

Capital Education

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Supporting our students and our schools

The City School District of Albany Board of Education is urging members of the Albany community to reach out to state and federal leaders to advocate for more support and equitable funding for schools during the COVID-19 economic crisis.

"We recognize that the economic impact of COVID-19 will be deep and lasting for students and families across New York, especially without the critical help that is needed from the federal government to support our nation's public schools," said Board President Anne Savage said.

"But communities of color are already bearing the brunt of the health and economic impacts of COVID-19. We expect

our state and federal leaders to ensure that school funding decisions will not exacerbate that impact by reducing school aid the most in the communities already hit the hardest."

If state and federal budget cuts are necessary due to COVID-19, across-the-board aid reductions would hit hardest in high-needs school districts and communities like Albany. The district is strongly urging our elected officials to implement any cuts equitably to avoid potentially devastating outcomes where the need already is the greatest.

You can visit albanychools.org/advocacy for more information about how you can make your voice heard in

support of school funding. The page includes information about the impact of the COVID-19 fiscal crisis on the district, as well as sample messages and contact information for key state and federal officials.

Impact on Albany's schools

With the federal government's lack of action to provide economic relief for states and schools to date, the New York State Division of Budget has indicated that, in the continued absence of federal aid, it will withhold 20% of its school aid for the 2020-21 school year.

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Student achievement: Condell Miller

The power of positivity

Attitude goes a long way. And Condell Miller has a great attitude.

"Life is good. My life is good," said Miller, a student in the Albany High School/Sage College Transition program.

Once June rolls around, Miller wants to get a full-time job, get an apartment and help his family. But for now, he is happy to take life-skills classes at Russell Sage College's Albany campus and work at his part-time job at B. Lodge and Co., on North Pearl Street.

The goal of the transition program is to give students with disabilities ages 19-21 an opportunity to finish up their education on a college campus and experience as much of the college setting as possible, said teacher Matt Moore, who heads up the program.

The program also gives students job training and experience.

"Throughout the process, we work with outside agencies to set

up students with care managers and job coaches that will be with them when they leave Sage," Moore said. "Together we identify each student's strengths and try to match them in a career where they will be successful."

Miller's positive outlook has made him a favorite at Lodge's, where he works two hours a day, five days a week.

"He makes the place better just being here," said Mark Yonally, co-owner of Lodge's. "Every day when he walks through the door he's smiling."

Miller acknowledges that he's a people person.

"Everybody thinks I'm cool because I'm respectful to everybody, and I'm funny," Miller said.

Miller isn't just about the laughs, though. He's a hard worker who willingly takes on any task that needs doing, Yonally said.

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All in for Albany

From the superintendent

During times of triumph, it is easy to be focused on the vision and mission of an organization. However, what speaks to the character of who we are is what we do during challenging times.

Times like these.

Now, more than ever, our entire school community must rally in support of our students. Our collective voices for equitable funding, academic transparency and accountability, family engagement and community partnerships must rise to the highest level.

If we aspire to be greater and stronger and better, we must be greater than any one individual, stronger than our most venerable and better today than we were yesterday.

Everyone in the organization and in our community is valued and important. While our roles may be different, we work together to form a stronger organization.

During the summer, the district planned to implement a robust plan of in-person and hybrid instruction, with a virtual option. We then adjusted our plans to absorb the emerging fiscal impact of COVID-19, with significant impacts on the delivery of quality instruction.

The district implemented staff reductions to address these fiscal challenges, which transitioned the options for our general education students in grades 7-12 to virtual learning only and required the restructuring of programs and services we value.

Our families have been amazing in making the adjustments necessary to support these challenges. We appreciate the patience and flexibility our families have demonstrated. Our community partners also have been instrumental in providing resources and wraparound services to support our students and families.

As we move forward amid the continued uncertainty of COVID-19, our families'



voices will be critical as we continue to advocate for the equitable funding that high-needs districts like ours need and deserve. Equitable funding is the foundation by which we can maintain quality educational programs and rebuild the staffing to support our instructional framework.

We encourage you to contact state and federal elected officials with this message. You can find contact information and background at albanyschools.org/advocacy.

We remain committed to our vision and mission. We will continue to strive to be a district of excellence that offers equitable opportunities for all students. We will continue to provide engaging learning experiences supported by caring relationships, and we will continue to place an emphasis on our students' social and emotional development and well-being.

As a community, let us marshal our energy, our resources and our passion to provide our children with the best education possible. Together, let us continue 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 have you and your family done to stay active during the pandemic?



“ My family has been staying active by creating and playing games. One game my brother and our friends made up is social distancing tag. My family also took camping trips. We went fishing, swimming and built sand castles. I also went tubing for the first time. I did it all wearing Christmas socks!

— **Abby Colloton**
New Scotland Elementary School
Fifth grade



“ I go with my family and I walk around the block. I see a lot of birds and people. Another thing we do is ride bikes. I ride my bike with my family and we go to my aunt's house. In addition, we dance around. I like to dance to what my gym teacher posts. We keep moving during the pandemic.

— **TahZier Graham**
Sheridan Preparatory Academy
Fourth grade



“ We did our laundry, went to the grocery store to get food and water, and went to my grandparents' house to check on them. We mostly stayed in the house and only went out to places that were important. When summer came around, we had family cookouts and stuff. I also went swimming.

— **Lyric Hernandez**
Edmund J. O'Neal
Middle School of Excellence
Eighth grade



“ During the pandemic, my family and I are moving around in the house, cleaning it and playing games. Plus, I usually walk to the store with my brother. I like basketball and I play when the weather is nice, but I haven't been able to do much of that lately.

— **Miguel Munoz**
Albany High School
Sophomore



“ My family and I took long sightseeing drives and walks, watched movies, played family games and crafted. We like to take drives to view different things like the changing of the colors of the leaves. For family games, we played Monopoly, charades, Uno, Kahoot, Life and Scrabble.

— **Riley Stainrod**
Pine Hills Elementary School
Third grade

Celebrating great employees

Not even a pandemic could stop the City School District of Albany from spotlighting its employees of excellence.

In the past, the district has honored its best at the Employee Recognition Celebration at the Palace Theatre. The tradition continued virtually in 2020 with a video that recognized the award-winners.

Top employees for 2020 were recognized 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 Apple Award recipient was selected from each of the categories – the best of the best.

Crystal Apples recipient for 2020 were (pictured at right, clockwise from top left) New Scotland Elementary School Principal Lesley Buff, Philip Schuyler Achievement Academy teacher Susan Paultre, Stephen and Harriet Myers Middle School Home School Coordinator Joseph Burke and District Technology Coordinator John Wylid.

Learn more and view the recognition video at albanyschools.org/recognition.



'Do the Right Thing,' Albany-style

Middle and high school students in the City School District of Albany who are positive role models will be recognized and rewarded for their efforts under a new program announced Oct. 5.

The school district has partnered with the Albany Police Department and the City of Albany on "Do the Right Thing," an initiative that acknowledges students for their accomplishments, positive behavior and good deeds. Worthy students are nominated by school staff, parents and guardians, police officers and community members.

"In these challenging times, it is more important than ever to support young people who make smart choices and are role models in our community," said Superintendent Kaweeda G. Adams (pictured at left at announcement). "Many, many of our students 'do the right thing' every day, and we are grateful to our city and our police for creating this opportunity to recognize and reward them."

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Six join Hall of Fame

The City School District of Albany is proud to recognize the members of the Hall of Fame Class of 2020.

The annual honor, established in 2009, recognizes three categories of people: alumni who excel in their careers or through community involvement; administrators, teachers, support staff and coaches; and loyal and devoted supporters of the district.

This is the first year that the class is all-female. The honorees (pictured at right, clockwise from top left) are:

- **Doris E. Bedell**, Albany High School Class of 1956, former district administrator
- **Tracie Killar**, Albany High School Class of 1981, South End Children's Cafe director
- **Onnolee Smith**, Albany Fund for Education past president

- **Theresa Swidorwski**, Former City School District of Albany Board of Education president
- **Theresa Vaughan**, Albany Fund for Education founding member
- **Kimberly Young Wilkins, Ed.D.**, Former district administrator, New York State Education Department deputy commissioner

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the annual Hall of Fame banquet and induction ceremony normally held in conjunction with Albany High School's Homecoming in the fall was postponed.

Also, the district is accepting nominations for the Class of 2021 through Feb. 1. Visit our online Hall of Fame section to download a nomination form.





(Above left) Eagle Point Elementary School first-grader **Carter Hallenbeck** pauses to reflect while working on an assignment on Oct. 30 – the Friday before Halloween!

(Above) Faculty and staff are implementing social-emotional learning (SEL) periods into instruction for all of the district's in-person and virtual students. In this photo, North Albany Middle School social worker **Karleen Brookshire** (left) and sixth-grade social studies teacher **Andrea DeLollo** (right) are working with students on the benefits of thinking positively and understanding the importance of highlighting accomplishments.

(Above) On Oct. 23, **Sara McGraw**, the district's elementary instructional supervisor for STEM, delivered a hydroponic laboratory to Thomas O'Brien Academy of Science and Technology (TOAST) teacher **Art Flynn**. Hydroponics uses water enriched with minerals and nutrients to grow fruits, vegetables and plants – a sort of floating garden that doesn't require soil. Flynn, who is teaching remotely, installed the lab in his home. For now, his students will experience the joy of hydroponic gardening remotely. Eventually the lab will return to TOAST and students will be able to get their hands wet in person.

(Right) Delaware Community School second-grade student **Paw Tee** listens intently during an Oct. 23 lesson on close readings and text summaries.

(Below) The last home meet for Falcon cross country ended in a double victory! On Oct. 27, the boys beat Troy 15-50 and the girls won 18-40. Congratulations to all our scholar-athletes on a very different – but competitive – fall season.





(Above left) Both in-person and virtual students at Stephen and Harriet Myers Middle School celebrated Spirit Week Oct. 26-30. The festivities ended on Friday, Oct. 30, with students like sixth-grader **Than Shwe Zin**, donning their favorite pajamas. It was perfect timing, too – that was the morning it snowed in Albany so being warm and cozy were top priorities!

(Above right) Arbor Hill Elementary School second-grader **Kayla Gonzalez** reviews her “Words I Use When I Write” guide during a writing assignment on Oct. 16.

(Right) Albany School of Humanities (ASH) fifth-grader **Elijah Kirkland** pays close attention during an Oct. 9 math lesson on exponents.

(Below) Extra! Extra! Read all about it in Montessori Magnet School’s *The Megaphone*. This fall intrepid fifth-grade reporters **Wanjiku Waweru**, **Sally Hill**, **Aniyah Huntley-Dickson** and **Fiona Allen** (pictured L-R) started publishing their own student newspaper. They’re only two issues in but already *The Megaphone* has tackled hard-hitting topics like virtual learning and academic preferences.

(Below right) We have the best community partners! On Oct. 27, representatives from Metropolitan Baptist Church donated Chromebooks to Arbor Hill Elementary School. Principal **Rosalind Gaines-Harrell** (second from right) will distribute them to 10 of the school’s virtual learners.





Volunteer Spotlight

Jonathan Hentrich

Age and occupation:

40; pastor at Christ's Church Albany

Volunteer activities:

Organized volunteers to assist the City School District of Albany in serving more than 353,000 meals during the COVID-19 school closure from March through June. Currently, Hentrich leads an initiative called Serve Albany (servealbany.org), which makes it easy for people to find volunteer and mentoring opportunities with more than 40 Albany nonprofits, many of which serve district students. Whenever he can, he tries to jump in and help.

Why he volunteers:

"I believe that giving and volunteering are truly the best ways to live. I was reminded of this in the early days of COVID. There were so many days that felt so bleak and uncertain, but jumping on a school bus and helping deliver meals helped reshape my whole week."

Achievement *(continued from page 1)*

"Not many of us get excited about going to work, but Condell loves his job," Yonally said. "He's a hard worker and game for whatever."

Miller's friendly nature and enthusiasm also made him a natural leader among his teammates on the Albany High unified basketball team. His skills on the court, especially defensively, helped propel the team to the top of Section 2 in 2019, the team's last season of play.

"We were the champions," he said.

Miller is on track to finish the Albany High/Sage

program in June and will graduate with a certificate of completion.

His future looks bright.

"Condell has done a tremendous job at Sage and at his internship at Lodge's," Moore said. "He has been a great role model for his classmates with his dependability, work ethic and his infectious positive attitude."

"He will be a great asset to any business that hires him."

Right Thing *(continued from page 3)*

Community members can nominate students from Albany High School, Edmund J. O'Neal Middle School of Excellence, North Albany Middle School, Stephen and Harriet Myers Middle School and William S. Hackett Middle School.

Behaviors that might earn a student recognition include striving to do well in school; helping peers, family and neighbors; working to overcome obstacles with grace and compassion; shining academically, athletically or artistically; or being overall good citizens in school, at home and in our city.

Albany Police Officer Christopher English, the school resource officer at Albany High, was the driving force behind bringing the program to the school district.

English said he sees students doing plenty of good things and he wanted a way to acknowledge them. His research led him to Do the Right Thing, Inc., a national nonprofit dedicated to recognizing and rewarding school-age students for their positive contributions.

Of those nominated, 10 students from each middle school and 20 from Albany High will be selected to receive a T-shirt, a certificate of acknowledgment and a small prize. Of the semifinalists, one student from each middle school and three students from Albany High will be named winners and all will receive a tablet.

Find out how to nominate a student at albanyschools.org.



Help our kids stay warm this winter with a donation to the 2020 Cash for Coats drive!

Cash for Coats – coordinated by the office of Albany Mayor Kathy Sheehan – is an annual effort to raise money to buy new winter coats and accessories for City School District of Albany students in need.

Visit albanyschools.org to learn how to help.

Donations are due by Monday, Nov. 16.

Advocacy

(continued from page 1)

For Albany, a 20% reduction in state aid would mean a loss of \$16.5 million-\$23.2 million during the current school year. The district reduced 215.6 positions in September in response to this looming budget crisis.

In August and September, the state withheld \$1.4 million of the district's final state aid payments for the 2019-20 school year.

The district did receive 100% of its first state aid payments of the 2020-21 school year in September and October, totaling nearly \$21 million. That represents about 17.7% of the district's total anticipated state aid for 2020-21.

However, nearly \$100 million more is pending, with about

\$75 million of those funds scheduled for payment in March and after. Governor Cuomo has said he will provide his next update on the state's financial position in late December or early January.

"In order to plan responsibly, we need clarification about how the governor's commitment to equity will translate to dollars," Savage said. "We need to know how much aid we will have so that we can retain the staff we need to serve Albany's students."

"We have exceptional staff, and our district is seeing improving outcomes every year. Reductions of this magnitude are going to impact our ability to serve our students."



Rebuilding Albany High

As work on Phase 2 – our brand new 39,000-square-foot art and music building – is wrapping up, the demolition for Phase 3 is already underway. Phase 3 will completely renovate large sections of the existing academic building, including the auditorium.

Awards & Achievements

Schuyler nurse among elite

A City School District of Albany school nurse has been named one of the top 10 nurses in the Capital Region.

Jill Thornton, school nurse at Philip Schuyler Achievement Academy, was selected from among more than 625 nurses nominated for the recognition. She appeared in a special Oct. 18 section of the *Times Union* called "Salute to Nurses: 6th Annual Celebration of Nursing Excellence in the Capital Region."

Each year, the *Times Union* recognizes 25 local nurses – 10 winners and 15 finalists – nominated by family, friends, coworkers and others whose lives they've impacted with their work.

Thornton, one of the 10 winners, has been serving Schuyler's students since 2011. She was nominated by Andrea Ribner, who works in the district's English as a New Language and Refugee Services Department.

"Jill has passionately practiced her nursing skills on a daily basis, delivering care to hundreds of elementary students with many chronic illnesses, daily occurrences of aches, pains and accidental injuries," Ribner said. "She has compassion and grace caring for young people ... She is loved and cherished by all who know and work with her."

Blood drive saves lives

Neither a worldwide pandemic nor building construction could stop Albany High School from holding its annual fall blood drive. On Oct. 8, students and staff donated pints of lifesaving blood amidst the bookshelves of the school library. Thanks in large part to senior **Maggie Papa**, student coordinator of blood drives for the 2020-21 school year, the drive was a success, collecting 20% more than its goal!

The October drive was the first of three, and Papa stands to earn scholarship dollars from the Red Cross if enough blood is collected over the three drives.

Hughes recognized

Nov. 6 was Willie J. Hughes Day in the City of Albany!

So declared Mayor Kathy Sheehan. She, Sen. Neil Breslin, Assemblymember John McDonald and Superintendent Kaweeda G. Adams all lauded **Willie Hughes**, a longtime school resource officer and current head of security at William S. Hackett Middle School, for his outstanding efforts on behalf of our community.

Breslin led the news conference praising Hughes, who received a framed Senate proclamation commemorating his distinguished service as a community volunteer, member of the Albany Police Department and an advocate for students and families at Hackett Middle School.

McDonald presented Hughes with a citation, and Sheehan with her proclamation. Hughes also received a proclamation from Adams and U.S. Congressman Paul Tonko.

Seniors awarded prestigious fellowship

Two Albany High School seniors are participating this fall in a prestigious fellowship program started by former President Barack Obama.

The New York State Education Department chose **Robert Glover** and **Jareem Morris** to participate in the My Brother's Keeper (MBK) Fellowship program for 2020. The class of 71 fellows from across the state represents 24 school districts.

MBK was created in 2014 and aims to expand opportunities and create pathways for success for young men of color through public-private partnerships. Throughout this school year, Glover and Morris will be connected to established mentors who will help them to engage in government, education and business activities.

"The MBK Fellowship helps young Black men become leaders and agents of change in their communities," said Superintendent Kaweeda G. Adams. "Now more than ever, the opportunity for our students to participate in the MBK Fellows program means an opportunity for them to have a positive and lasting impact on their world."

In addition, Glover and Morris serve on a statewide MBK Fellows Workgroup to provide input on the development and implementation of a statewide MBK Mentoring Network.

MBK Fellows also have the opportunity to develop and execute a service project.

Whitney Young honors superintendent

Whitney M. Young Jr. Health Center presented City School District of Albany Superintendent Kaweeda G. Adams with a Community Partner Award on Oct. 23. Adams accepted the award on behalf of the district at Whitney Young's annual Legacy Event, held virtually this year.

"It is very humbling but also very rewarding to be able to accept this on behalf of the numerous people in our district, within the partnership, and most of all, on behalf of our students and families," Adams said.

Whitney Young's School Based Health Center Program provides primary and preventive medical services to students in clinics at four district schools: Albany High School, Giffen Memorial Elementary School, Philip Schuyler Achievement Academy and Sheridan Preparatory Academy.

New this year, services at the four school clinics are open to all district students – a great benefit to families from throughout the district, Adams said.

Adams was credited for being a great ally and supporter of Whitney Young programs.

"Thank you, Superintendent Adams, for your leadership in expanding access to health care for all students in Albany," said Antoine Harrison, vice chair of Whitney Young's Board of Directors.



Schuyler nurse **Jill Thornton**



Blood drive student coordinator **Maggie Papa**



Officer **Willie Hughes**

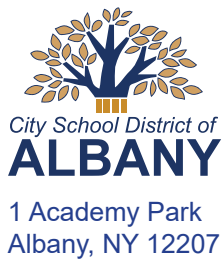


MBK Fellows **Robert Glover** and **Jareem Morris**

Board of Education

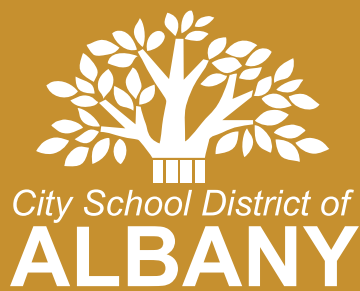
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in this newsletter and more at:
albanschools.org



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: John Wyld

*Class of '98,
technology coordinator,
Crystal Apple recipient*



Overnight, COVID-19 shifted education to a virtual environment for schools nationwide last spring. Even though teaching and learning have returned to a partially in-person environment this fall, the virtual component remains the primary method of instructional delivery for many students. As technology coordinator for the City School District of Albany, John Wyld has led efforts to make the dramatic and difficult change easier for students, faculty and staff, and families.

A 1998 Albany High School graduate, Wyld went on to earn his bachelor's in information science from Syracuse University. He became the district's technology coordinator in 2018. He leads a team of 10 that handles all technology questions and requests for help from the district's 9,000-plus students and approximately 1,500 employees. Their work also entails the upkeep of district computer software and systems, and Wyld specifically helps principals and administrators plan and implement technology initiatives.

Q: What does your average workday look like?

Every day starts with a "dad joke" for my staff! Adults need to laugh more. From there, every day is different based on priorities and volume of Help Desk calls. As you can imagine during COVID-19, the volume of support has increased significantly. During the month of September alone our office received 5,204 phone calls and 1,416 Help Desk tickets.

Q: How does growing up in Albany and being a product of Albany schools influence your relationships with students, staff and families?

Albany High School's education helped me get into my program at Syracuse, and its educators and staff helped shape me into the person I am today. I hope every day that I am doing my part to continue moving the district forward. It is exciting to be part of the past, present and future.

Q: What's the most common tech-related problem you're asked to solve?

Password resets!

Q: What's the most important technological advance in the last 50 years, and why?

Internet and network connectivity. During these COVID-19 days, think of how much we are all able to stay connected. As it relates to education, and while we are all learning, it is exciting to think about what instruction will look like in the next 50 years!



Alumni achievement

Molly Hennessy-Fiske '95

In May, Molly Hennessy-Fiske was one of several journalists covering George Floyd protests in Minneapolis when she was tear-gassed by police.

Hennessy-Fiske – a 1995 Albany High School graduate – is an award-winning reporter for the *Los Angeles Times*. She's had plenty of tense assignments in more than two decades of reporting, but Minneapolis was a first: Police fired tear gas at her and her colleagues after they identified themselves as members of the media.

Most of Hennessy-Fiske's assignments don't put her in harm's way. Still, as an *LA Times* national correspondent, she's covered wildfires in the west (*she's pictured above talking to a survivor in Oregon*) and spent time in refugee camps on the Mexico-U.S. border.

Her work takes her all over the place. And she loves it.

"I'm always interested in covering places that are different than where I'm from," Hennessy-Fiske said.

She lives and works in Houston, but keeps close ties to Albany. She recalls her Albany High years with fondness.

"I had so many great teachers and coaches," she said. "I really need to write to them and thank them."

At Albany High, she embraced all the school had to offer.

She played three sports, led the Speech and Debate Team (and went on to compete nationally), wrote for the school newspaper, was a peer mentor and mediator, and more.

She also – why not? – tried out for and landed a starring role in the school musical her senior year.

As a top student and an athlete, Hennessy-Fiske had a diverse group of friends who shaped the world view she has today.

"I had a very different mix of friends on the track team than I did in my classes," she said. "The experience of doing both was important. It influenced what I wanted to be, how I wanted to be."

The opportunities at Albany High were one of the reasons she got into Harvard University.

"I was very well-prepared for Harvard from the education I got at Albany High School," she said.

Overall, Albany High helped shape her into a person who values diversity and is comfortable in a variety of settings, she said.