

'Moga' the way for Myers students

"Namaste" is a deeply respectful greeting in many Eastern religions and philosophies.

It's also a word well-known by students in Cindy Clo's special-needs classroom at Stephen and Harriet Myers Middle School.

Clo's students know about namaste because twice a month, for about an hour, they push their desks to the classroom perimeter and take part in "moga."

Moga, the brainchild of Clo and instructor Peg Clark of Whispering Willow Yoga, morphs together meditation exercises that focus the attention (mindfulness), slow and deliberate exercises (movement), and poses and stretching (yoga).

Clo's 10 students, who have varying degrees of disability, fully take part in moga. They love it, and she has observed improvement in their social skills, balance, focus and ability to follow directions.

"They're open and ready to learn," Clo said.

Led by Clark, who also is an occupational therapist, Clo and her students proceed through a series of exercises in mindfulness, movement and yoga.

"I really push them to be independent," Clo said. "I will help and support them, but they're motivated to do it on their own."

Several City School District of Albany schools, including Myers, do mindfulness exercises twice a day throughout the building. A handful of individual teachers also do yoga and relaxation exercises in their classrooms.



Teacher Cindy Clo, sixth-grader Ti Nah, center, and eighth-grader Louis O'Hare-Pham perform "moga" – mindfulness, movement and yoga – in their classroom at Stephen and Harriet Myers Middle School.

Clo initiated moga in her classroom during the 2015-16 school year. This year, Clark also is working with Special Education teachers and staff at Montessori Magnet School to implement moga there for students with autism spectrum disorder.

Research exists on the positive effects yoga, mindfulness and movement each have on student learning, Clo said. But there's no solid data yet on a combination of all of them. Clo, who sees first-hand the benefits of moga for her students, intends to collect and provide that data.

"You can incorporate moga into all subjects," she said. "It really gets to the whole child. It increases their language skills. They start talking to each other and other people in the classroom. They know they're loved, and that can take them anywhere."

A recent moga class drew to a close with students bowing and saying "namaste" to each other. The word and moment were particularly significant for one mostly non-verbal student: "Namaste" was the first word he ever spoke to his classmates.

Student achievement

About face!

JROTC motivates junior's impressive turnaround

Emmanuel Tay failed four subjects as a freshman at Albany High. He almost failed gym.

Fast-forward 15 months.

Tay is well on his way to making honor roll for a third consecutive semester this fall. He is looking ahead to the possibility of a commission to either the U.S. Military Academy at West Point or the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis.

The turning point for Tay?

JROTC.

Tay was one of the first students in Albany High's fledgling Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps program as a freshman in 2014-15. But he was a lot more interested in the program than in his classes – until he realized he couldn't have one without the other.

"Once I joined JROTC, I felt like I had more to offer," Tay said. "I set higher standards for myself and stepped up my game."

JROTC instructors retired Army Major Dave Erickson and retired First Sergeant Dennis Palow helped guide Tay from struggling student to poised leader.

As a member of Albany High's Color Guard, Tay learned he had to show up on time to the daily 7:15 a.m. practice or face being kicked off the team. Palow in particular drilled the idea into Tay's head that being a leader means acting like one.

The camaraderie Tay built with his fellow cadets also inspired him.

"Those are my brothers and sisters out there, and we all depend on each other," he said. "I take this seriously."

Erickson and Palow noted Tay's potential early on.

After he proved he was serious with better grades in summer school after his freshman year, they selected him to



Albany High School junior Emmanuel Tay: JROTC cadet on the rise

attend the 2015 Junior Cadet Leadership Challenge, a summer camp usually reserved for older JROTC students.

The 400-plus cadets at the camp come from high schools around the Northeast with well-established programs. Even though Tay had been involved in JROTC for less than a year, he still was his platoon's honor graduate that first summer.

He returned to the camp this summer, one of a dozen Albany High cadets to attend. Tay again was his platoon's honor graduate (Albany High cadets took home four trophies this year).

Tay currently holds the highest rank a junior can earn in JROTC – command sergeant major. His ambition at first was to become a Navy SEAL, but his experience in JROTC is leading him to keep an open mind about his options, including the Army's prestigious service academy just down the Hudson River.

Besides his extraordinary leadership skills, Tay is a good boxer. He spars at the Albany Boxing Gym on Quail Street, where he's been a fixture since middle school.

Turns out the boxing coach there is a friend of the boxing coach at West Point.

"If I could get into one of the academies, that would be the best decision I could make," he said.

Jan. 10 vote planned for middle-school renovation

Project would have no tax impact, address enrollment growth

Faced with growing enrollment and urgent space needs for the 2017-18 school year, the City School District of Albany Board of Education has approved a \$6.5 million facilities referendum that would convert an existing district building to a middle school.

The vote on renovations to 50 North Lark St., will be Tuesday, Jan. 10. **If approved, the work would have no impact on taxes.**

The renovations would be paid for with \$1.3 million from the district's Capital Reserve Fund and \$5.2 million in state aid. The building currently is home to the district's Alternative Learning Center, which would be relocated.

Beginning in September 2017, the middle school at 50 North Lark would be enrolled on an interim basis for 3-5

years while the district plans for its long-term, permanent middle-school facilities and enrollment needs.

The district's Grade Configuration Steering Committee is expected to make recommendations to the board for those plans next spring (*see related story, page 3*).

The temporary enrollment for 50 North Lark would be students from:

- Arbor Hill Elementary School
- North Albany Academy
- Schuyler Achievement Academy
- Sheridan Preparatory Academy
- West Hill Middle School

Please visit www.albanyschools.org and for updates

on community meetings and school tours in advance of the Jan. 10 vote.

Benefits for students and families

Interim Superintendent Kimberly Young Wilkins, Ed.D., has stressed that the district is prepared to invest in programs and supports for all students at 50 North Lark that are equal to – and in some cases based on students' needs, more comprehensive than – those at William S. Hackett and Stephen and Harriet Myers middle schools.

The board already has determined that the district's long-term plan for middle school includes all students in grades 6-8. This interim plan would be a step in that direction.

(continued on page 3)

From the interim superintendent Planning for our future



Kimberly Young Wilkins, Ed.D.
Interim superintendent

Our enrollment is booming, which is good news. However, it means we have to make more room for middle-school students by next September.

That's why the City School District of Albany has a plan to open a third middle school in 2017-18. That school will have a temporary (3-5 year) enrollment pattern pending long-term enrollment recommendations from the Grade Configuration Steering Committee (see related story, page 3).

The \$6.5 million proposal would not affect tax bills of homeowners or businesses because the funds will come from a combination of state aid and the district's Capital Reserve Fund, a savings account for long-term building projects (see related story, page 1).

On Jan. 10, voters will have the opportunity to weigh in on that plan, the first step of a long-term strategy to accommodate our growing population.

The newest middle school would be located at 50 North Lark St., the former home of New Covenant Charter School and current location of the district's Alternative Learning Center. The district purchased the now-closed charter school in 2012 with voter approval and an eye toward using it to accommodate the district's increasing enrollment.

If the Jan. 10 referendum is approved, dollars will go toward renovating classrooms so they can accommodate middle-school students.

Our need for another middle-school building is evident. The number of students in grades 6-8 has increased by about 360 since 2011, and we anticipate there will be 425 more middle-school students by September 2025. There is simply not enough space in the district's existing middle-school buildings to accommodate that growth.

The Board of Education approved an enrollment plan for the newest middle school that calls for students from four elementary schools to attend the school: Arbor Hill Elementary School, North Albany Academy, Philip Schuyler Achievement Academy and Sheridan Preparatory Academy.

Also attending the newest middle school would be the remaining students at West Hill Middle School, a temporary school opened in 2015 to accommodate the closing of two charter middle schools. That building was not an option for the third school; the district rents it and the lease is up at the end of June.

The enrollment pattern for the new school is temporary and will be in place 3-5 years. In the meantime, over the next 10 months the Grade Configuration Steering Committee will consider and recommend a long-term permanent enrollment plan where all elementary schools would serve students from prekindergarten-grade 5 and all middle schools would serve students in grades 6-8.

The middle school at 50 North Lark will be part of a long-term facilities investment that meets an immediate need. The time is now to invest in a facility that would provide equitable programs and services for the students who will attend it, and we are fortunate that we can create such a facility without raising taxes in Albany.

Kimberly Young Wilkins



**CAPITAL
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Voices

Q: If you could make one rule that everyone in the world had to follow, what would it be and why?



The world should take a power nap each day to improve alertness, mood and performance. Taking a nap reduces the risk of heart disease and makes you more productive. Humans are among the few animals that take their sleep in one shot. The rest of the animal kingdom cycles through sleep in one 24-hour period. You should take a 10-20 minute power nap to give you the best result.

— Tishawn Austin, senior
Albany High School



If I could make one rule the whole world would follow, it would be "think before you speak." This should be a rule because I see many kids upset because of what people say to them instead of what they do to them. Adults and kids know they are more likely to get away with using words to hurt people than using actions. If my rule was followed people would be less likely to say anything hurtful. I know many people already follow this rule, but some don't, including presidential candidates.

— Anna Baldes, fourth grade
Albany School of Humanities (ASH)



Don't you wish you could do something, make a rule everyone has to follow? Not like a law people can break, but a rule that everyone world-wide cannot physically break. What would it be? I feel the rule should be "You must be kind to every human on earth!" Think how much better the earth would be. Humans not only would help other humans, but it probably would lead to less animal abuse also as it would show that violence is not tolerated. One more question: "Would you rather live in that world or this one?"

— Alison Powell, seventh grade
William S. Hackett Middle School



If I could make one rule that everyone had to follow it would be to take care of each other. Fathers would stick around to show their sons how a woman is treated. Our mothers would stay to show ladies of the future to be independent and strong. Our families would stay together and get stronger. Fights happen; we would try to see compromise and grow for our country with peace and love.

— Coralys Henriquez, senior
Albany High School



Could you imagine if you could create one rule that everyone had to follow? Well, if I had to make one rule it would be that everyone had to be treated equally. There are many reasons why. Here's one reason: people wouldn't be judged by their race, how they dressed and how much money they had. There would be fewer problems in the world like bullying and fighting. Everybody has to have equal opportunities with everything. Every race can do any sport and any job. Wouldn't you like living in this world with this rule?

— Rebeca Navedo, fifth grade
Delaware Community School



The only rule everyone in the world should have to follow is that they respect each other. Even if a person doesn't like you or you are from another religion, race or country, all of these things don't matter. People should respect you and you should respect them. The only thing that matters is respect.

— Wamedh Othman, fifth grade
Philip Schuyler Achievement Academy



If I could make one rule that everyone in the world had to follow, it would be everyone should have more time for recess — adults, too! I chose this rule because recess is a time when we get to see all of our friends and play games with them, like soccer, basketball and tag. Everyone comes back from recess feeling happy they went outside, but ready to go back in and get things done. If adults had recess, they would be happier because they would get a nice built-in break in the day. Breaks help everyone to refocus and come back all charged up. Recess for all!

— Joseph Rizzo, fifth grade
Eagle Point Elementary School



If I could make one rule that everyone in the world had to follow, the rule would be that no one would live without money. The reason I chose this is because if everyone had money, I would not have to see people on the streets hungry and homeless. Another reason I chose that rule is because it bothers me to see other people making fun of people who are misfortunate.

— Supreme Fitzgerald, seventh grade
Stephen and Harriet Myers Middle School

At a glance: William S. Hackett Middle School

Principal: Michael Paolino | **Grades:** 6-8 | **Address:** 145 Delaware Avenue

Built in 1926 and named after Albany's 67th mayor, William S. Hackett Middle School underwent a complete renovation that was completed for the start of the 2008-09 school year. Ceramic tiles and windows in the school's magnificent foyer all were restored to their original glory, and every floor and wing was overhauled and updated with state-of-the-art technology. The project also included a magnificent makeover for the auditorium.

Students: 625 | **Teachers:** 80 | **Total employees:** 100

Points of distinction:

- Highest 2016 state test scores in Albany in math and English for sixth-graders
- Extra English and math instruction for all students
- Special program for English-language learners featuring a core subject teacher and an English as a New Language teacher
- Unique program uses data to pinpoint specific areas of English and/or math a student may struggle with, and tailors help to meet that need
- Before-school programs starting at 7:30 a.m.
- After-school tutoring
- Expanded extended-day programs from 3-5:30 p.m.

Programs and partners:

- Albany Community Afterschool Network (ACAN)
- Athletics: baseball, basketball, cross country, football, lacrosse, soccer, softball, volleyball, track, wrestling
- Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Capital Region
- Capital Area School Development Association
- Catholic Charities
- Clubs: Chess, Cooking, ESL, Journalism, Karate/Kung Fu, Math, Robotics, Step Team, Tennis, Yearbook
- The College of Saint Rose
- Cooking Club

- Girls Inc. of the Greater Capital Region
- eba Inc.
- In Our Own Voices
- Music: Albany Marching Falcons, Band, Chorus, Jazz Band, Orchestra
- National Coalition Building Institute
- Park Playhouse KIDZ
- Parsons Child and Family Center
- Police Athletic League (PAL)
- PTA
- School Climate and Culture Committee
- Science and Technology Entry Program
- Siena College
- University at Albany

What makes our school special?

We celebrate the strength of our diversity and foster a learning community based upon mutual respect and supportive relationships to achieve our full potential as leaders, learners and citizens.

Did you know?

Hackett originally was built as a junior high school, one of the first in the United States, serving grades 7-9. It was changed to a middle school for grade 7 and 8 in 1974 and grade 6 was added in 2000.

Seven join Hall of Fame

A *Fortune* 500 executive, a TV meteorologist and a principal of the former Street Academy were among the seven new members inducted into the City School District of Albany Hall of Fame on Sept. 16.

The members of the Class of 2016 were inducted in conjunction with Homecoming weekend. This year's inductees follow.

• The late **Robert Brown**, *Albany High School Class of 1966* – An accomplished lawyer and politician, Brown served as counsel to the government committee that recommended the impeachment of President Richard Nixon. Brown was the first African-American mayor of Orange, N.J., and also served in the New Jersey State Legislature until his death in 2009.

• **Fred Daniels**, *Albany High School Class of 1977* – Daniels played varsity basketball all four years at Albany High, leading the team in assists, steals and triple-doubles. He made local and state all-star teams as a sophomore, junior and senior before going on to play at Siena College. After his Siena graduation, he became a successful executive at several *Fortune* 500 companies. Daniels currently is vice president of distribution at Dollar General – No. 139 on the *Fortune* list.

• **Jason Gough**, *Albany High School Class of 1988* – As a meteorologist for WNYT/Channel 13, Gough's face is familiar to anyone who watches television or cares about the weather. Gough also donates his time to several charities and causes in the Capital Region, including the Spina-Bifida Association of Northeastern New York and the American Cancer Society.

• The late **Norman McConney Jr.**, *Albany High School Class of 1965* – McConney was the longtime chief of staff for Assemblyman Arthur Eve of Buffalo, deputy speaker of the State Assembly. McConney helped create SUNY's Educational Opportunities Program and the state

Association of Black and Puerto Rican Legislators. Throughout his career he was a staunch advocate of programs to benefit disadvantaged students.

• **Bernie Mulligan**, *longtime Albany booster* – Mulligan has been – and continues to be – a passionate supporter of the City School District of Albany and Albany High School athletics. As a parent-advocate in the 1990s and early 2000s, Mulligan played a critical role in helping pass three bond votes that led to the rebuilding or renovation of elementary and middle schools throughout the district, bringing equitable school facilities to all neighborhoods.

• **Frank Owens**, *Philip Schuyler High School Class of 1967* – Owens lettered in three sports at Schuyler. He went on to play semi-pro football with the Albany Wolverines and the Metro Mallers. He also was a physical education teacher at Giffen Memorial Elementary School and Albany High. He served as director of health and physical education from 1986-2006.

• **Lillian Tillman-DeWitt**, *retired principal of the former Street Academy* – Tillman-DeWitt taught from 1955-57 at the former School 1 and School 6. She returned to the district in 1966 as an elementary teacher and became a resource-room teacher at Arbor Hill Elementary School in 1973. She was appointed principal of the former Street Academy in 1979 and was its principal until her 1991 retirement.

Visit www.albanyschools.org for a complete bio of each Hall-of-Famer.

The Hall of Fame was established in 2009 to recognize accomplished graduates, exceptional district staff people and community leaders that have supported our schools. Each year, new Hall of Famers are inducted after being nominated by the public and selected by a committee of district staff and community members.



The newest members of the City School District Hall of Fame were inducted Sept. 16 at a special ceremony. Front row from left: Cathleen McConney (accepting the award for her late husband Norman McConney Jr.), Lillian Tillman-DeWitt and Frank Owens. Second row from left: Bernie Mulligan, Fred Daniels and Jason Gough.

Vote planned for middle-school renovation

(continued from page 1)

Currently, about half of the district's sixth-graders attend middle school and about half attend elementary school.

However, sixth-graders in elementary schools, and students in grades 6-8 at North Albany, have 30 minutes less school each day than students in middle school. That equates to more than two weeks less of school every year.

The students at 50 North Lark would be on the full middle-school schedule.

The board also has made a change for 2017-18 to address overcrowding at Pine Hills Elementary School. Pine Hills students now will attend Myers beginning in sixth grade and Pine Hills will serve

students only through fifth grade.

Planning to meet future needs

While the proposed renovations for 50 North Lark are for a middle school that will be enrolled on an interim basis for 3-5 years, the renovated building is central to the district's long-term planning.

As examples, 50 North Lark could continue as a permanent middle school with a revised feeder pattern, as the permanent home for alternative education or as the home for a newcomer program that would serve the rapidly growing refugee and English as a New Language (ENL) population.

Albany High lottery applications available

Applications are available now for the lottery to determine placement in Albany High School's four academies for the 2017-18 school year.

Each of Albany High's academies has its own unique theme: Citizenship, Discovery, Leadership and Innovation. These physically smaller learning environments are designed to help students feel connected, involved and engaged.

The deadline to submit applications is Nov. 14. The lottery will be held Dec. 8 at Albany High.

The Albany High lottery is open to all incoming freshmen and new students, as well as to current Albany High students wishing to change academies for next school year. Students need to submit a lottery application to increase their chances of entering the academy of their choice.

New this year, the lottery will include caps to help balance enrollment across the four academies.

For each academy, the lottery will randomly select 175 students who listed that academy as their first choice on the application. Remaining seats available in that academy then will be randomly filled with students who selected it as their second, third or fourth choice.

For all eighth-graders in the district's four middle-school programs, guidance counselors will meet with students to help complete the application and academy selections. Students then will be asked to bring the application home for review with their parents or guardians, and return the signed application to school in advance of the Nov. 14 deadline.

Applications will be mailed to Albany families whose children currently attend eighth grade in private, parochial or charter schools

You also can download an application at www.albanyschools.org or pick up one at Central Registration, located at 75 Watervliet Ave.

Diverse committee explores enrollment options

While the City School District of Albany is preparing for a Jan. 10 vote on a tax-free renovation project to create a temporary middle school, a committee of parents, staff and community members is at work on permanent, long-term facilities and enrollment recommendations.

The Phase 2 Grade Configuration Steering Committee picked up this September where its Phase 1 predecessor left off in June.

The Phase 1 committee spent a year studying a variety of enrollment scenarios for elementary and middle-school students. It ultimately recommended to the Board of Education that:

- All elementary schools should serve students from prekindergarten-grade 5;
- All middle schools should serve students from grades 6-8;
- Equity is a priority; and
- Another middle school needs to be open by September 2017 to accommodate growing student population, and that school should be located at 50 North Lark St. (see related story, page 1). That school will have an interim enrollment pattern

for 3-5 years while the Phase 2 committee works on long-term recommendations.

The board agreed.

The Phase 2 work is focused on two main areas:

- Long-term facilities needs to serve the district's growing elementary and middle-school student population; and
- Enrollment patterns for the middle schools – which elementary schools will feed into which middle schools once the permanent structure is in place in 3-5 years.

The committee is expected to make its recommendations to the board in late spring. The board will study those recommendations before approving a long-term plan for elementary and middle-school enrollment.

Numerous opportunities for family and community input and feedback will be part of the process.

Visit the Grade Configuration section at www.albanyschools.org for more information and a schedule of Phase 2 meetings and board meetings, all of which are open to the public.

WE CHOOSE



These Montessori Magnet School students waited for the fun to start in physical education class on Sept. 9. From left, they are prekindergartener Reese Sobylak, kindergarteners Reuben Rosenthal, Noah Hamilton and Nah-Rhian Hoke and prekindergartener Julian Somarriba.



These Arbor Hill Elementary School prekindergarteners couldn't contain their excitement about their first day of school on Sept. 6! From left, they are Sky'Lynn Traynham, Justice Beals and Ejoleeze Sturdivant.



The Falcon's Nest – Albany High School's student cheering section – came out in full force at Homecoming 2016 on Sept. 17. Despite the great school pride vibe and outstanding running by senior Ky'ere Tillery, the varsity football team fell to undefeated Guilderland 41-24.



Students, staff and families at Eagle Point Elementary School celebrated the start of the 2016-17 year on Sept. 9 with their Welcome Back Barbecue. The event also gave third-grader Edward J. (also known as EJ) Verhoff an opportunity to show off his extreme flexibility.



Students in Regina Butler's second-grade class at Albany School of Humanities (ASH) patiently waited for their teacher to read a story on Sept. 9, the fourth day of school. From left, they are second-graders Romario Wright, Adam Rouse, Jonathan Zabaleta, Madison Plesser and Christina Williams.



Members of the Albany High School girls' varsity swim team were jubilant on Sept. 28 after defeating Schenectady 95-79. Falcon swimmers took first place in nine out of 12 events! From left are Elysse Bennett, Sarha Smith-Moyo, Andrea Aube, Betsy O'Toole and Barbara Delaney.



Students in Susan Fowler's second-grade class at Delaware Community School on Oct. 7 sang a welcome song to an international visitor to their school. From left, the students are Trista Rivera, Sedra Alothman, James Scott, Ble Bay and Hla Win.



Several hundred Falcons turned out on Sept. 25 to take part in the annual Falcon 5K and Fun Run in Albany's Washington Park. Racers above included members of the Albany High School JV soccer team and their manager, Naomi Simcoe. From left, they are Yonatan Eligberg, Nick Hillengas, Paul Criscione, Simcoe, Will Bulmer, Mike Gallagher, Jonathan Masih, Francis Hung Mang, Lucas Young and Afeer Masih.



West Hill Middle School seventh-graders Empress Shabazz Bey-El, left, and Lashowna Brown returned from summer full of smiles and ready to start the new school year off right.



Mastering the art of the combination locker is a rite of passage in middle school, and this sixth-grader at Stephen and Harriet Myers Middle School got a little help with his on the first day of school, Sept. 6.



The Carmon family arrived at New Scotland Elementary School on Sept. 6 looking quite spiffy in their back-to-school finery. They are, from left, second-grader Corey, fifth-grader C'Ionna and second-grader Ca'Dre.



Albany High School social-studies teacher Leah Evans, right, welcomed junior Kevina Burgess back to school on Sept. 7.

ALBANY SCHOOLS



Pine Hills Elementary School welcomed families to the 2016-17 school year with a Leadership Barbecue on Sept. 8. Enjoying the fare, from left, are second-graders Jusahd Thompson and Emmett MacCallum, Emmett's mother Elizabeth and little brother George and second-grader Thandise Pieterse.



Giffen Memorial Elementary School ended the first week of the school year with the annual PTA Parade on Sept. 9. Students, staff, parents, guardians and community members marched around the school on a hot afternoon to urge family members to join the PTA. From left, Giffen boosters are Joseph Texidor, Misbar Sharif, Amari Stubbs, Ah Ri Yar and Prince Crawford.



Philip Schuyler Achievement Academy kindergartener My'Liana Threatt showed up for the first day of school on Sept. 6 ready for anything, including the possibility of showers.



Basheer Othman, Lamin Sheriff and Braylon Richardson, all kindergarteners at Thomas O'Brien Academy of Science and Technology (TOAST), were excited for their school day to start on Sept. 8.



Sheridan Preparatory Academy held a Back-to-School Blast and Fall Open House on Sept. 15 that allowed parents to meet their children's teachers and gave the kids a chance to have some fun. First-grader Da'Lante Conner remained perfectly still while he received an elaborate face-painting.



Recess at Sheridan Preparatory Academy will be a lot more fun thanks to a new playground built on Oct. 8 with help from a grant and the community.

Volunteers breathe new life into Sheridan Prep playground

Already a favorite activity among children, recess for students at Sheridan Preparatory Academy just became even more exciting.

About 60 volunteers from the school and community came together Oct. 7-8 to build a new playground. Sheridan Prep's previous playground equipment, put in place when the school opened in 2004, was inadequate to serve the school's nearly 450 students, especially the older students.

Knowing that her students deserved better, and understanding the important role active play has in a child's development, Principal Zuleika Sanchez-Gayle launched the fundraising efforts for the project two years ago.

With assistance from school staff and volunteers from the First Unitarian Universalist Society of Albany (Albany UU), Sheridan Prep raised \$50,000 of its \$60,000 goal for the project. The school has a Red Basket fundraising site to help raise the remaining \$10,000 – <https://redbasket.org/1074>. Those funds will be used to add on a final apparatus.

The Albany UU congregation raised more than \$16,000 toward the project. Support for the project also included a

\$15,000 Let's Play Community Construction Grant from Dr Pepper Snapple Group and national non-profit KaBOOM!

Let's Play is an initiative by Dr Pepper Snapple Group to provide kids and families with the tools, places and inspiration to make active play a daily priority. A Let's Play grant helped bring a new playground to Giffen Memorial Elementary School in 2012.

Other donors included the Albany Fund for Education, Creighton Manning Engineering LLP, Stewart's Holiday Matching Fund, Price Chopper's Golub Foundation, Regeneron Pharmaceuticals Matching Fund, Albany Junior League, Whitney Young Health and Chipotle Mexican Grill.

Sheridan Prep's students also took an active role in making the project happen. One group of students raised \$200 selling lemonade in the community, while others collected another \$200 in loose change.

Far more important than the money they raised were the lessons they learned in doing so, Sanchez-Gayle said.

"Although the dollar amount might be small, the fact that they are a part of beautifying and improving their school is profound," she said.



Christhyl Tabanao, center right, was one of 25 exceptional students recognized at an Oct. 4 reception by Interim Superintendent Kimberly Young Wilkins, Ed.D. (second row, center) and Assistant Superintendent for Instruction Lori McKenna (far left). On hand for the celebration were Christhyl's mom, Retchie, dad, Royman and brothers Christoff (left) and Christian.

District lauds great students

The 25 outstanding students who appear in the City School District of Albany's annual calendar were recognized Oct. 4 at a special reception in Academy Park.

The calendar features students who stand out in a variety of ways. Some excel in academics, sports, fine arts, visual arts or performing arts. Others are actively involved in community service.

The students were chosen last spring by their principal to represent their school in the calendar. The students are as follows:

Albany High School

- Eileen Fahy Bequette
- Gail Cabahug
- Michael Campbell
- Noah John
- Griffin Lilly
- Zylia Montes
- Christian Welch

Albany School of Humanities (ASH)

- Nicholas Caesar

Arbor Hill Elementary School

- Desjare Shannon

Delaware Community School

- Richeylee Santana

Eagle Point Elementary School

- Angelina Cipollo

Giffen Memorial Elementary School

- Tra'vontay Speight

Montessori Magnet School

- Jackson Mackenzie

New Scotland Elementary School

- Caroline Hilts

North Albany Academy

- Jayden Henry (elementary school)
- Tyiesha Cintron (middle school)

Philip Schuyler Achievement Academy

- Azera Gates

Pine Hills Elementary School

- Luyanda Pieterse

Sheridan Preparatory Academy

- Luis Colon

Stephen and Harriet Myers Middle School

- Supreme Fitzgerald
- Queen Muhimpundu

Thomas O'Brien Academy of Science and Technology (TOAST)

- Christhyl Tabanao

West Hill Middle School

- Naahayah Williams

William S. Hackett Middle School

- Olivia Henry
- Michael McNeil

Visit www.albanyschools.org to learn about what makes each student exceptional. Congratulations to all of them!

Pine Hills students the face of statewide attendance campaign

State Education Commissioner Mary-Ellen Elia and City School District of Albany Interim Superintendent Kimberly Young Wilkins, Ed.D., were the headliners, but Pine Hills Elementary School students stole the show as the New York Council on Children and Families unveiled its statewide attendance campaign, "Every Student Present."

Every Student Present focuses on helping schools and families address chronic absence, one of the earliest indications that students are not on course. Pine Hills Elementary students are the models for this year's campaign.

A student who misses one day of school every two weeks each school year will lose more than a full year of instruction over the course of their schooling – and often the opportunities that come

with it as well.

"When our students miss school, they miss the opportunity to learn," Dr. Wilkins said at the September kickoff event. "There are many reasons students miss school, but the outcome is the same – missed instruction and missed opportunities."

Elia made her second visit to Albany public schools in as many weeks to start the school year, and the second visit to Pine Hills of her 17-month tenure as the state's top education official.

"Attendance is critical to academic success, even as early as preschool and kindergarten," Elia said. "Students can't learn if they're not in school and missing just a few days each month can add up, resulting in students falling behind."



Pine Hills Elementary School fifth-grader Egypt Barnes on Sept. 14 unveiled a poster of herself that will be used in a statewide campaign promoting the importance of attendance.

AWARDS & ACHIEVEMENTS

Albany teachers get regional recognition

The *Times Union* recently recognized five outstanding teachers from throughout the Capital Region based on nominations from readers, and two are in the City School District of Albany.

Lauded were William S. Hackett Middle School's **Kerstin Comproski**, and Thomas O'Brien Academy of Science and Technology's **Cathy Lotmore**.

Bravo! Students selected for state ensembles

Two Albany High School students have been selected from among thousands to participate in statewide ensembles of the New York State School Music Association.

Senior **Raphael Cohen**, a tenor 1, will sing in the Conference All-State Mixed Choir. Junior **Sofia Fasullo**, who plays clarinet, will play in the Conference All-State Symphonic Band.

Their concert is Dec. 4 at Kodak Hall in the Eastman Theater in Rochester.

Albany High senior a National Merit semifinalist

Albany High School senior **Emily Ha** has been named a semifinalist in the 2017 National Merit Scholarship Competition.

Her outstanding score on the 2015 SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test placed her in the top 1 percent of the 1.6 million students in New York state and the United States who took the test during junior year.

In order for Ha to become a finalist for a scholarship, she must have outstanding academic records throughout high school, be endorsed and recommended by the high school principal and earn SAT scores that confirm the student's earlier performance on the qualifying test.

National Merit scholarships will be awarded in the spring.

Filling backpacks to fill stomachs

Families across Albany can look forward to a new ally in the fight against hunger this school year: the Albany Backpack Food Program.

While the City School District of Albany currently provides all students with free breakfast and lunch on school days, this mealtime assistance goes on hiatus every weekend – from Friday's lunch until Monday's breakfast.

With more than a third of the district's children living below the poverty line, some families struggle to feed their children over those 2½ days. The Backpack Food Program hopes to significantly reduce the number of families facing those circumstances.

The program is a partnership between the Homeless and Travelers Aid Society, the Regional Food Bank of Northeastern New York, the Albany Fund for Education, the Junior League of Albany and other community stakeholders.

Through their collective fundraising efforts, they intend to provide 455 Albany students across all 15 elementary and middle schools with backpacks full of food every Friday afternoon throughout the 2016-17 school year.

They plan to provide more students with backpacks each year, with the ultimate goal of serving 1,025 students by the start of the 2019-20 school year.

The Backpack Program has enjoyed success in Schenectady over the past few



Interim Superintendent Kimberly Young Wilkins, Ed.D., expressed her gratitude at an Oct. 13 news conference announcing expansion of the Albany Backpack Food Program to all district elementary and middle schools.

years, with the program being linked to an increase in attendance rates and a decrease in disciplinary issues.

The backpacks will include three entrees, one loaf of bread, two juice boxes, fresh fruits and two snacks.

A voucher for a gallon of milk will be distributed on a biweekly basis, and canned vegetables will be sent home once every month, all of which can be provided for an annual cost of \$239 for each child.

For more information, or to make a donation, contact Amy Savoie at amysavoie@gmail.com or Carly Connors at cconnors@casdany.org, or visit www.gofundme.com/2dcnubw.

Dads show support for their kids' education

Some came after finishing the night shift. Others showed up before heading into work. Fathers, grandfathers, stepfathers, uncles and brothers all shared a common goal: to support their children's education.

More than 1,700 fathers and father figures visited their children's City School District of Albany schools Sept. 20 during "Dads Take Your Child to School Day."

The event is part of a national effort to encourage men to be more active in their children's education. Schools throughout New York state took part in the event, which is sponsored by the Fatherhood Initiative of the New York state Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) and the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA).

All 17 district schools recognized dads in a variety of ways: breakfast for dads and their kids, speakers, photo ops, school tours and more. At North Albany Acad-



North Albany Academy seventh-grader Travis Moultrie, right, and his stepfather Sean Haley enjoyed breakfast together on Sept. 20 during "Dads Take Your Child to School Day." More than 1,700 fathers and father figures took part in activities throughout the City School District of Albany.

emy, Interim Superintendent Kimberly Young Wilkins, Ed.D., was on hand to greet dads and kids at the school.

Also, OCFS Acting Commissioner Sheila J. Poole and OTDA Executive Deputy Commissioner Michael Perrin joined school staff to serve breakfast to the droves of dads who turned out at North Albany (Perrin is the dad of an Albany High School senior).

Kids who have a father or father figure involved in their schooling are more likely to get good grades, feel better about themselves and make good choices, research shows.



U.S. Sen. Charles Schumer, visiting Albany High in May, helped secure full Army funding for the school's JROTC program.

Schumer secures JROTC funding

Thanks to the advocacy and leadership of U.S. Sen. Charles Schumer, Albany High School will receive full federal funding for its popular Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps program.

The Sgt. Henry Johnson Battalion began at Albany High during the 2014-15 school year. It finished its first full year in 2015-16 with 65 students and anticipates growing to 120 by the end of this school year.

The group was forced to run an unfunded version of the JROTC program until Schumer's intervention. The senator announced the funding in September.

"We are so ecstatic at this wonderful news – and the wonderful opportunities that it will present for our students at Albany High School," said Interim Superintendent Kimberly Young Wilkins, Ed.D. "This will change the trajectory and the

outcomes for so many of our students.

"We are grateful to Sen. Schumer for his support and leadership in making this dream a reality for our students at Albany High."

Board of Education President Kenneth M. Bruce said Schumer's announcement is a significant step forward to allow the district another opportunity to engage students around a valuable program in which they have demonstrated extremely strong interest and commitment.

"In addition to the opportunities JROTC provides, it also teaches soft skills such as leadership and self-discipline that are so necessary to be successful in life," Bruce said. "It was a game-changer for me, and I think it can be game-changer for so many of our students."

Check us out online!

We have an Online News Center to provide you as much news as possible about the great people and programs of the City School District of Albany. Visit www.albanyschools.org and click the Online News Center link in the right-hand column to read more about any of these stories and additional articles, including:

- Rally urges state to make good on funding promise
- Mayor launches 10th annual fundraising drive for winter clothing
- Follow your child's bus with Durham Bus Tracker
- Stay in the loop on school news
- Board extends interim superintendent
- Leadership changes at Albany High School

Also check us out on Facebook, Twitter and School News Notifier!

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Leading the way Meet teachers Leah Evans and Tere Wislous

Leah Evans and Tere Wislous are recipients of the City School District of Albany's Crystal Apple, an annual award given to the very best of a select group of teacher-leaders known as Golden Apples. Evans received the Crystal Apple honor in 2016 and Wislous in 2015.

Evans started teaching at Albany High School in 2007. Certified in social studies and business, she has taught both at the school; now she teaches social studies. Wislous, fluent in English and Spanish, is a bilingual special-education teacher at Delaware Community School. She joined the district in 1989.



Leah Evans

Q: What makes a great teacher?

A: Evans: While there are a lot of components that go into being a good teacher, I think the most important part is the relationships that we build with our students. Knowing and investing in our students is the foundation for everything that we achieve in the classroom, on the field and in the community. Students need to feel validated, supported, valued and understood in order to reach their full potential.

A: Wislous: A great teacher sets high expectations for all students, creates a positive and safe learning environment with a sense of humor and a positive attitude, is consistent and fair and is flexible. A great teacher is creative in finding different possibilities to help students reach their potential and gives students tools that help them become independent, engaged and responsible for their own learning.

Q: Why did you decide to become a teacher?

A: Evans: I decided to become an educator because I love spending my day with students. I always tell my kids that history is my vehicle to having access to them. There are so many incredible things that our students are able to achieve, and it is exciting to be a part of that. To be an adult that can impact a child's path in a positive way is a gift.

A: Wislous: I lost interest in school when I was in elementary school in Puerto Rico. All that changed in sixth grade. That year, my teacher sat down with me and told me it was a new beginning. She set goals for me, gave me confidence and helped me experience success. She was funny, caring and made learning fun. She made a difference in my life and inspired me to want to do the same.

Q: In a world focused on standardized tests and evaluations, what keeps you motivated?

A: Evans: The students continue to keep me motivated and focused on what is truly important. It is the process of developing the whole child, not the test score. Being kind, compassionate and empathetic human beings cannot be bubbled-in on a test sheet. The process of learning is way more important than demonstrating what you know in one moment of time on a standardized test.

A: Wislous: My students and the strong relationships that I continue to build with them, their parents and the staff I work with keep me motivated and focused. Instead of resisting changes, I welcome them and see them as opportunities for growth. The challenges that my students bring, my passion for learning, the support from my family and the desire to do better the next day also keep me motivated.



Tere Wislous

Alumni achievement Taofeek Abijako '16

At the age of 4, Taofeek Abijako began selling hand-made greeting cards around his building to earn some extra money.

Fourteen years later, and just a few months after walking across the stage with Albany High School's Class of 2016, he is now designing his own line of clothing for United Arrows, a major Japanese fashion retailer.



Taofeek Abijako '16

Growing up in Lagos, one of the largest cities in his home country of Nigeria, Abijako didn't find anything unusual about engaging in this activity at such a young age. He describes the best opportunities for employment there as the ones people create for themselves through a unique "entrepreneurial spirit."

Abijako jokes that his first words upon arrival in America at age 11 were: "How do I sell stuff?" and "Where is the closest painting-supply store?"

He continued producing art to generate income, even drawing portraits of classmates to sell for a single dollar. As he moved into high school, however, his focus shifted away from art and onto the soccer field.

Midway through his junior year at Albany High, though, Abijako underwent what he jokingly refers to as a mid-life crisis that he was too young to have. It led to a prodigal return to the world of art.

He began selling custom-painted shoes to classmates, and immersed himself in Albany High's vibrant art scene. This set off a series of serendipitous events, ultimately leading to actress Amandla Stenberg ("The Hunger Games") featuring his work on Instagram.

Capitalizing on the success this brought, Abijako created his own clothing line, Head of State, which he named after a song by Nigerian artist Fela Kuti addressing corruption in his home country.

After appearing on a hugely influential fashion blog, his designs began spreading across social media, eventually catching the eye of the Japanese high-end fashion retailer United Arrows.

Aware that Head of State was now growing quickly, Abijako called upon Patrick O'Connell, his former economics teacher at Albany High, for assistance. O'Connell joined him in New York City to meet with United Arrows representatives, and recalls they were "ecstatic" about the clothes Abijako brought to the meeting.

Although he remains truly humble about his success, it should come as no surprise to anyone who knows Abijako that his passion for all things creative – whether film, art or fashion – has already begun paying dividends.

"For someone like Taofeek, the possibilities are endless," O'Connell said.

Abijako's designs will debut in United Arrows stores across Japan this February.