

Capital Education

Fall 2019

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Attendance matters. All day. Every day.

The message is simple, the reasons clear.

Attendance matters. All day. Every day.

That's the theme of the City School District of Albany's campaign to improve student attendance in all schools in the 2019-20 school year.

"Students must be present to learn and grow," said Superintendent Kaweeda G. Adams.

Attendance matters in a student's academic success starting as early as prekindergarten, and good attendance also is about

much more than academics, Adams said.

"Students who regularly attend school are more positively engaged in the true benefits of academic and social-emotional growth," she said. "They have the opportunity to build supportive relationships with their peers, teachers and staff members."

Beginning in September, the district and individual schools have been engaged in a variety of efforts to emphasize this important message. That includes:

- Intensifying efforts to identify barriers to good attendance

early on and working with families and community agencies to help overcome those barriers.

- Working to ensure that all schools are places where students and families feel welcome, valued and safe.
- Educating families about the benefits of good attendance through positive messages and communication in our schools and with families, on CDTA buses and bus shelters, in radio ads, in local businesses and with agencies that serve our families.

(Continued on page 6)

Student achievement:

An amazing journey in music, and in life

Singer-songwriter Lee Reh – the kid who won a national songwriting contest and went to the Grammys with a fellow Stephen and Harriet Myers Middle School student in 2016 – is about to hit the big time.

Now a senior at Albany High School, Reh has gone solo and his song "Real Love" will be released on the White Lion Records label Nov. 15.

He's also played for some pretty impressive crowds.

Some 20,000 people were at his last performance Sept. 16, when he sang the national anthem at a rally for presidential hopeful Elizabeth Warren in Manhattan's Washington Square Park.

"I was shaking before I went on," Reh said. "It was outside and the acoustics weren't great, and I was really nervous. But as soon as I hit the stage and saw the people, it all went away."

In every sense it's been a long journey for Reh. Ten years ago he came to Albany from his birthplace, a refugee camp in

northern Thailand. He spoke no English.

He enrolled in Giffen Memorial Elementary School, where he excelled academically. Music, however, was not on his radar until sixth grade, when Giffen hall monitor Alex Huntley asked him if he wanted to be in the school talent show.

"I was just this quiet kid and I was too afraid to sign up," Reh said. "So if he hadn't asked me, I wouldn't have performed."

The experience transformed him.

It also cemented his relationship with Huntley, who continues to be a mentor and volunteers as his manager. Huntley – a drummer – and some local session musicians collaborated with Reh to write the instrumentals on "Real Love."

"Lee's growth has taught us both the value of patience and discipline," Huntley said. "He started as a timid, reserved kid and has transformed into a go-getter."

(Continued on page 6)



All in for equity, empowerment

From the superintendent

In the City School District of Albany, we are committed to providing equitable opportunities so that each and every student can reach his or her potential.

Much of this happens in the classroom through culturally responsive teaching and learning. We instituted these practices during the past year, and we are building on that during 2019-20 with ongoing review to identify any systemic roadblocks that hinder student success.

Equity consists of more than academic achievement, however.

We consider social and emotional development to be an important piece of student success. Our goal is to assure that every student has access to all the supports he or she needs, whether that is through academic tutoring, behavioral counseling or a caring adult to talk to.

Another crucial part of the equity equation is making sure our expectations are crystal clear. Students and families need to know that we have high expectations about schoolwork and behavior, and those expectations reflect our belief that they can and will succeed. These expectations are outlined in our Student Code of Conduct, which you can find at albanschools.org.

Students and families also have a stake and voice in the process. Empowering students and families to take charge of their education and their actions is key to achieving true equity.

The district has launched two important initiatives that give students the opportunity to play an important role in their own education. One involves coming to school; the other involves speaking up about violence and substance abuse.

"Attendance matters. All day. Every day." is the theme of a district-wide campaign that stresses the importance of regular attendance (see *related story, page 1*). Look for attendance-themed ads inside buses and on bus shelters



operated by CDTA.

You also may see posters at various businesses throughout the city that feature our students and our attendance messages.

"Speak up, speak out" provides opportunities for students and families to be encouraged to support themselves and their classmates in being proactive in notifying a teacher or trusted adult if they know another student is hurting themselves (unsafe behavior or substance abuse) or another person (through bullying or other violence).

Our schools have numerous resources available to help. But we can't help if we don't know about it. We need everyone.

We all share responsibility for making our schools safe and welcoming places where students have access to the programs and people they need to help them succeed. I welcome all of you to join me in these efforts to be all in for Albany!

Yours in education,

Kaweeda G. Adams
Superintendent



Capital Education is published by the City School District of Albany. Please direct comments about the newsletter, story ideas and questions to either:

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Voices

Q: What are you looking forward to this school year?



“Some of my goals for this school year are to be an honor student, have the best grades in all subjects and have a great time. I also want to be prepared for each class this year and be at school and on time every day. Another goal for this year is to make friends who want to learn as much as I do.”

— **Malik Grant**

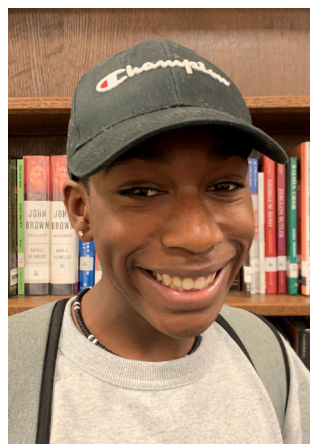
Giffen Memorial Elementary School
Sixth grade



“As a sixth-grader who just started middle school, I have a lot to look forward to this year. I have my own locker. I can make friends with kids from other elementary schools, and I have more after-school activity opportunities. I'm really excited about Robotics!”

— **Anya Miller**

William S. Hackett Middle School
Sixth grade



“This year, I'm looking forward to creating better bonds with teachers and classmates before I leave.”

— **ShiVear Parker**

Albany High School
Senior



“Some things I am looking forward to this year are band, chorus, the science fair and art. I love playing in band. I am also looking forward to the science fair this year. You get to do cool experiments or you can do a research project on a scientist. Finally, I am looking forward to art class this year. Go Eagles!”

— **Lucy Rathke-Cook**

Eagle Point Elementary School
Fifth grade



“What I'm looking forward to in school this year is making lots of changes in my school. My goal is to be a leader, to listen and to learn. As school president, I want students to listen to their teachers, and to listen and talk at appropriate times.”

— **LaNir Whitaker**

Philip J. Schuyler Achievement Academy
Fifth grade

Celebrating great employees

The City School District of Albany spotlighted its employees of excellence and honored staff members who have reached significant anniversary milestones in their district careers at the annual Employee Recognition Celebration on Sept. 6.

The district held the ceremony at the magnificent Palace Theatre in downtown Albany, recognizing top employees for 2019 with a series of “apple” awards: Emerald Apples for administrators, Golden Apples for teachers and other professional staff, Ruby Apples for support staff and Sapphire Apples for management confidential staff.

A single Crystal Award recipient was selected from each of the Emerald, Golden and Ruby categories.

In addition to the apple awards, the district recognized employees who reached anniversary milestones of 25 years or more.

Superintendent Kaweeda G. Adams thanked the honorees for their dedication, and noted that employees in every role in the school district play a vital part in educating students.

“Together, we are all in for Albany!” she said.

Learn about the distinguished employees recognized at albanyschools.org.

Pictured at right, Pine Hills Elementary School Principal Tia Corniel, right, embraces third-grade teacher and Golden Apple recipient Tanya Randolph at the Sept. 6 Employee Recognition Ceremony.



Dads, father-figures turn out for education

More than 1,000 men – fathers and father-figures to City School District of Albany students – showed up and showed their support for education Sept. 17 on Dads Take Your Child to School Day.

The event is a national initiative that is designed to get men involved in their children’s education. The day highlights the important role men play in their children’s lives and academic success.

District schools recognized fathers and father-figures in a variety of ways: breakfast for dads and their kids,

speakers, photo ops, school tours and more.

Students 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.

Pictured at left, Philip Schuyler Achievement Academy second-grader Ameenah Nelson and her dad, Jabrone Nelson, shared breakfast at school Sept. 17 on Dads Take Your Child to School Day.

Six join Hall of Fame

Six distinguished people joined the City School District of Albany Hall of Fame on Oct. 4. The 2019 honorees were:

- Former physical education teacher and state-champion coach **Leslie Bogucki**
- Albany High School graduate, former Board of Education president and current Schenectady City Court Judge **Teneka Frost** (*read more about Frost on page 8*)
- Former Albany High state-champion swimmer **Elizabeth Gaffuri Kearney**
- Former guidance counselor and longtime Albany Public School Teachers Association (APSTA) President **Bill Ritchie**
- Former Albany High and Naval Academy student-athlete **Demond Shepard**, and

- Former Albany High student-athlete and decorated Army sergeant, the late **Sonja Michelle Smith-Summers**

They were inducted at a special ceremony and dinner at the Italian-American Community Center. They were honored again the following day during the Wall of Fame ceremony at Albany High School, which kicks off the school’s Homecoming activities each year, and also at halftime of the Falcons’ Homecoming football game against Columbia.

Read more about these amazing people at albanyschools.org.

Pictured at right is the Hall of Fame Class of 2019: front row, L-R: Gaffuri Kearney, Frost, Angela Dixon (accepting for her sister, the late Smith-Summers), and Bogucki; back row, L-R, Shepard and Ritchie.)





(Above left, above right, and right) The weather was glorious for Homecoming weekend Oct. 4-5, and Albany High School fans and family members marshaled their inner Falcons for the festivities. Homecoming included Hall of Fame inductions Oct. 4, and the Wall of Fame unveiling, a tailgate party, a parade around the neighborhood to the stadium and the football game against Columbia on Oct. 5.

(At right) Falcon pride was in high gear Sept. 23 during the Albany Booster Club's annual Falcon 5K and Fun Run/Walk in Washington Park. It was the biggest turnout in the seven years of the event's existence, with more than 500 taking part in either the 5K or the one-mile fun run. What a great day to be a Falcon!

(Below) These Delaware Community School staffers celebrated Hispanic heritage and the 20th anniversary of the bilingual Dual Language Program with families Oct. 5 with a parade and a feast. In the Dual Language Program, students are taught in both Spanish and English. By the time they finish the program at the end of fifth grade, they are fluent in both languages!





(Above) As it does at all schools in the district, attendance matters all day, every day at Edmund J. O'Neal Middle School of Excellence. And on Oct. 4, the school honored the 98 students who had perfect attendance during September with a special breakfast. Students recognized included (L-R) eighth-graders **Abdul Ahmed**, **Mohammed Ali**, **Desmond Sowah** and **Muhammad Ismail**. Bravo, students, and keep up the great work!

(Above right) Albany School of Humanities (ASH) kindergartener **Ethan Chaudhry** was one of the first students to earn a free book from the school's brand new book vending machine Oct. 4. Students are awarded gold coins for academics, attendance or kindness that they can then use to pick out a book to take home.

(Right) Albany High School junior **Godfrey Brix Garzon**, left, showed a visiting Dutch student how to measure on a scale Oct. 11. That day, 32 high school students from Albany's sister city – Nijmegen, Netherlands – prepared, then shared, a meal with culinary students at Albany High's Abrookin Career and Technical Center.

(Below right) Hands-on science is the best kind of science! During after-school programming in partnership with University at Albany education students Oct. 10, Arbor Hill Elementary School third-graders (L-R) **Jasianah Rivera** and **Nevaeh McNeal** learned that the substance Oobleck (made with cornstarch and water) can be both a liquid and a solid.

(Below) Fall is harvest time at Montessori Magnet School! Fifth-graders (L-R) **Satori Youngs** and **Ava Downer** peel sweet potatoes planted by the students last year. The gardeners/chefs then combined the root vegetables with garlic and onions (also from the Montessori garden) for a crockpot dish the entire class enjoyed.





Volunteer Spotlight Peter Cuevas

Age and occupation:

48, stay-at-home dad

Volunteers at:

Giffen Memorial Elementary School, where sons Joshua and Tyler are students. He tends the school garden and also volunteers whenever asked or needed.

Why he volunteers:

"I've got two kids, and I want them to understand that it's important to give. When someone blesses you, you pass it on. You always try to help, no matter what."

Achievement *(continued from page 1)*

Reh resists the urge to embrace a musical genre or pigeonhole his style. He describes "Real Love" as "more of an '80s vibe with a Michael Jackson feel to it. It's really up-tempo."

"When I started off, I just wanted to sing," he said. "I thought, 'singing is cool.' But now it's all about the music. I'm trying to discover who I am in music."

At Albany High, in addition to AP and honors classes he takes music theory, sings in the school's Troubadours choir, plays in the jazz band and takes a jazz improv class. He is grateful for the opportunities Albany schools have provided him.

"If it wasn't for the school district, I never would have found my passion for music," he said.

For more updates, follow Lee Reh on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram: @LeeRehsMusic



Attendance *(continued from page 1)*

- Improving and standardizing how we collect attendance data as well as the interpretation of our data.

Research clearly indicates that missing even two days a month – called chronic absenteeism – causes students to fall far behind. By sixth grade, attendance is a leading predictor of whether or not a student will graduate from high school.

By ninth grade, regular attendance significantly improves a student's trajectory toward graduation.

Adams offered the following tips to help families make attendance a priority:

- Make sure students keep a regular bedtime and establish a morning routine so they are rested and alert when they get to school.
- Turn off all electronics at bedtime, including TVs, phones and tablets.
- Make sure clothes and backpacks are ready the night before.

- Check with your school nurse or office staff if you are not sure about when to keep your child at home due to illness.

- Avoid scheduling vacations or doctor's appointments when school is in session.
- Talk to teachers and counselors for advice if your student feels anxious about going to school.

- Develop backup plans for getting to school if something comes up. Call on a family member, neighbor or another parent to take your student to school.

Elected officials and leaders in law enforcement, higher education and business joined Adams at a news conference to announce the initiative Aug. 27. Students and families were represented, as well.

"Students benefit in so many ways from being in school all day, every day," Adams said. "Let us work together as a community to help our students get to school every day on time and ready to learn."

Soccer Falcons soar again

The Albany High School boys' soccer team enjoyed another outstanding season this fall, winning the Suburban Council Gray Division for the second year in a row and advancing to the Section 2 Class AA semifinals for the first time in six years.

Led by senior midfielder Harrison Leon (13 goals, six assists), the Falcons went 10-3-2 in the regular season and beat Shaker 3-2 in the sectional quarterfinals Oct. 26.

That earned the Falcons a trip to the semis to play Shenendehowa on Oct. 31 (Capital Education went to press before the game).

It was the Falcons' fourth trip to the semis in coach Dave Weiss' 13 seasons – Albany

High had reached the semis only once prior to that (1983). The Falcons also were seeking to reach the final for just the second time in school history (2013), and to win the school's first sectional title in soccer.

"We set three goals at the beginning of the season: finish atop the Suburban Gray Division, earn a first-round bye and win sectionals," Weiss said. "Obviously, my coaching staff, the players and I are very pleased in achieving our first two goals, but the work is far from over."

"The elusive sectional title is the target we want to hit."

Read more about the team's season at albanyschools.org.



Awards & Achievements

Calendar's outstanding students honored

The City School District of Albany held a reception Oct. 2 to recognize more than two dozen exceptional students spotlighted in the 2019-20 district calendar.

Superintendent Kaweeda G. Adams and district administrators joined students and their families to celebrate the occasion.

Students selected for the calendar 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. Still others are leaders and great ambassadors for their school.

Choosing an individual to represent a school and the district is a challenge because so many of our 9,300 students are impressive in their own right. In the end, the calendar students represent all that is great in Albany's public schools.

Pictured at right is New Scotland Elementary School student **Johan Richardson** with his dad Raphael and teacher Julie Yanson.

Read more about each of the students and why they were selected at albanyschools.org.

Trio earns film honors

Films by Albany High School junior **Sophia Doehla**, junior **EhBlu Say** and sophomore **Chit Su Moe** received honors Oct. 5 at the 2019 Rod Serling Film Festival in Binghamton.

Doehla's film, "Paper Brains," won Best Fiction/Story. Say's and Moe's collaboration, "Love Through the Seasons: A Bird's Love Story" received an honorable mention.

Doehla is pictured at right with her film teacher Theresa Story.

The annual festival honors the work of "Twilight Zone" creator Rod Serling and seeks to inspire the next generation of filmmakers. The festival is held annually in Binghamton, Serling's hometown.

Senior 'Girl of the Year'

Girls Inc. of the Greater Capital Region named Albany High School senior **Jaida Coleman** (right) as a "Girl of the Year" at the group's annual Fuel the Fire awards lunch Sept. 25.

Girls of the year are area Girls Inc. members whose lives have been positively affected by the organization and who represent future generations of accomplished women. Coleman was chosen for exemplifying the mission of Girls Inc., and being a powerful voice in shaping the women of tomorrow.

Senior promotes leadership program

Albany High School senior **Kennedy Jones** is featured in a video promoting Bank of America's national Student Leader program, which she took part in last summer.

The program helps young people gain work experience, broaden their perspective on

how nonprofits serve community needs, and advance their civic engagement. Jones and 2019 Albany High alum Jasmin Harrison both participated in the program, which enabled them to have paid internships at local nonprofit agencies.

You can watch the video at aboutbankofamerica.com.

Honor Society inducts 99

A total of 99 academic luminaries were inducted into Albany High School's Arista Chapter of the National Honor Society on Oct. 23.

The students, all seniors, were eligible for National Honor Society because each has maintained an overall academic average of 89.5 or higher at Albany High. Visit albanyschools.org for a complete list.

Albany High's National Honor Society inductions were moved from the spring of junior year to the fall of senior year so that every student's academic record would include all junior year grades.

Congratulations to each of this year's inductees!

Diver makes big splash

William S. Hackett Middle School's **Anna Flanders**, picture in action below at right, is currently the No. 3 ranked high school diver in New York state and is leading Section 2.

So far this season the eighth-grader has broken pool diving records at Albany, Schenectady and Niskayuna high schools as a member of the Albany High School girls' swimming and diving team.

JROTC earns top honor

Albany High School's Henry Johnson Battalion Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC) has been awarded a coveted "Honor Unit with Distinction" for 2019-20.

The Department of the Army presents the award to JROTC units that maintain an exceptionally high level of performance. It is the highest rating a JROTC battalion can receive.

Currently in its fourth year, Albany High's JROTC program has 110 cadets in grades 9-12. The award was announced Oct. 16 but is based on a series of inspections that took place in April. The award puts the Albany High JROTC on par with long-established groups at local schools.

"If someone sees that you are truly invested in something, they're more likely to be motivated," said Battalion Leader **Julia Baez**.

"We needed a lot of kids to be dedicated to the process. We had to get everyone involved. When you see everyone that driven it is truly a magnificent thing."

The inspection that earned the distinction was extensive. The battalion was rated on supply operations (earning a perfect score), online cadet portfolios (which includes resumes and goal setting), presentations by the cadets on service learning projects, and more.



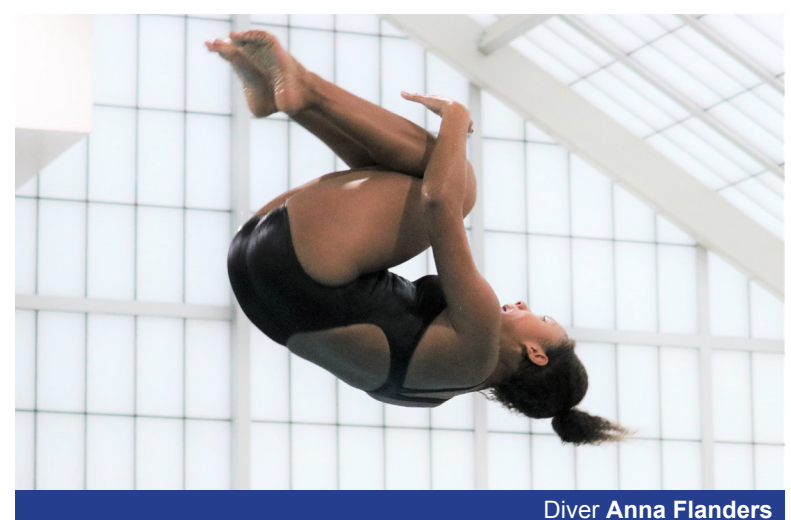
Calendar student **Johan Richardson**



Film honoree **Sophia Doehla**



'Girl of the Year' **Jaida Coleman**

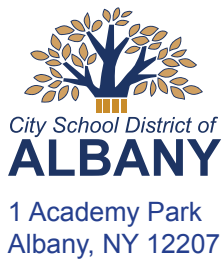


Diver **Anna Flanders**

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in this newsletter and more at:

albanschools.org



Our guiding principles

Our vision

The City School District of Albany will be a district of excellence with caring relationships and engaging learning experiences that provide equitable opportunities for all students to reach their potential.

Our mission

The mission of the City School District of Albany is to work in partnership with

our diverse community to engage every learner in a robust educational program designed to provide the knowledge and skills necessary for success.

Our goals

Increase student achievement; Enhance the delivery of quality instruction; Build our leadership capacity and increase accountability; Empower families; Partner with our diverse community

Leading the way:

Latanya Sumpter

Class of '92 alum, teacher, Crystal Apple recipient



Latanya Sumpter is the recipient of the City School District of Albany's 2019 Crystal Apple, an annual award given to the very best of a select group of teacher-leaders (*learn more about them and other outstanding district employees on page 3*).

A 1992 graduate of Albany High School, Sumpter began teaching in the district in 2001 as a building substitute. The following year she was hired to teach at the former Philip Schuyler Elementary School. She transferred to Philip Schuyler Achievement Academy when that school opened in 2004 and has been there since as a second-grade teacher.

Q: What makes a great teacher?

A great teacher is someone who is loving, caring and compassionate, who provides students with a structured, safe environment with consistent expectations.

Great teachers build strong, trusting relationships with students and families. Great teachers know their students – their strengths, their likes, their dislikes – and respect each student's differences and uniqueness.

And great teachers provide students with engaging learning experiences that promote curiosity and a love of learning.

Q: Why did you decide to become a teacher?

I always knew I wanted to be in a helping field or career, and I was thinking social work or psychology. I had a bachelor's degree in psychology and was working with adults with mental illness for a couple of years, and I realized I could make more of an impact working with children.

So when a friend of mine told me about a program at The College of Saint Rose tailored to people with a bachelor's in another field, I jumped at the idea and never turned back.

Q: What do you like best about your job?

So many things! I love that every day is a fresh new start to begin new learning. I like seeing the growth that students make and knowing that I contributed to it.

I have a mentor at church who's a former teacher, and she always uses the phrase "planting seeds."

My hope is that I am planting seeds that will develop lifelong learners who see the importance of school, education and being a person of good character.

Q: What's the most important thing you've learned from your students?

That I don't know it all! Learning and growing is lifelong. I tell my students I learn from them, and that even though I am an adult, I will always be a learner and a student.



Alumni achievement

Teneka Frost '94

Teneka Frost can admit it. There were times she struggled academically.

Atkins, that sparked a desire to work in public service.

While at Giffen Memorial Elementary, she was assigned to a remedial reading program and she had to attend summer school after her sophomore year because she failed geometry and biology.

"It helped me figure out what I was meant to do in life," said Frost, a 2019 inductee into the City School District of Albany Hall of Fame (*read more about the Hall of Fame on page 3*).

Despite the challenges, Frost worked hard, perhaps even harder than her peers, and was able to don a robe and graduate from Albany High School in 1994. Today, however, she wears a different type of robe – that of a judge.

Frost moved on to serve as chief administrative law judge for the Department of State and was director of the state Office of Administrative Hearings. She believes growing up in Albany, and participating in opportunities that only a state capital can provide, gives our students a huge advantage: a front row seat to the inner workings of state government.

"I did not let those things define me or stop me from moving forward," said Frost, who is Schenectady's first elected black City Court judge. "While the road is not always easy ... I can achieve anything."

"Hearing and seeing, up close and personal, about laws being made was fascinating," she said.

"I was receptive to the help that was out there and that allowed me to achieve all my dreams and more."

Equity and justice aren't Frost's only professional and personal interests. Education is also one of her top priorities, and because she wanted to give back to the community that shaped her, Frost served on the Albany Board of Education from 2005-08 and held the role of president in 2007-08.

After graduating from Albany High, Frost earned a bachelor's degree from Syracuse University, her law degree from Albany Law School and a master's in public administration from the University at Albany. It was an internship at the Center for Women in Government, suggested by her Albany High guidance counselor Marna

"Students should always work hard, stay focused and don't give up when things get tough," she said.