



Dr. Juliette Pennyman, Superintendent of Schools

### **For Immediate Release**

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## **MHA of Columbia Greene Awarded \$5.5 Million to Expand Afterschool Program with Hudson City School District**

*Grant Will Strengthen Curriculum for Kindergarten Through Grade 8*

**HUDSON, N.Y., July 1, 2024** – MHA of Columbia Greene (MHACG) has been awarded a \$5.5 million grant to expand and advance afterschool programming with the Hudson City School District.

The Learning and Enrichment Afterschool Program Supports (LEAPS) grant, from New York State’s Office of Children and Family Services, covers 2024 through 2029, according to school district Superintendent Dr. Juliette Pennyman. It provides \$550,000 each year for the afterschool program at Montgomery C. Smith Elementary School, serving grades kindergarten through five. It also provides \$550,000 each year for the afterschool program at Hudson Junior High School, serving grades six through eight.

MHA of Columbia Greene’s mission is to advance mental health as a critical part of the overall health and well-being of its communities. Providing these essential services to enrich opportunities, socialization, and learning for the youth in our community is a critical component. Since 2004, MHACG has provided afterschool program assistance to countless families and this historic grant will pave the way for advancing youth access and resources.

“Afterschool provides additional learning, play, and enrichment while giving students a safe place to go,” said David Rossetti, LCSW-R, Executive Director for MHACG. “With all that has happened in the past few years, socialization and positive engagement opportunities for youth in afterschool programs have never been more crucial for well-being. We are immensely grateful to partner with the talented educators of the Hudson City School District for this important program.”

The Learning and Enrichment Afterschool Program incorporates academics, cultural and recreational components, conflict resolution/violence prevention, student-leadership development, drug prevention, social awareness and more. The grant was awarded to MHACG, who partnered with the Hudson City School District on the application.

“This historic grant will robustly advance learning opportunities for students, while assisting families by providing a safe, secure educational environment for students after classes end each day,” Dr. Pennyman said. “These benefits are absolutely essential to a child’s maturation. We are grateful to New York State for this important investment and are excited to partner with the dynamic, dedicated team at MHA of Columbia Greene.”

MHACG will use the money within the Hudson City School District to provide students with access and opportunities to engage in meaningful learning enrichment activities, while prioritizing students’ social-emotional wellness and mitigating the impacts from COVID-19. The grant also will result in additional staff, curriculum updates, securing new equipment/technology and will help defray current costs. Overall, the program will eventually serve up to 200 students.

MHACG provides opportunities for learning, socialization, and growth through activities with arts & crafts, nutrition classes, theater, sports, STEM Camp, community service, and even field trips to museums, the Bronx Zoo, and more. These funds play a critical role in providing these students with these impactful learning and growth activities, and ultimately help create positive mental health and well-being.

The Hudson City School District has prioritized applying for grants to ease the financial burden on taxpayers. The district also has been awarded nearly \$3 million this school year from New York State to support safe, healthy learning environments for students and expand pre-kindergarten. The district also joined Verizon Innovative Learning, which – at no cost to the district – provides Chromebooks, enhanced internet and technology coaches to Hudson Junior and Senior High Schools to leverage technology as a teaching tool. The district’s largest previous grant award was \$840,000 from New York State, for 21st Century community learning.

Afterschool programs support students’ growth and learning, according to a report posted on the National Institutes of Health website. Benefits include gains in standardized test scores, grades and work habits due to increased engagement during regular classes, improved attendance, higher motivation and good behavior. Programs also keep students active and involved via access to enrichment activities that stimulate learning and build character. In addition, programs ease child-care needs for parents and decrease the number of missed days of work.

“The Hudson City School District is committed to continually innovating to implement dynamic new approaches that brighten futures for our students,” Dr. Pennyman said. “We’re confident that our teamwork with MHA of Columbia Greene will do just that.”