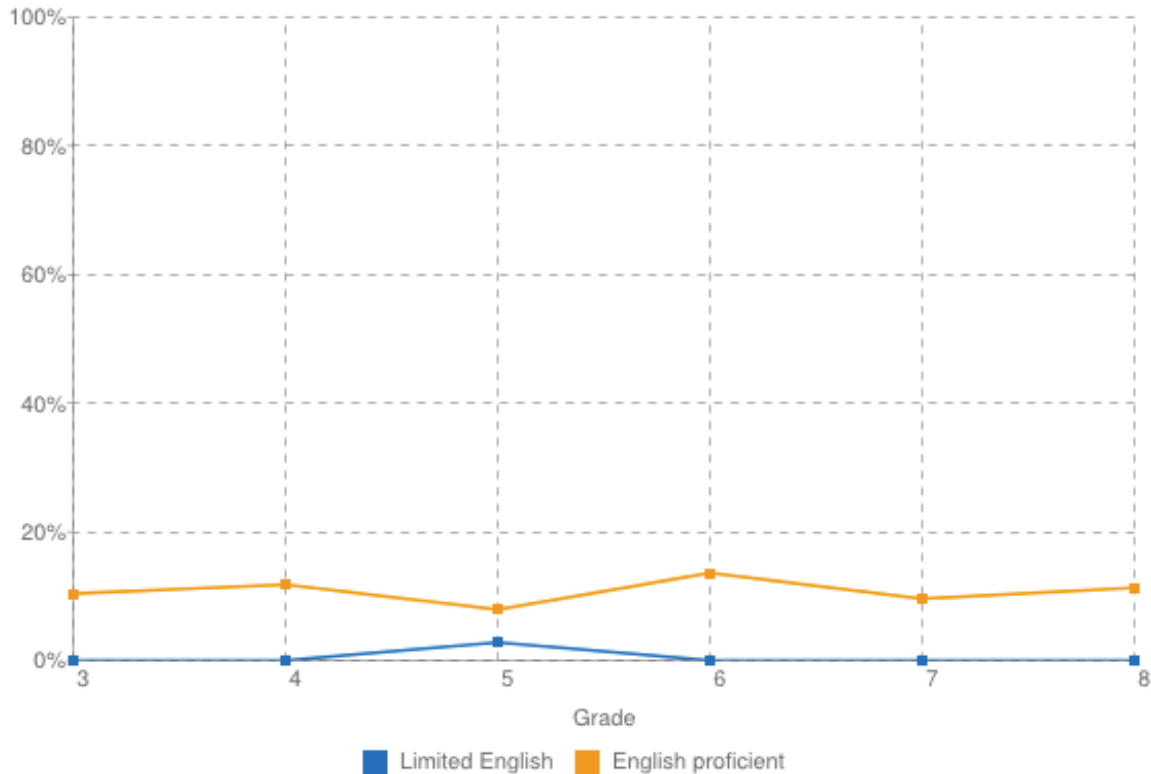
POUGHKEEPSIE CITY SD  
ELA, Year 12/13, Percentage Level 3 and 4



POUGHKEEPSIE CITY SD  
ELA, Year 12/13, Percentage Level 3 and 4



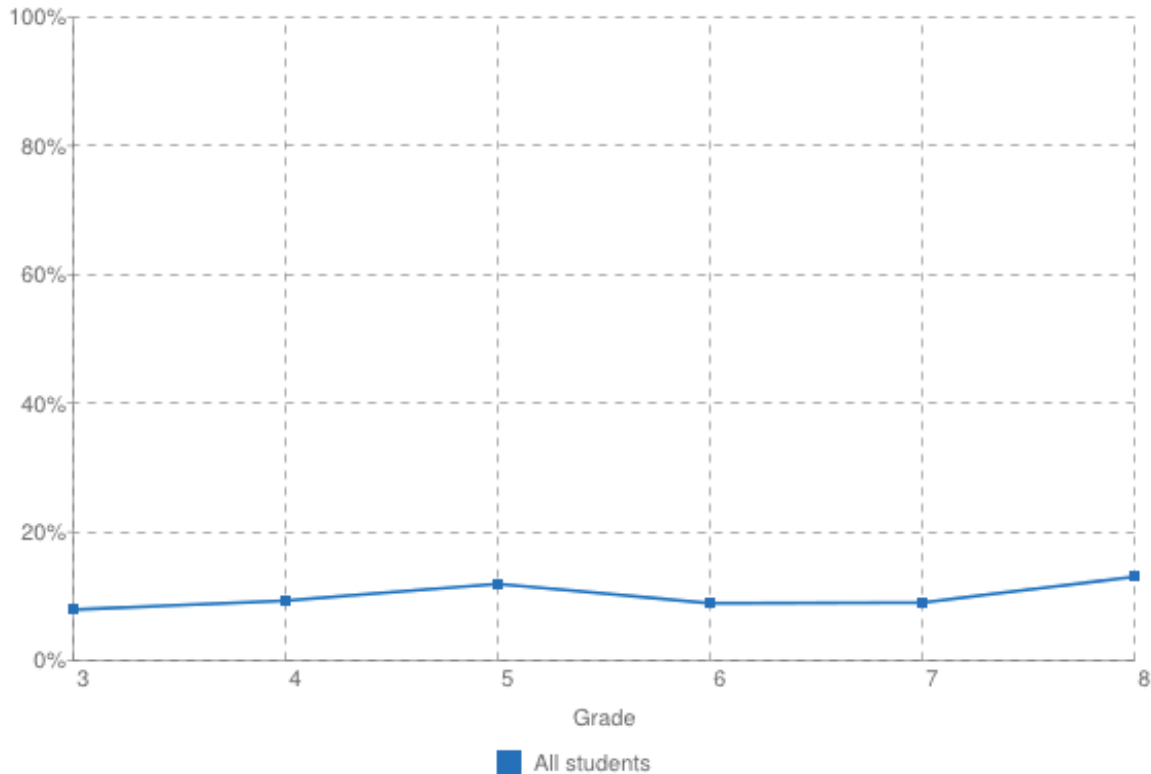
**POUGHKEEPSIE CITY SD**  
**ELA, Year 12/13, Percentage Level 3 and 4**



**English Language Arts (ELA) State Assessment Results Grades 3-8 (2013-14)**  
 (Results for the most recent ELA assessment were available only for the average of grades 3-8 combined at the time of this report.)

**State 31%** of students grades 3-8 **proficient** (scoring a Level 3 or 4)  
**Poughkeepsie 10%** of students grades 3-8 scoring at the **proficient** level.  
 Poughkeepsie students continue to score significantly below the State average in ELA. (See chart below - NY Rural Schools data)

**POUGHKEEPSIE CITY SD**  
**ELA, Year 13/14, Percentage Level 3 and 4**



**Math State Assessment Results All Students (2011-13) Poughkeepsie Compared to State Average (NY Rural Schools data)**

The math results were even lower than the ELA results with less than 10% of the students in all grades, except 4<sup>th</sup>, scoring proficient on the 2012-13 Math State Assessment.

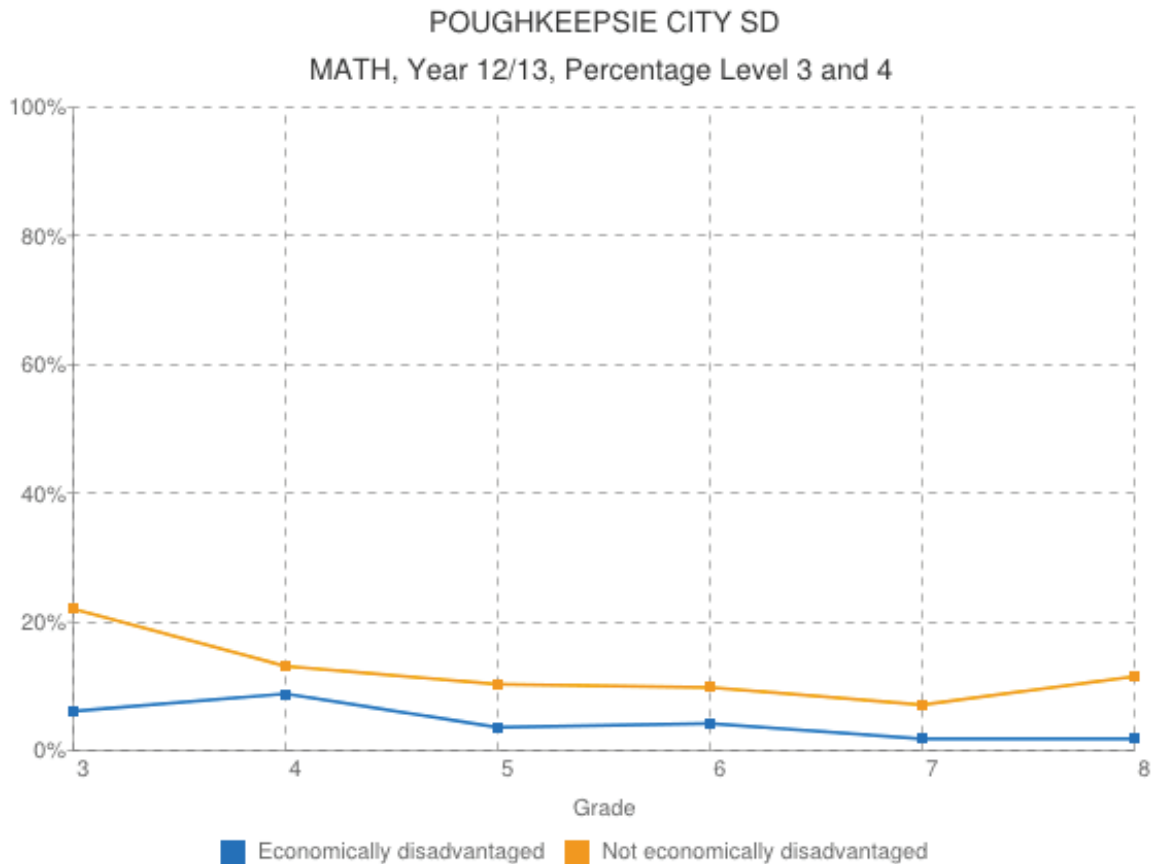
Grade	% Proficient Poughkeepsie 2011-12	% Proficient State 2011-12	% Proficient Poughkeepsie 2012-13	% Proficient State 2012-13
3	32%	61%	<b>9%</b>	34%
4	36%	69%	<b>10%</b>	36%
5	33%	67%	<b>4%</b>	30%
6	30%	65%	<b>5%</b>	31%
7	22%	65%	<b>3%</b>	28%
8	23%	61%	<b>3%</b>	28%

**State Assessment Results Math Grades 3-8 (2012-13) Poughkeepsie All Students compared to LEP Students, Students with Disabilities and Economically Disadvantaged Students**

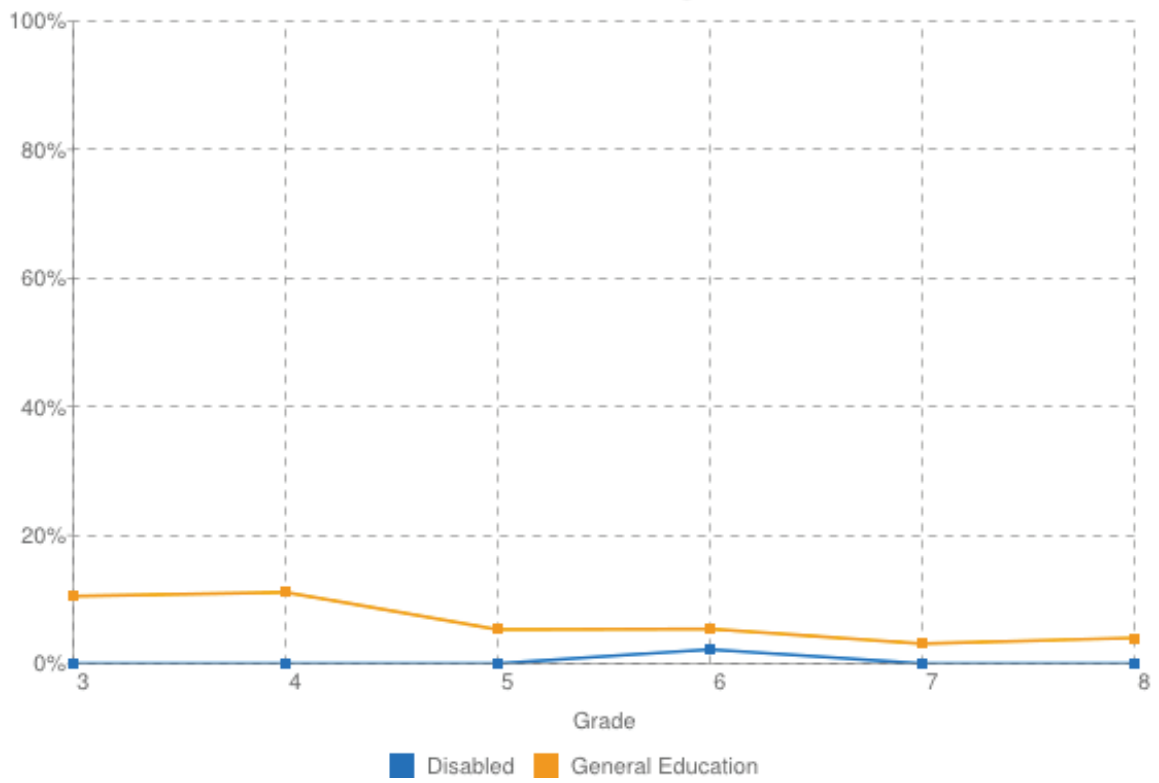
On the 2012-13 Math State Assessment very few students in any subgroup achieved proficiency.

Grade	% All Students Proficient 12-13	% ELL Proficient 12-13	% SWD Proficient 12-13	% ED Proficient 12-13
3	9%	0%	0%	6%
4	10%	0%	0%	9%
5	4%	0%	0%	4%
6	5%	4%	2%	4%
7	3%	0%	0%	2%
8	3%	0%	0%	2%

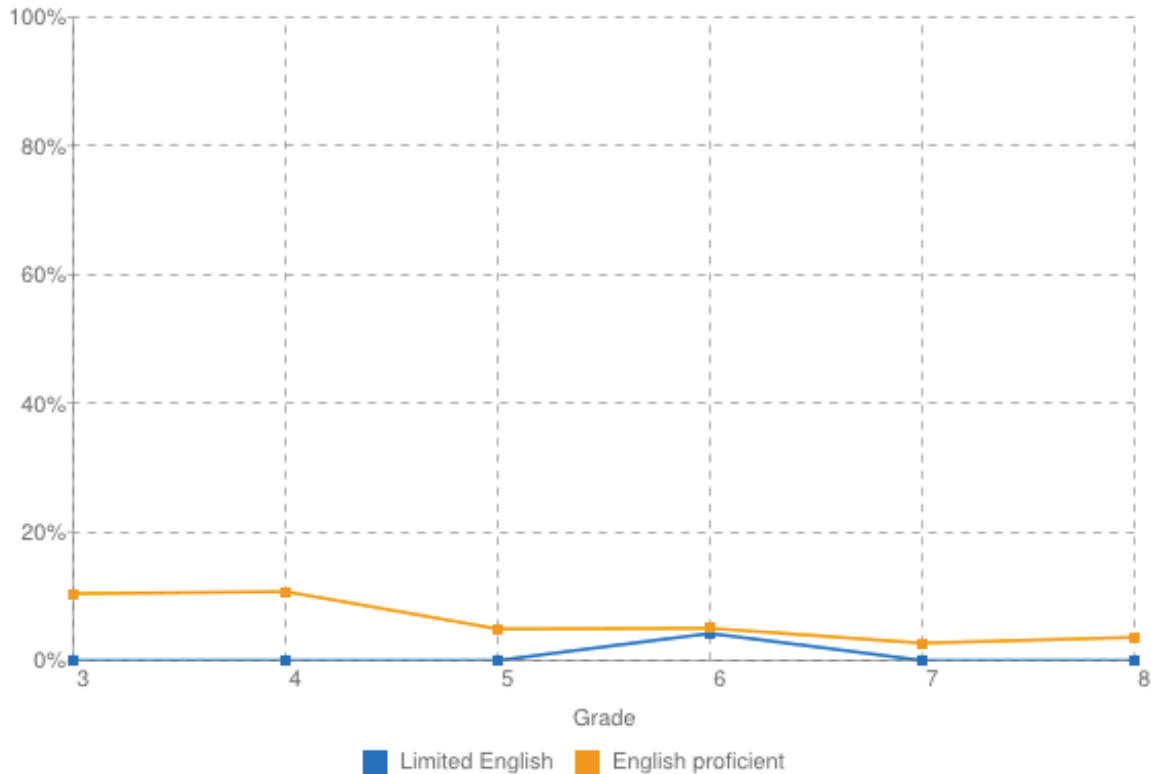
The following charts illustrate the achievement gaps for economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities and limited English proficient students. Very few students in any group achieved proficiency.



POUGHKEEPSIE CITY SD  
MATH, Year 12/13, Percentage Level 3 and 4



**POUGHKEEPSIE CITY SD**  
**MATH, Year 12/13, Percentage Level 3 and 4**



**Math State Assessment Results Grades 3-8 (2013-14)**

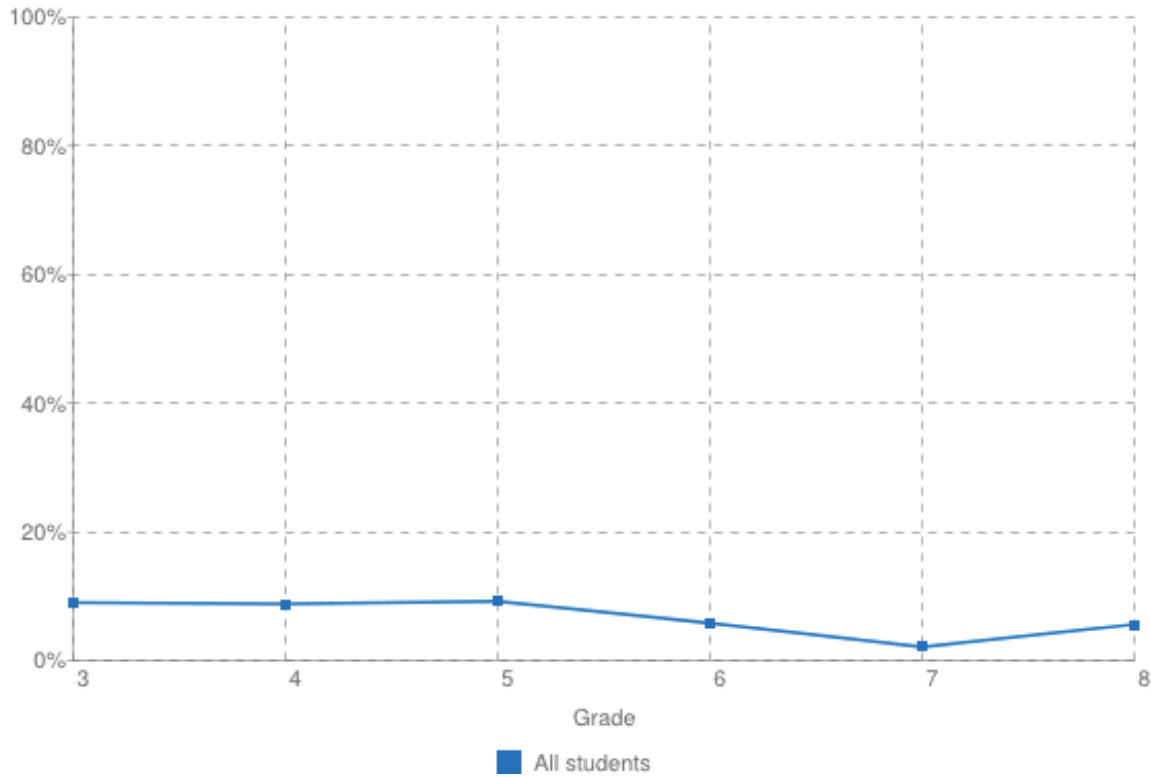
(Results for the most recent Math assessment were available only for the average of grades 3-8 combined at the time of this report.)

**State 36%** of students grades 3-8 **proficient** (scoring a Level 3 or 4)

**Poughkeepsie 7%** of students grades 3-8 scoring at the **proficient** level

Poughkeepsie students continue to score significantly below the State average in Math. (See chart below – NY Rural Schools data)

**POUGHKEEPSIE CITY SD**  
**MATH, Year 13/14, Percentage Level 3 and 4**



**Poughkeepsie and Comparison Group Secondary All Student Performance-2012-13 (School Report Card)**

The chart below compares the student performance in the Poughkeepsie School District to that of Dutchess County school districts that achieved an 80% or greater graduation rate. The factors compared are graduation rate, the percent of students receiving an advanced designation Regents Diploma, the percent of students scoring 65% or better on the Regents Comprehensive English and Integrated Algebra exams and the district’s accountability status. The student performance in each of the comparison districts significantly exceeds that of Poughkeepsie’s.

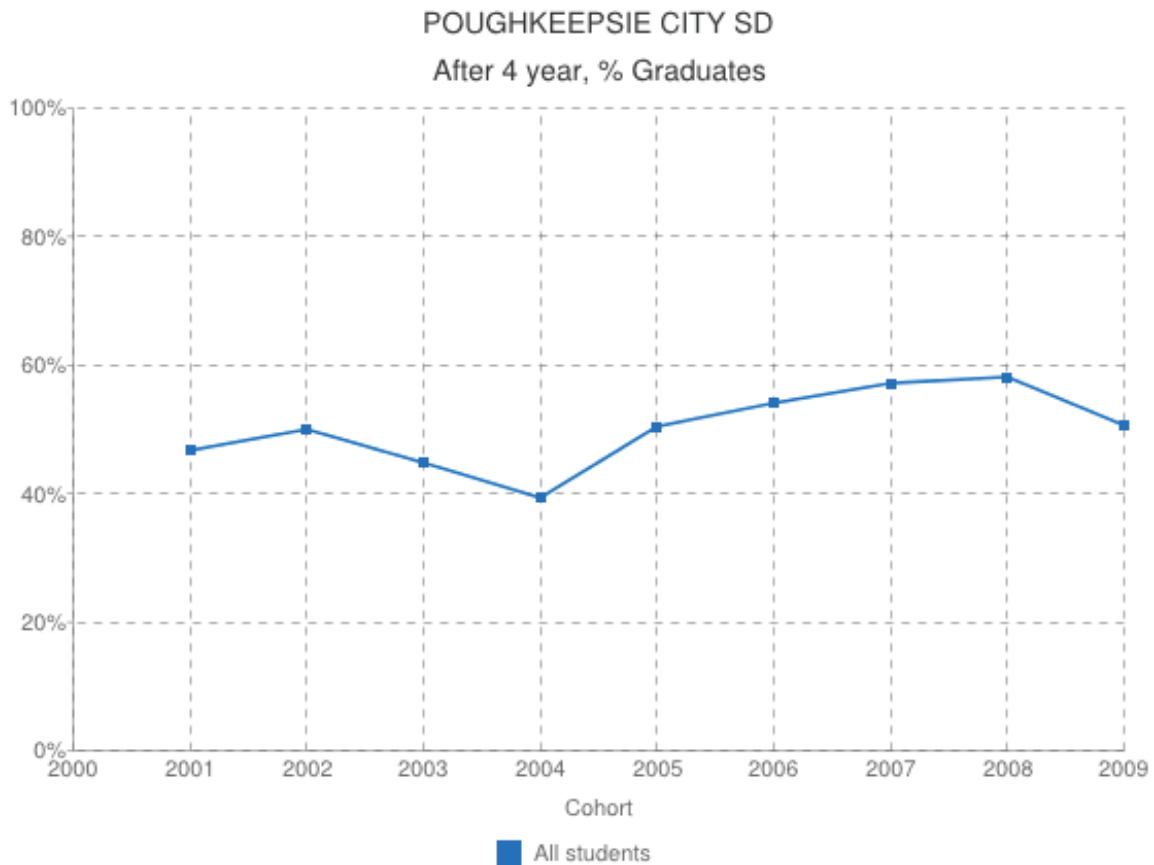
	Poughkeepsie	Arlington	Red Hook	Spakenkill	Pawling	Rhinebeck	Wappingers
4 yr Grad Rate 2008 cohort	61%	89%	91%	95%	89%	89%	87%
Advanced diploma High school	6%	48%	57%	53%	44%	40%	41%



Comprehensive English	70%	93%	92%	89%	90%	98%	88%
Integrated Algebra	40%	90%	99%	97%	91%	99%	89%
Accountability Status	Focus District	Good Stand.	Good Stand.	Good Standing	Good Standing	Good Standing	Good Standing

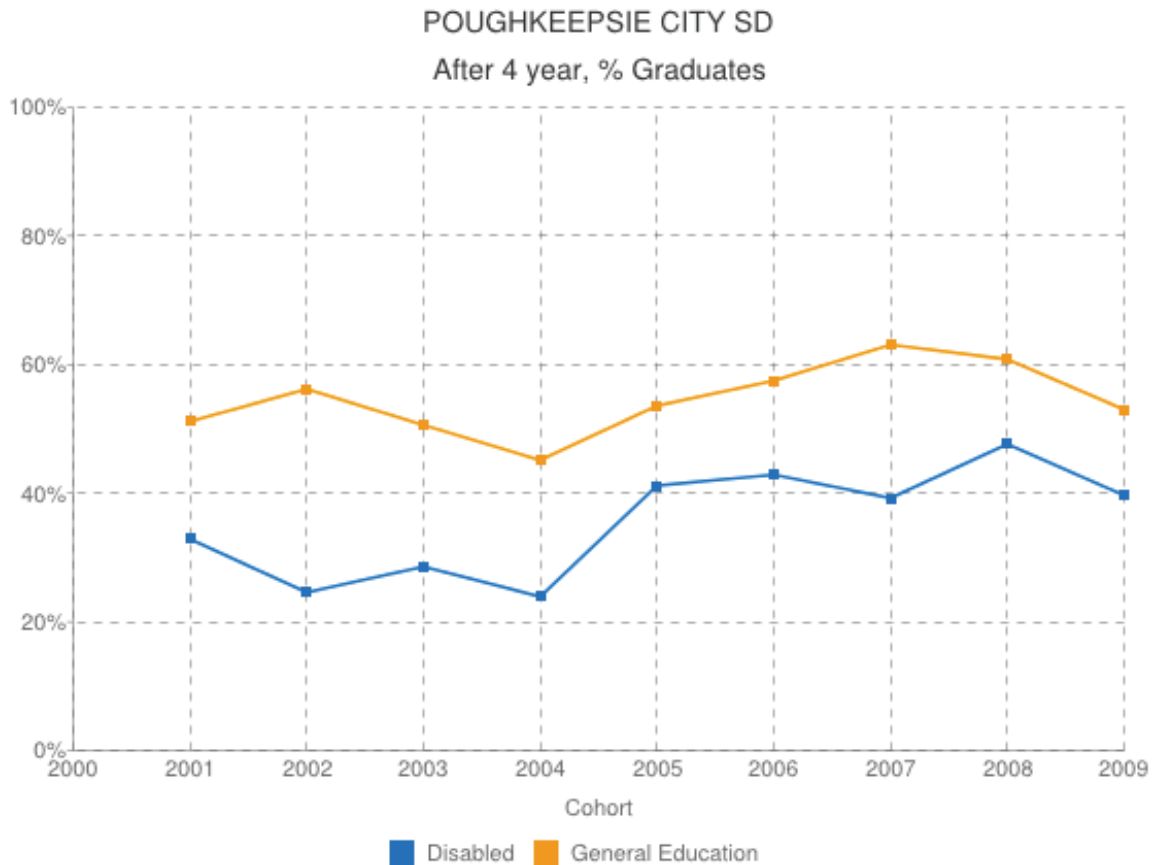
**Graduation Rate Poughkeepsie All Student Group 2001-09 Cohorts (Cornell Database)**

The graduation rate has remained significantly below the 80% Regents minimum standard and further declined with the 2009 cohort.



### **Graduation Rate General Education Students Compared to Students with Disabilities**

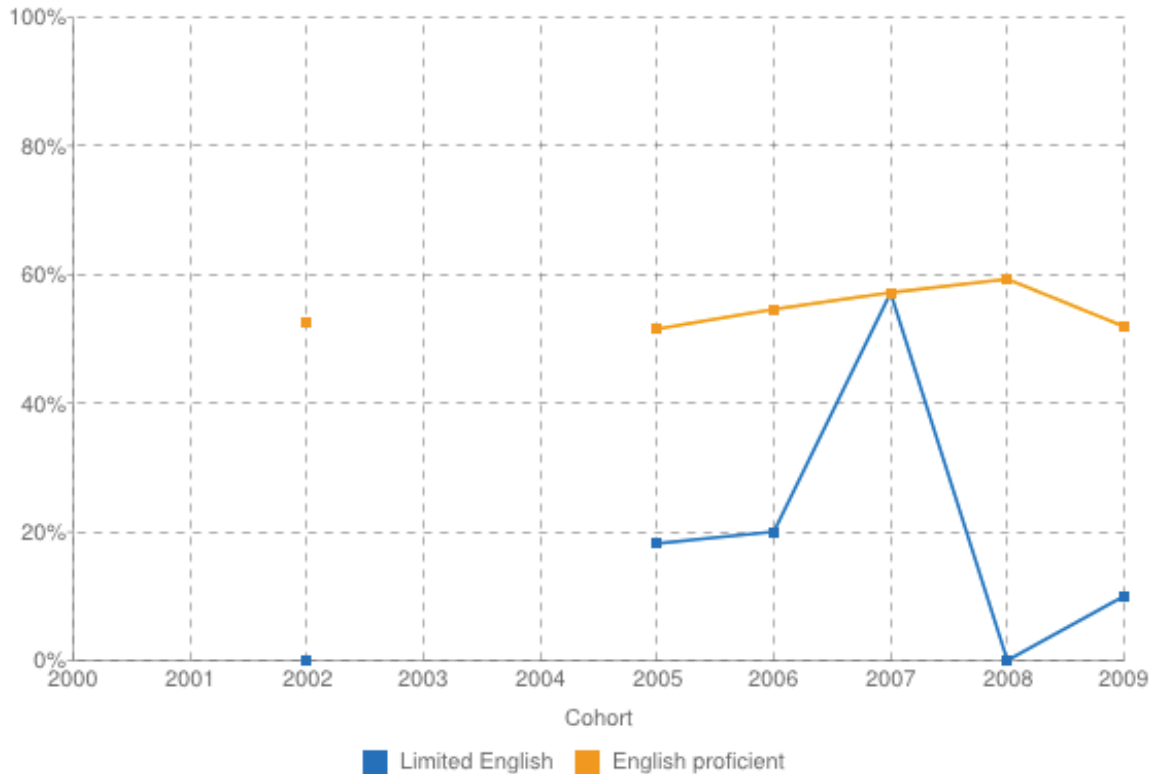
A consistent gap is present in graduation rates between the students with disabilities and those without disabilities (general education) from the 2001 cohort to the 2009 cohort (2013 graduates).



### **Graduation Rate English Proficient Students Compared to Limited English Proficient Students**

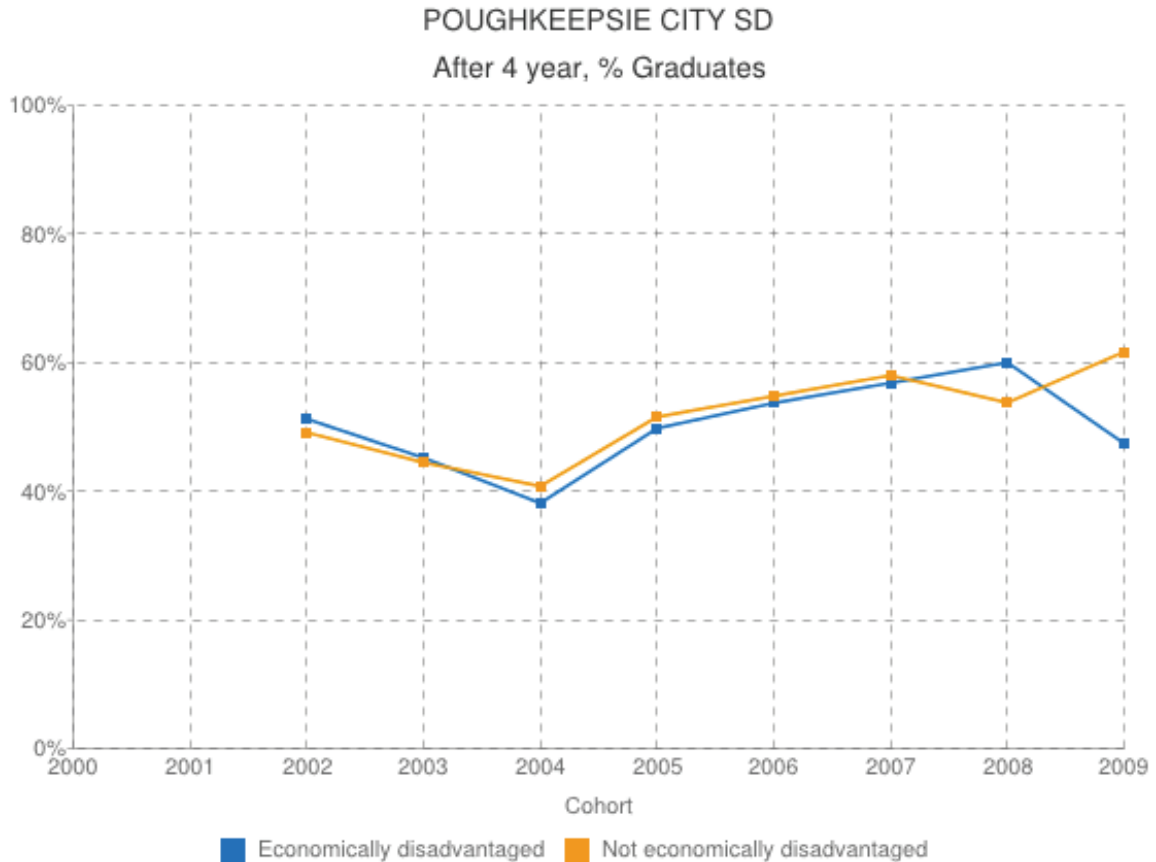
There was a dramatic drop in graduation rate for the LEP students in the 2008 cohort with only a slight improvement in the 2009 cohort (2013 graduates). The significant gap between English proficient and limited English proficient students remains.

POUGHKEEPSIE CITY SD  
After 4 year, % Graduates



**Graduation Rate Economically Disadvantaged Students Compared to Not Economically Disadvantaged Students**

While the gap between these two groups of students is not as large as between other groups it is widening with the 2009 cohort (2013 graduates).



## Accountability Reviews

The Poughkeepsie District has had many state reviews of their schools and programs as a result of student performance below the state standards and their subsequent negative accountability status. The expectation of the New York State Education Department (NYSED) is that recommendations resulting from the reviews will be implemented. Some of the significant findings from previous reviews are presented beginning with the Audit of Curriculum in 2008.

Audit of Curriculum (AOC) – a mandated review conducted by NYSED as a result of the continued negative accountability status of the school district. Some of the significant findings and recommendations from the AOC are as follow.

-District and school personnel request and need professional development in these areas:

- Students with disabilities (SWD)
- English language learners (ELL)
- Differentiated instruction
- Use and Evaluation of data for instruction
- New teacher mentoring

-Technology is not being used extensively at any grade level including with students with disabilities

-Additional staff are needed in these areas:

- Dually certified special education teachers and English as a second language teachers
- ELA coaches
- Support staff
- ESL district director

-Increased access to the general curriculum is needed for students with disabilities and English language learners.

**The most significant needs were identified as the areas of ELA, SWDs and ELLS.**

While this review was conducted in 2008 many of the same needs continue to exist and have been identified by subsequent NYSED accountability reviews as mentioned in the following sections of this report.

#### Findings & Recommendations Poughkeepsie High School Progress Review Report (10/11)

The high school had previously been identified a Persistently Lowest Achieving (PLA) School and therefore qualified for a School Improvement Grant (SIG) to implement a transformation model intervention at the school. In October 2011 a progress review was conducted by NYSED. Some of the significant findings of the review are listed below:

-School-wide behavior issues and school improvement initiatives have prevented administrators from being in the classrooms to conduct the appropriate number of observations.

-Student attendance remains an issue

-The alternative learning situation for the district has changed. Recently-incarcerated and socially-challenged students are now mainstreamed in the high school. School leaders and teachers reported this has led to an increase in disruptive behavior through the building.

-Officers from the Poughkeepsie Police Department are no longer on-site due to district budget constraints.

-“The school and district appear to be working together to coordinate their efforts and implement as much of their Transformation Model as possible. However, during the NYSED Team site visit student behavior was seen to be adversely

affecting the school's improvement efforts, as were inconsistent classroom management techniques, instructional practices and behavioral expectations.”

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I visited the Poughkeepsie School District in December, 2012. The following is the summary of my conversation with the high school principal and visit to the school.

-Principal stated that the School Improvement Grant (SIG) had provided some resources including summer school for incoming 9<sup>th</sup> graders to improve literacy, extended day (10<sup>th</sup> period), 2 academic intervention support (AIS) teachers for ELA, credit recovery program, Regents review program in January and June, double period for social studies. He believes the resources provided by the grant are helping make progress in student achievement. The grant, however, is one- time money. The need for these resources will be ongoing after the grant ends.

-Principal shared that the following budget cuts impacted the high school program negatively; loss of 3 security staff, loss of the alternative program for students with significant behavioral issues, reduction in staff resulting in larger class size. He also stated more literacy support was needed in core classes and that a Saturday School Program would be beneficial.

- The principal reported that with the inclusion of the most difficult students in the regular high school following the closing of the alternative school, there has been an increase in serious behavior problems.

-Class sizes averaged 25 to 26 students.

-I observed that there were only 5 AP classes offered. The principal said the students were not asking for more advanced classes.

- Supplies and materials in general were greatly lacking.

### Conclusions

The high school has significant challenges that are being partially met through the resources provided by the SIG. When the grant ends there will not be sufficient resources to continue these successful interventions. Security remains an issue, as does student attendance. The annual attendance rate reported on the most recent school report card is only 88%. The expected attendance standard for schools in New York State is 95%. The fact that students are not seeking more advanced classes is troubling. It is a sign that students do not see themselves as capable of achieving a challenging curriculum and staff are not motivating and encouraging them to achieve at higher levels.

## Recommendations

Maintain the successful interventions implemented under the SIG. These include literacy summer school program for incoming 9<sup>th</sup> graders, Regents Review in January and June, additional ELA teachers for AIS, credit recovery program, double period for 9<sup>th</sup> grade social studies, extended 10 period day, additional assistant principal to oversee smaller learning communities.

Add another social worker full time. There is currently one assigned to the school.

Establish an alternative education program to meet the needs of the most behaviorally and socially challenged students.

Reinstate at least some of the security positions that were cut. A large high school in an urban core needs sufficient security personnel to insure a safe environment for all students and staff.

Provide additional professional development for staff in effective behavior management strategies for all students with an emphasis on working with students in poverty.

Provide professional development for all staff on raising achievement levels for students in poverty.

Offer additional AP classes and encourage students to enroll without prerequisite requirements (open enrollment).

Provide adequate books, supplies, materials and technology for all students and staff.

Reduce class size.

Hire literacy and math coaches to assist teachers in data analysis and incorporation of effective instructional strategies in their classes.

Hire a position to serve as a parent and community liason to encourage parent engagement and improvement of student attendance.

Findings & Recommendations Poughkeepsie Middle School Quality Review (SQR)  
(1/12)

The middle school was previously identified as a school in need of improvement. A NYSED review was conducted in 2012 due to this negative accountability status. The following are significant findings and recommendations.

-Faculty acknowledge the need for curriculum alignment to be ongoing work in which all instructional staff participate.

-Consensus exists among faculty that the needs of English language learners and research-based strategies to support learning is an area of high priority and great need.

-There is a need to continue to develop teachers' and school leaders' knowledge of the shifts in instruction required by the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). Professional development delivery should be ongoing and include time to create instructional materials and assessment.

-School leaders and teachers recognize the need to address discipline issues across all settings in order to regain structured, predictable environments conducive to learning.

-Limited opportunities exist for after-school academic and extra-curricular programs due to budget constraints.

-There is limited availability of instructional materials to support learning for students with disabilities and students with language-based needs.

-There is limited access across all grade levels and content areas to updated technology and resources in the classroom.

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I visited the Poughkeepsie School District in December, 2012 and observed many of the same issues at the middle school that were identified in the SQR Report. The following are additional observations I made during my visit to the school.

Personal Observations Site Visit (12/12)

-The new principal understood the needs of the students and the school. She was working very hard, however was overwhelmed trying to meet all the needs with limited resources.



- There were not sufficient staff to offer Math AIS to all students who qualify.
- Science labs were outdated and lacked sufficient equipment.
- Library media center had inadequate resources. The collection of books is outdated and technology for student use is limited.
- Textbooks are outdated.
- Fine Arts material and equipment is outdated or lacking.
- Homework Center is no longer open for drop in help by teachers.
- School Store was closed due to budget cuts.
- There is no longer a yearbook produced.
- The football program was cut.
- Custodians were cut from 2 full time to 1 full time.
- The cleanliness and maintenance of the facility reflected the reduction in custodial staff.
- Professional Development needed in Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and new APPR for teachers and principal.

### Conclusions

Poughkeepsie Middle School has extremely low student performance on State Assessments and is identified as a Priority School in the State Accountability System. Almost all the students live in extreme poverty (94%). The school has inadequate resources and staff is inadequately prepared to effectively meet the many needs and challenges of the students they serve. The new principal is dedicated and hard working but is overwhelmed trying to meet the challenges with limited resources.

### Recommendations

- Assign a leadership coach to support and develop the new principal in meeting the challenges of leading and improving student achievement in an urban school. She has the passion and the work ethic to be successful in the role of school based leader if properly supported.

- Provide sufficient staff to meet all of the AIS needs in Math as well as other core subjects in classes of no more than 10 students.
- A desktop computer is needed in each classroom and laptop computers or ipads available to students in each classroom. These may be provided on carts that could be shared with other classrooms as the need arises. Every classroom should have a smartboard.
  - The library media center needs to be transformed into a 21<sup>st</sup> century resource center with appropriate technology, adequate staff and space to accommodate the needs of all the students in the school.
  - All students should have access to updated textbooks and appropriate equipment for science and fine arts classes.
  - Literacy coaches should be hired to work with staff and students. It is critical to address the literacy needs of middle school students before they move to the high school level. Inadequate reading ability is one of the primary causes of failure in middle and high school.
  - Professional development on raising achievement levels of students in poverty should be provided for all staff. The middle school poverty rate as measured by free and reduced lunch counts is reported at 94%. (SRC 2011-12)
  - Professional development on effective behavior management should be provided for all staff. The suspension rate reported on the 2011-12 school report card is 33%.
  - Professional development on the Common Core Learning Standards and the new APPR should be provided for teachers and administrators.
  - Provide extra-curricular activities for students that help them connect to the school.
  - Implement extended day, extended year programs for remediation and enrichment.
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## George Clinton Elementary School Quality Review Report (SQR) (1/12)

The following are significant findings and recommendations from a recent SQR conducted by NYSED at Clinton Elementary due to its status as a school in need of improvement.

- There was little evidence that data for students with disabilities, English language learners, and economically disadvantaged subgroups have been analyzed to plan interventions.
- Professional development should be provided to all staff on differentiated instruction and research based teaching strategies.
- Teaching and learning strategies are needed to support the development of reading comprehension skills across all content areas for all students.
- Staff should be trained on the curriculum that is aligned to the CCLS ELA shifts.
- School leader should ensure that at-risk students receive adequate academic support prior to grade three.
- There is one computer lab in the school. There are a limited number of desktop computers (one to three) in classrooms.
- There is limited access to updated technology and resources in classrooms across all grade levels and content areas.
- There is a need for more computers and handheld devices in classrooms.

In addition to the recommendations in the SQR report, in my professional judgment, the school also needs the following:

- Two full time literacy and math coaches to work on improving basic skills for all students.
- Extensive professional development for all staff in working with students in poverty to improve achievement. There is a 97% poverty rate in the school.
- Professional development in all areas cited in the SQR.
- Adequate instructional materials and computers.

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### **Early Learning Center at W.W. Smith School**

The Early Learning Center (ELC) was opened in the 2012-13 school year to serve all pre-K and kindergarten students in the school district. It is housed in the W.W. Smith School that was previously closed due to budget cuts. I visited the ELC and spoke with the principal.

**The kindergarten program across the district was reduced from full day to half day due to budget cuts.** The principal of the ELC shared that **100 kindergarten students are “missing” due to the reduction of kindergarten to a half-day program.** Parents find it difficult to access daycare for half day.

A large body of research supports the importance of quality early childhood education to insure success in school, especially for children from poverty. Children from low-income households often come to kindergarten substantially behind children from higher-income households in early vocabulary and literacy development, in early math, and in the social skills they need to get along well in classrooms.

The importance of a quality pre-school experience is well documented in research the most extensive conducted by the Perry Preschool study, the Abecedarian study and the Chicago Child-Parent Center Study. The Poughkeepsie District is striving to provide the quality of program presented in the research so that their students enter kindergarten ready to learn. Pre-k funding has been re-directed from off-site programs to a centralized program under the direction of the school district and located at Smith Elementary, now the Early Learning Center. The reduction of the kindergarten program to only half-day however may negate the gains made in pre-K, or at least minimize them. The loss of half day of instruction in kindergarten will likely cause the students to enter first grade behind and not ready to meet the expectations of a first grade curriculum.

My observations and recommendations from my visit to the ELC are as follows:

- There is only one literacy and one math coach assigned to the school.
- Class size averages 16 in pre-K and 23 in kindergarten.
- A social worker is assigned to the school for 2 days per week.
- 15% of the students are English Language Learners (ELLs). There is not adequate staff to meet the needs of all the ELLs.

-There is no dedicated library.

-The play equipment is not age-appropriate.

-The principal feels the Pre-K program should be expanded and also a 0 to 3 year old program implemented.

### Recommendations

Hire at least one additional literacy coach and one additional math coach.

Class sizes should be reduced in all classes.

**More than 20 years of research has shown that reduced class size (15 to 18 students) is associated with increased student achievement especially in the primary grades and when students were in smaller classes for more than one year. The most influential contemporary evidence that smaller classes lead to improved achievement is Tennessee's Project Star. This project in the mid 1980s used a scientifically valid research design to determine the impact of class size on academic achievement. The most significant findings of the research were that:**

- **Students in smaller classes (13-17 students) did better than those in larger classes throughout K-3 grades**
- **Minority and inner-city children gained the most from smaller classes**
- **The more years spent in reduced classes, the longer lasting the benefits.**

**Wisconsin's SAGE Project (1999) found similar results with class size of 15 students to one teacher.**

A full time social worker needs to be assigned to the school.

Additional resources should be added (teacher, appropriate materials) to support the ELLS.

A library should be established with adequate print material and technology.

Renovate the playground to include age-appropriate equipment for young children.

The implementation of an expanded Pre-K program and a 0 to 3 year old program is essential to the large demographic living in poverty who are served by the district. The benefits of quality early childhood education are well documented in research. A randomized control study conducted by

Ramey & Ramey in 1998 showed that the IQ of children from low socio-economic status (SES) who have received intensive early education is between one-half and one full standard deviation higher than the IQ of low SES children in control groups. Early childhood education and intervention will contribute to an increased graduation rate in future years.

Provide additional professional development for all staff in effective practices for teaching pre-K and primary grade students.

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**General Recommendations for all elementary schools:**

In Poughkeepsie there are 4 elementary schools with grades 1-5 and the Early Learning Center for all Pre-K and K students. All schools would benefit from reduced class size. The average class sizes for each elementary as reported on the SRC 2011-12 are as follows:

Krieger School	26
Clinton School	22
Young School	25
Warring School	21
Early Learning Center	
Pre-K	16
Kindergarten	23

The research cited earlier in this report recommends no more than 13-17 students in a class and further stated that minority and inner-city children gained the most from the reduced class size.

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Interviews District Office

I met with the Assistant Superintendent for Business. He shared the constant need for repairs and renovations to the aging facilities and schools in the district. The current Capital project is not sufficient to meet all of the needs. He estimates that an additional \$70 million is needed to address all the identified repairs and improvements. One of the most critical needs is the repair and/or replacement of the steam heating systems in many of the buildings. Following my visit to the district a boiler failure forced the closing of one of the schools resulting in an unplanned expense and loss of instructional time for the students in the school.

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**Budget**

The Poughkeepsie District continues to be designated as a Focus District, one of the 10% lowest performing districts in the state, and the majority of its schools remain

Focus or Priority Schools and therefore subject to State review. They must submit to an Integrated Intervention Team (ITT) Review and complete a district comprehensive improvement plan and individual school improvement plans using the Diagnostic Tool required by the New York State Education Department. The district has not had the resources to implement all of the recommendations from previous reviews and has not been able to provide a sound, basic education for all of its students.

The charts below illustrate expenditures per pupil in the Poughkeepsie District compared to similar districts statewide and all districts statewide. The data shows that Poughkeepsie spends less per pupil than the average of districts statewide and less for students with disabilities (SWD), a subgroup for which they have been consistently in a negative accountability status. They spend considerably less on a greater number of SWD pupils than most regional comparison districts. In researching the challenges in an urban district like Poughkeepsie, I believe student need requires expenditures greater than the statewide average in order to provide a sound, basic education for all students.

**Poughkeepsie Expenditures per Pupil Compared to Statewide Expenditures**

**per Pupil (2011-12 school year)**

(SRC 2012-13)

	Poughkeepsie District	Similar Districts	All Districts
Expenditure per pupil Gen Ed	\$11,931	\$11,462	\$11,615
Expenditure per pupil SWD	\$28,831	\$30,069	\$30,207
Expenditure per pupil total	\$19,556	\$20,045	\$20,906

**Poughkeepsie and Comparison Group Expenditures per SWD Pupil 2011-12**

(SRC 2012-13)

	Poughkeepsie	Arlington	Red Hook	Spackenkill	Pawling	Rhinebeck	Wappingers
Expenditure per pupil SWD	\$28,831	\$26,466	\$43,581	\$32,610	\$34,350	\$34,548	\$24,103
Classification Rate	15.1%	12%	11%	10.3%	10.8%	10.2%	13.8%

**Poughkeepsie and Comparison Group Financial Data** (Cornell database)

In the chart below the combined wealth ratio (CWR) represents the index of total property wealth and total income wealth that supports each student in a school district. The **state average** index is **1.0**. Poughkeepsie's CWR is **.58** which is below the state average and significantly lower than the CWR of comparison districts in the region. The district is dependent on **state aid for approximately 64%** of its general fund budget and has a limited tax base from which to generate the remaining 36% of its budget.

	Poughkeepsie	Arlington	Red Hook	Spackenkill	Pawling	Rhinebeck	Wappingers
CWR 2013-14	.58	.897	.909	.967	1.453	1.996	1.034
Tax Rate 2013-14	\$12.54	\$20.74	\$18.45	\$22.14	\$19.30	\$14.64	\$14.62

**Poughkeepsie City School District State Aid 2010-2014**

The basic state aid to a school district is called Foundation Aid. The amount allocated to school districts had been frozen at the 2008-09 level until the enactment of the 2013-14 State Budget which provided a minimal increase to Foundation Aid. If Foundation Aid had been fully phased in as planned the Poughkeepsie School District would have cumulatively received an additional **\$64,552,342** in State Aid since 2007.

In recent years the State has reduced the budget of each school district with the Gap Elimination Adjustment (GEA) to help the State with its overall debt. The GEA has resulted in a cumulative loss of **\$16.5 million** in state aid to Poughkeepsie since the 2010-11 budget.

The GEA has impacted school districts unequally across the state favoring the wealthier districts over the poorer districts whose students have greater needs. The chart below shows an analysis of the GEA as a percent of total general fund expenditures (TGFE) and the GEA per pupil. Districts with a lower combined wealth ratio (poorer districts) have a greater GEA than wealthier districts, except for the Big 4 districts (Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, Yonkers).

The second chart compares Poughkeepsie to Dutchess County districts with a CWR of 1 or greater. The GEA per pupil in Poughkeepsie is nearly double that of the



district with the highest CWR, Rhinebeck. As shown earlier in this report, Rhinebeck also has the highest 4-year graduation rate in the region at 91%.

**GEA as Percent of Total General Fund Expenditures (TGFE) Statewide Averages** (NYS Association of Small City School Districts)

Averages	CWR 2013-14	GEA as % TGFE	Enrollment	GEA per Pupil
SCSD (57 districts)	0.71	3.39%	4,142	\$641
Non-city CWR under 1 (407 districts)	0.64	4.33%	2,042	\$853
Big 4	0.47	2.35%	29,658	\$444
NYC	1.02	2.53%	1,030,681	\$488
Non-city CWR at or over 1 (207 districts)	2.78	2.09%	2,350	\$562
State		2.99%	2,703,099	\$606

**GEA as Percent of TGFE Poughkeepsie Compared to Dutchess County Districts with a CWR of 1 or Greater** (NYS Association of Small City School Districts)

District	CWR 2013-14	GEA as % TGFE	Enrollment	GEA per Pupil
Poughkeepsie	0.58	3.32%	4,350	\$621.30
Pawling	1.453	1.45%	1,305	\$396.76
Rhinebeck	1.996	1.49%	1,130	\$372.50
Wappingers	1.034	3.54%	11,962	\$578.33
State		2.99%	2,703,099	\$606

The enacted State Budget for 2013-14 includes a partial restoration of the GEA as illustrated in the chart below. After applying the \$1.4 million restoration figure Poughkeepsie still loses **\$2.7 million** in state aid for the 2013-14 budget.

District	Found. Aid 12-13	Found. Aid 13-14	GEA 11-12	GEA 12-13	GEA 13-14	GEA Restore 13-14	Adj. GEA 13-14
Poughkeepsie	\$47.8 million	\$47.9 million	\$5.2 million	\$4.1 million	\$4.1 million	\$1.4 million	\$2.7 million

In addition to flat state aid and the GEA, a tax levy limit was enacted for the 2012-13 budget year. Under the tax levy limit Poughkeepsie raised its tax levy by only 2% for the 2012-13 school year and is proposing a 2.99% levy for the 2013-14 budget. Poughkeepsie's allowable levy increase for 2013-14 is 4.96%, however the district is not proposing the larger levy due to the difficult economic conditions in the community.

The historic underfunding of state aid to the Poughkeepsie District, the application of a gap elimination adjustment for the past three years, and the implementation of a tax cap in 2012, have resulted in the following significant budget deficits and cuts to staff and programs: (Interviews Poughkeepsie City School District staff)

#### Significant Budget Deficit and Cuts 2012-13

- \$2.8 million budget deficit
- Move all Pre-K and Kindergarten students to one location as an early learning center (ELC) in a school previously closed due to budget cuts.
- Close an elementary school, relocating kindergarten to the ELC and other grades to remaining 4 elementary schools.
- Cut .5 teacher at high school
- Cut 2 clerical positions
- Shift salary for high school assistant principal from general fund to grant funding.

#### Significant Budget Deficit and Cuts 2013-14

- \$2.8 million budget deficit
- \$2 million from reserves applied to budget
- cut 3 secondary teaching positions
- cut 2 clerical positions
- Eliminate Director of Pre School Special Education position
- Cut \$50,000 from extra-curricular activities
- Reduced equipment and supplies allocation
- Restructure Pupil Personnel Services moving 28 special education students from BOCES and private programs into district program

#### Significant Cuts Prior to 2012

- Reduction of kindergarten to half day program
- Elimination of alternative education high school program
- Reduction in extra-curricular activities and sports programs

**Poughkeepsie District has eliminated 115 staff positions in the last three years due to budget issues.**

## **Recommendations & Conclusions**

Like many small city school districts Poughkeepsie has used grant funding to make up for lost state aid and to meet critical needs of the district. The problem is grant funding is that it is one time or non-recurring money used to meet long-term needs. When the grant ends it is unlikely there will be general fund money to continue the staffing, programs, or other interventions supported by the grant. The district, like the population it serves, will be challenged to break the cycle of poverty it operates within.

**Extreme poverty is one of the greatest overall challenges for the Poughkeepsie District.** Success in educating students in poverty requires not only adequate resources but additional resources beyond those needed in schools serving middle and upper class families and their students. One of the most successful interventions to help children in poverty succeed in school is access to a quality early education program. The district has attempted to provide this with the implementation of an ELC. Insufficient funding however required a reduction in kindergarten to a half-day program.

The community wants a return to full day kindergarten, the district has this as a priority, research supports quality early childhood education, but there is not enough money in the budget to support a full day program. The district is seeking a grant to expand Pre-K to full day. If they receive the grant and expand the Pre-K program what will happen when students return to only half day of school in kindergarten? There is no grant at this time to fund full day kindergarten. General fund money must be used for this.

Based on my observations, interviews with district staff, NYSED reviews and educational research some of the most critical needs of the district are:

**Implement full day kindergarten**

**Reduce class size Pre-K – 12**

**Establish an alternative program for secondary students**

**Provide adequate supplies, materials and technology**

**Provide professional development for all staff in effective instructional practices and behavior management for working with students in poverty, students with disabilities and English language learners.**

Poughkeepsie needs adequate state aid funding to implement these critical needs if they are to provide the sound, basic education guaranteed for all students by the New York State Constitution.

Peggy J. Wozniak, Ed.D.  
Professional Judgment Panel Member

Note: The information, recommendations and conclusions expressed in this report are not the opinion of the New York State Education Department

## **Frequently Used Acronyms**

**CWR** = combined wealth ratio

**ED** = economically disadvantaged

**ELL** = English language learner

**ESEA** = Elementary and Secondary Education Act

**ESL** = English as a second language

**GEA** = Gap Elimination Adjustment

**LEP** = Limited English Proficient

**NCLB** = No Child Left Behind

**NYSED** = New York State Education Department

**SWD** = Students with Disabilities

**SQR** = School Quality Review

**TGFE** = Total General Fund expenditures

I hereby affirm that the foregoing report is true and accurate to the best of my knowledge.

Peggy J. Wozniak

Peggy J. Wozniak

Sworn to and subscribed before me on this  
18 day of December 2014

Jihan Abdulla  
Notary Public

