



City School District of
ALBANY

Capital Education

Winter 2021

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In-person options increase for students

The brightening prognosis for both the health and fiscal outlook of the COVID-19 crisis has provided the City School District of Albany the welcome opportunity to expand in-person instruction for students.

The district's middle schools and Albany High School are in the process of bringing nearly 1,100 students in grades 7-12 back to campus during the third quarter, while continuing to follow and monitor health and safety guidance from the federal and state levels.

The district also is working toward expanded in-person opportunities for all general education students in grades 7-12 during the fourth quarter, which begins April 26.

As of March 19, a total of 1,767 students and families in grades 7-12 had responded to a district survey indicating that they

would choose a hybrid instructional model for the fourth quarter. This will include in-person instruction one or more days a week.

Students switching to the hybrid model will receive fourth-quarter schedules during the week of April 16. Students and families also can expect to receive much more information about the fourth quarter in the coming weeks.

Another 1,082 students and families responding to the district survey indicated they would prefer to remain in a distance learning model. The district will continue to offer that option as well.

"We are so excited to have the opportunity to welcome more of our students in grades 7-12 back to school in-person during the third and fourth marking periods," said Superintendent Kaweeda G. Adams. "However, we are mindful that we remain

in the midst of a global health crisis, and that we must continue to be vigilant about all health and safety guidelines as we move forward."

Planning for the 2021-22 school year also is in motion. The district's primary goal is to offer in-person instruction for every student and family that request it. Students and families will be able to review and provide feedback on those plans later this spring.

Managing a difficult school year

Last summer, the district had planned hybrid instructional models for middle school and high school students in response to the major health and safety concerns of returning to school amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Student achievement: Onovu Otitigbe-Dangerfield

No question about it – top student in Class of 2021

Onovu Otitigbe-Dangerfield asks a million questions.

Her curiosity, smarts and persistence have paid off. With her near-perfect GPA, the Albany High School senior is poised to be valedictorian of the Class of 2021.

She will be the first African-American valedictorian in the school's history. Reaching that milestone is empowering, she said.

"An image speaks realities into existence that people can't necessarily envision for themselves unless they get to see that representation for themselves," she said.

She hopes to use the platform to inspire not only other young women of color, but individuals throughout her community.

School always was a priority for Otitigbe-

Dangerfield, who also was valedictorian of her eighth-grade class at Stephen and Harriet Myers Middle School.

"I come from a Nigerian household, so education has always been important," Otitigbe-Dangerfield said.

She also liked school and was eager to learn.

"I've always been curious and my desire to learn is what motivated me to be dedicated to studying and seeking to understand content," she said.

Her family provides the chief inspiration for her work ethic, providing her with a group of strong role models from professions that range from engineering to teaching to child-care. Other critical support came from the teachers, guidance counselors and coaches

who encouraged her learn, create and innovate.

Ellen Green was Otitigbe-Dangerfield's middle school guidance counselor, and the two remain close.

"Even in her middle school years, Onovu navigated systemic roadblocks and was a champion for her education, which of course continued to drive her toward increased confidence and success," Green said. "Being in her presence for only a minute will allow you to realize she will make the world a better place."

Technology teacher Allen Landman taught Otitigbe-Dangerfield all four years of high school and worked with her on the school's robotics team. He said she's one of the best students he's ever had the pleasure to teach.

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Marking one year in a global health crisis

From the superintendent

The week of March 15 marked one year since COVID-19 enveloped the Capital Region and significantly changed the face of education for our students and families.

The worldwide pandemic has affected everyone over these 12 difficult months – some in the most unimaginable ways due to the loss of life, social-emotional challenges, health care disparities and economic turns that COVID-19 has and continues to cause.

We know that our students, families, faculty and staff have faced so many challenges during this global health crisis. We have worked through these challenges and been resilient, flexible and innovative in our strategies to adapt, pivot and persevere.

From the first day of our school building closure last March, we provided meals to address the acute food insecurity that many families experienced. We provided more than 353,000 meals from March-June through the courageous efforts of our staff and volunteers, and we have continued those efforts this school year.

We also worked tirelessly to deploy technology to our students, and to provide professional development for our teachers and support staff in delivering instruction through Google Classroom.

By early April last year we had distributed our district supply of nearly 4,000 Chromebooks to students, prioritizing a device-per-household model to stretch our limited resources as far as we could at that time – a time when the state still was measuring the pandemic in two-week increments.

Today, we have 11,000 Chromebooks and have achieved a 1:1 computing model. We are grateful to the community partners who also supported the technology needs of our students and families.

We are excited to have the opportunity to welcome more of our students back to school in-person this spring. This will include expanded extracurricular



opportunities and activities to address the growth and development of the whole child.

We also have started looking ahead to next school year. Our goal is to provide in-person instruction for every student and family that wants it, and to address academic gaps that have developed during the pandemic.

We will ensure that our planning aligns with all required guidance from federal, state and county health officials.

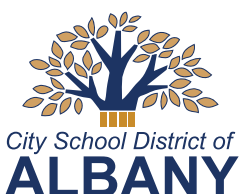
We look forward to getting feedback on these plans for 2021-22 from our students and families later this spring.

None of this has been easy, and it has not been perfect.

I am grateful to our Board of Education, and all of our faculty and staff, for doing their best throughout this crisis to meet the needs of our students. I also am grateful to every district family, and our community partners, for remaining “All in for Albany!” throughout this very challenging year.

Yours in education,

Kaweeda G. Adams
Superintendent



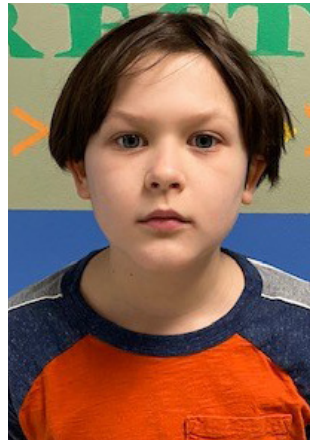
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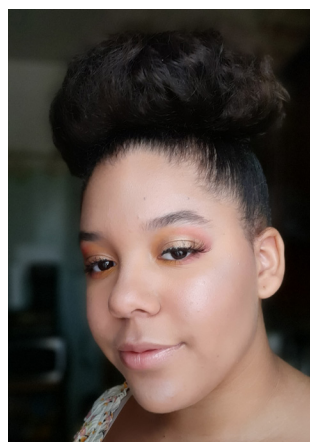
Voices

Q: If you had a chance to meet with President Joseph Biden, what issue or issues would you suggest that he focus on as he begins his first term?



“ President Biden should focus on climate change. Millions of people live in coastal, subtropic, tropic and dry areas. Climate change will affect those areas with flooding, heat waves and droughts. Because of climate change, the ice caps are melting in areas around the world, hot and cold temperatures are enhanced, and there will be more extreme weather conditions. If we don’t stop climate change soon, it may be too late. ”

– **Conor Amodeo**
Eagle Point Elementary School
Fifth grade



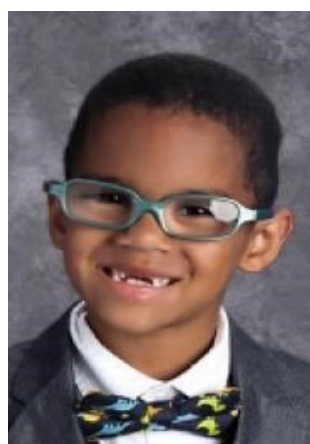
“ As President Joseph Biden begins his presidential term there are a few issues that he should focus on, but I’ll be shedding light on the issue of systematic racism. Black, indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) have never been fully treated fairly by the system that is there to protect all citizens no matter the color of their skin. In the movement Black Lives Matter, BIPOC came together to fight for the equality they deserve. President Biden can help fix a system that has been broken for far too long. ”

– **Mariah Carter**
Albany High School
Junior



“ President Biden should focus on stopping white supremacy. I’m afraid that my mom and I are going to get hurt, or worse, get killed by someone who doesn’t like us because of our race. We need better gun control. Kids have gotten hurt or killed because of lax gun laws. I worry that someone might shoot me just because they had access to a gun. ”

– **Thornton Stewart Fraser**
Delaware Community School
Fourth grade



“ President Biden should work on two main issues that will help all people. First, getting 100 million people vaccinated in 100 days. This was his campaign promise. He promised this to prevent COVID-19 from spreading and so things can get back to normal. Second, I would like to for him to address climate change. We need to make sure that the Earth’s climate does not get any hotter! The glaciers are melting. This, I think, is causing so many hurricanes. ”

– **Yohance Jolivette**
Arbor Hill Elementary School
Second grade



“ President Biden should focus on racial inequalities that exist in the United States. Black people are three times more likely to be killed by police than white people, which shows the justice system has bias and prejudice within. American citizens are dying at the hands of people who are supposed to be here to protect us. As president, I am hoping he will see this as a first step to make America a safer home for all. ”

– **Marley Smith**
Myers Middle School
Eighth grade



Pre-K, magnet lottery information

The City School District of Albany's prekindergarten and magnet programs offer families an array of options for an outstanding elementary school experience.

The lotteries to enroll in pre-K and magnet programs for the 2021-22 school year were held virtually on March 17 at 10 a.m.

Once lottery seats are assigned, the district will mail you one of the following letters: an acceptance letter, a waiting list letter (for pre-K) or a waiting-pool letter (for K-5 magnet programs). This notification will also be sent to the email address you provide on the application.

If your child is selected in the lottery, you will receive an acceptance letter. You must register your child by the deadline indicated in the letter. If you do not register your child by the deadline, his or her spot will be given to another child. You can register electronically or by mail, and can visit albanyschools.org/registration to find more information on how to do so.

Please keep in mind that you will be required to select a learning preference (virtual or in-

person) when completing your registration paperwork. Selecting a learning preference does not guarantee placement within that model. All enrollments are subject to the capacity of the building due to social distancing guidelines.

If your child was not selected in the lottery, you will receive either a waiting list or waiting pool letter, both through the mail and to the email address you provided on the application. This letter will contain additional instructions on the options available to you if you did not receive your first choice. You can also learn more about both the magnet and pre-K lotteries by visiting albanyschools.org/registration. You can also contact Kahla Kuchta for more information at (518) 475-6551 or kkuchta@albany.k12.ny.us.

The district also offers pre-K for 3-year-olds at community locations. A lottery for those spots will be held later this spring.

Although we encourage families to enter the annual lotteries for the best chance of securing a seat for September of the upcoming school year, we accept magnet and pre-K applications year-round. You can learn more about this by visiting the "applying outside the lottery window" sections of our pre-K and magnet registration pages on our website.



Albany High grad rate hits new milestone

The Albany High School Class of 2020 achieved the highest graduation rate in the 16 years of the state's current accountability system, with 73% of the class earning diplomas in four years.

The State Education Department released its annual graduation data in January. Albany High's rate increased from 68%, where it had held steady for the classes of 2018 and 2019. That had been the school's highest rate since the state started measuring graduation under its current methodology in 2005.

"This new milestone in our continued work to raise achievement for all students in our school district is a tribute to our students and their families, as well as to the dedication of our faculty and staff, and the leadership at Albany High School," said Superintendent Kaweeda G. Adams.

"We have maintained a consistent focus on the delivery of high-quality instruction,

establishing an environment of high expectations and supporting our students' social and emotional well-being. These will continue to be our primary areas of focus in our efforts to continue our progress in the years to come."

Graduation rates increased statewide in 2020, with an overall increase of 1.7% from 2019. The statewide rate for 2020 was 84.8%.

The 73% mark for Albany High's Class of 2020 represents a 7.4% increase from 2019. It is the seventh year in a row that Albany High's graduation rate has increased or held steady.

Albany High's lowest graduation rate under the state's current methodology was 50% for the Class of 2010. The 2020 graduation rate represents a 46% increase since then.



(Above left) Philip J. Schuyler Achievement Academy fourth-grader **Skye Harris** expanded her knowledge of circuits and electricity with some hands-on learning on Jan. 15, using a science curriculum kit to explore open and closed circuits, along with the conductivity of different materials.

(Above right) Pine Hills Elementary School fifth-grader **Hadia Niazi** paused to examine her measuring implements while presenting her findings from a Jan. 22 experiment on the concentration of solutions.

(Right) Albany School of Humanities (ASH) kindergartner **Skyler Spriggs** worked on a building block challenge as part of his classroom's 100th day celebration on March 5.



(Left) Albany High School students learned about one of upstate New York's best natural resources – maple syrup! With the help of The Vegetable Project, freshman **Davonte Watkins** inserted a tap into one of the many maple trees on the Albany High property.

(Below) In March, Montessori Magnet School fifth-graders designed their own sleds using basic household items. In advance of the STEM assignment, **Miles Maercklein** caught some air while conducting a hillside "experiment" to determine the best items to use to make a sled that is safe, comfortable and fast!





(Above) With pig in hand, first-grader **Charlotte Taber** took on the persona of Fern from the beloved E.B. White book “Charlotte’s Web” on March 2 when Thomas O’Brien Academy of Science and Technology (TOAST) celebrated Read Across America Day.



(Above right) Albany High School junior, JROTC cadet and culinary student **Troy Millin** believes that dessert connects with your soul, which is why he likes to bake. He also likes to give back to the community and bakes birthday cakes for veterans. He is pictured decorating a cake for one on Feb. 26 in the kitchen at Abrookin Career and Technical Center. Members of the local American Gold Star Mothers chapter got wind of Millin’s efforts and recently surprised him with baking supplies and ingredients so he can continue his work at home.

(Right) **Grace Collins** and her first-grade classmates at New Scotland Elementary School celebrated 100 days of school (and their knowledge of the number 100) on March 2 by dressing as 100-year-old versions of themselves.

(Below and below right) While our Communications Department regularly visits schools to highlight in-person learning, we are making sure to spotlight our virtual learners as well. Parents and guardians can submit photos of students engaged in virtual learning by visiting albanschools.org/photos.

Pictured below are submissions of William S. Hackett Middle School seventh-grader **Retaj Naser** (below) and Stephen and Harriet Myers Middle School seventh-grader **Etienne Douzal** (below right).



New equity, academic and community web content

The City School District of Albany has added a completely overhauled academics section, as well as an Equity in Education page and Community dropdown menu to albanschools.org to better organize web resources and serve all of our partners in these important areas.

The new academic section provides a clear overview for families of what students will learn at each grade level, along with a look at all the unique programming available at Albany High School.

The Equity in Education section includes links to the Board of Education's foundational Equity in Education Policy, as well as to a video series highlighting the perspectives of our students, faculty and staff, and a variety of additional resources.

The Community dropdown section of our main navigational menu includes links to information about employment opportunities in the district, our Workforce Development initiative, the district Hall of Fame, Parent University, community resources and much more.

Important special education reminders

Parents and guardians have the right to request a referral and evaluation of a child for the purposes of special education services or programs.

If you believe your child has a disability that requires special education or special accommodations, contact your child's building principal. You also can call Assistant Director of Special Education Catie Magil at (518) 475-6150 to discuss whether your child should be referred to the committee or the "504 Team" for a full evaluation.

For more information, please visit albanschools.org/specialed to download a copy of Special Education in New York State for Children Ages 3-21: A Parent's Guide.

If your child attends a non-public school in Albany, you may request an evaluation to determine eligibility and need for special education by writing to the Committee on Special Education, 75 Watervliet Ave., Albany, NY 12206.

For a student found eligible before April 1, a parent or guardian may request services to begin within 30 days of the determination.

If you plan to enroll your child in a non-public school in Albany in 2021-22, you must provide a written request for services to the Committee on Special Education by June 1. We urge you to provide your request as early as possible so the district's Committee on Special Education can develop an Individual Education Service Plan (IESP) for your student.

Please note that there is an April 1 deadline for requesting transportation if your child will attend a non-public school in Albany (see related story below).

If your child will attend a non-public school outside Albany in 2021-22 and you want services, you need to request the services in writing from the public school district where the school is located, also by June 1.

The district does not provide services to non-public-school students found eligible for accommodations under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

Please contact Magil or the Special Education Department at (518) 475-6150 if you have questions.

Non-public school transportation deadline



State law requires Albany parents and guardians whose children will attend a non-public school in 2021-22 to submit a written request for transportation to the City School District of Albany by April 1.

The purpose of this deadline is to enable districts to budget funds and make necessary arrangements to provide reasonable and economical transportation. This applies to students who will attend private, parochial and charter schools.

Please note that eligible students attending middle school and high school will be transported via CDTA buses.

For non-public school students who move into the city after the April 1 deadline, parents and guardians must submit a

written request for transportation within 30 days after establishing residency.

In order to qualify for transportation, students must meet the requirements under the district's Transportation Policy. Visit albanschools.org/transportation for that policy.

Requests should be mailed to:

Inho Suh
Director of Transportation
City School District of Albany
75 Watervliet Avenue
Albany, NY 12206

For more information, contact the Transportation Department at (518) 475-6170.

Achievement (continued from page 1)

"Onovu's ability to challenge herself and still persevere has always been something I admire most about her," Landman said. "She has always exhibited a combination of a positive attitude and a desire to constantly seek more knowledge."

"I know she will continue to display the same level of commitment in everything she does."

Joshua Binfield, her longtime soccer coach, sees Otitigbe-Dangerfield as an inspiration.

"Onovu's charisma, intelligence and work ethic make me proud to work at Albany High School, and she motivates me to empower other girls just like her," Binfield said. "She can and will achieve anything she puts her mind to, just like she has in her time at Albany High, breaking down barriers as a Black female leader."

Otitigbe-Dangerfield said people like Green, Landman and Binfield have helped her grow academically and personally.

"I've been able to develop a lot of confidence with the support I have," she said.

With that confidence, came leadership skills.

For example, Otitigbe-Dangerfield isn't just at the head of her class. She also is president of the robotics team, president of Key Club and editor-in-chief of the online school newspaper *The Nest*.

She sings in the Select Choir and plays

violin and piano in the Jazz Improv Band. She's also part of a group of seniors that operates the Student Technology Help Desk. She also makes time on weekends to work at a nursing home, be involved in church activities and binge-watch reality TV shows and episodes of "Law and Order" with her grandmother.

"Yes, I sleep," she said when questioned about her busy schedule.

Superintendent Kaweeda G. Adams first met Otitigbe-Dangerfield when the student was at the top her freshman class at Albany High.

"I am thrilled to see her accomplish the goal of valedictorian," Adams said. "Onovu is an inspiration not only to her peers, but adults as well."

"Her determination, work ethic and commitment to excellence model what it takes to be focused on your destination while still enjoying the journey. I am very proud of her."

In the future, Otitigbe-Dangerfield hopes to specialize in pediatric robotic-assisted neurosurgery and become a "surgeiner," an emerging field that combines the interdisciplinary aspects of robotic design and performing surgery.

As for the future? Harvard and Yale universities have accepted Otitigbe-Dangerfield, and she's waiting to hear from other schools before she makes a final decision this spring.

Options (continued from page 1)

However, the state announced in late August that it would withhold 20% of its funding for schools unless the federal government provided financial relief.

With no federal relief in sight last fall, the district made the difficult but fiscally responsible decision in September to reduce its 2020-21 budget, eliminating about \$15 million and 215.6 positions and shifting all general education students in grades 7-12 to distance learning.

The district was able to maintain an in-person option for all students in prekindergarten through grade 6, as well as self-contained special education students 7-12.

At the secondary level, the district began implementing Phase 2 of its instructional rollout in November, offering limited in-person opportunities for Albany High students. Those opportunities focused on career and technical education programs, music and art, and staff-supported learning labs.

The dramatic spike in COVID-19 cases in December (an average of 2.9 new cases per day in the district) and January (4.4 new cases per day) limited the district's ability to expand in-person opportunities.

However, COVID-19 rates have declined steadily since early February, a period that also has coincided with the growing availability of COVID-19 vaccines.

Fiscal relief on the way

Financially, the changing administration in Washington, D.C., in January under President Biden also led to significant aid for states and schools. In New York, that allowed the state to assure school districts that last summer's warnings of potential 20% withholdings would not come to pass.



The financial prognosis for next school year in terms of both state and federal funding also is hopeful.

The state Senate and Assembly both have proposed an increase of approximately \$1.4 billion in aid to schools for 2021-22 (the state's budget is due April 1). U.S. Senate Majority Leader Charles Schumer also recently announced that Albany's schools will receive an additional \$44.2 million in federal aid over the next two years.

These needed and welcome federal funds will help address academic gaps for students that developed during the COVID-19 crisis, and support investments in technology and other infrastructure needs that the pandemic has highlighted.

"We all have learned so much over the past year," Adams said. "We have shouldered the impact of COVID-19. We have worked through the challenges and been resilient, flexible and innovative in our strategies to adapt and persevere to meet the needs of our students, families, faculty and staff."

Awards & Achievements

Rewarding good deeds

City School District of Albany students continue to Do the Right Thing, and the efforts of several were rewarded March 3 with Samsung tablets.

“Do the Right Thing” is a collaboration that began last fall between the school district, the City of Albany and the Albany Police Department. Middle- and high-school students are nominated each month for their accomplishments, positive behavior and good deeds.

Each month a committee determines the top students, who receive tablets and other prizes.

Edmund J. O’Neal Middle School of Excellence student **E’maj Holland Hook**, pictured at right, was one of seven student winners of “Do the Right Thing,” and School Resource Officer Chris English hand-delivered the seventh-grader’s prize – a Samsung tablet – to his home on March 3.

To check out the Do the Right Thing honorees from previous months, and learn more about how to nominate a worthy middle- or high-school student, visit: albanschools.org/dtrt

District teacher makes Top Teacher list

LaQuita Love – businesswoman, hairstylist and Cosmetology teacher at Albany High School’s Abrookin Career and Technical Center – has been named one of the Top 13 Teachers of 2021 by WNYT/Ch. 13.

Love attended Albany’s public schools and graduated from Albany High School in 1994. She earned a cosmetology license in 1997 and in the next six years opened Safari New York Hair Studio and Hair Candy Beauty Supply.

She started teaching in the Cosmetology program at Abrookin in 2006. She completed her teaching certification at The College of Saint Rose while working full-time, and also earned a bachelor’s degree at SUNY Empire State College.

Love has been the recipient of both teaching and beauty awards during her career.

In 2020 and 2015, she earned the prestigious Golden Apple Award for Excellence in Teaching from the City School District of Albany. She received a 2018 Ujima Journey Kazi (work) Award and a 2012 Woman of Distinction Award from the Black Women’s Association.

Biden inaugural features alum’s music

Albany High School had a place in the Jan. 20 inauguration ceremony for President Joseph Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris.

The ceremony included a composition by Albany High graduate **Adolphus Cunningham Hailstork**, Class of 1959. The U.S. Marine Band performed Hailstork’s “Fanfare on Amazing Grace” as the second selection in the inauguration ceremony.

It is just the second time that a work by a contemporary African-American composer

has been performed as part of a presidential inauguration.

An internationally acclaimed composer, Hailstork is an eminent scholar and professor emeritus of music at Old Dominion University. He is a 2010 inductee into the City School District of Albany Hall of Fame.

Student Help Desk supports technology assistance

Four tech-savvy Albany High School seniors have made this year’s shift to distance learning a little easier on students and faculty alike.

Sarah Bearden, Hailey Krasnikov, Onovu Otitigbe-Dangerfield and **Myles Rosenzweig** make up this year’s Albany High Student Help Desk, a resource that supplements the school’s efforts to provide technology assistance.

The students guide classmates through resetting passwords, emailing teachers, finding and submitting Google Classroom assignments and more. They know what fellow students need because they surveyed them about the biggest challenges to distance learning.

The team also assists teachers who are learning to operate new equipment and navigate new programs.

And teachers love it.

“Myles walked us through how to navigate the HoverCam and taught us how to take screenshots, record and do other tricks that will be game-changers once we are back to in-person teaching,” said special education teacher Kristin Davey.

Interested in being on the Student Help Desk? Apply through March 26. To learn more, visit: ahsstudenthelpdesk.weebly.com

Former Falcon added to New York State Basketball Hall of Fame

On Aug. 1, **Nathaniel (Brian) Hines** will become the 23rd former City School District of Albany basketball player or coach inducted into the New York State Basketball Hall of Fame.

Hines, a teaching assistant at Eagle Point Elementary School, has worked for the district for 25 years. He played basketball at Albany High School as a sophomore and junior (1983-85) and was nicknamed ‘Dunkin’ Hines’ because of his aerial prowess.

During his time at Albany High, the Falcons won Big Ten and Section 2 titles. After graduating high school, Hines played at Westchester Community College and St. Augustine’s University.

Hines is the founder of the Dunkin’ Hines Basketball Classic, an annual tournament he started in 2005 for student-athletes Albany.



Rewarding **E’maj Holland Hook’s** good deeds



Albany High’s **LaQuita Love** and students (photo from 2019)



Student Help Desk’s **Sarah Bearden** (photo from Dec. 2020)



Former Falcon **Nathaniel (Brian) Hines**

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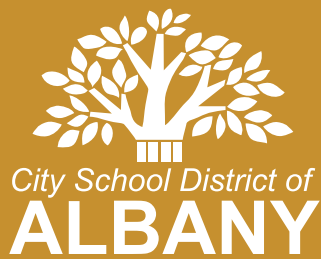
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in this newsletter and more at:

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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:

Suzanne McCarthy

Health Services Coordinator, RN



Suzanne McCarthy has been the City School District of Albany's daily go-to person on COVID-19, overseeing employee health screening and conducting contact tracing of every student and employee who has tested positive.

McCarthy joined the district in 2005 as a travel nurse, eventually becoming the nurse at Pine Hills Elementary School. In 2010, she took the part-time role as health services coordinator, which evolved into a full-time position. She now supervises 28 nurses who serve district schools and the city's private, parochial and charter schools. She stays on top of state and federal rules, tracks immunizations and more – work that continues in tandem with the critical duties the pandemic has added.

Q: How have your duties changed since COVID-19?

The biggest change has been the complete shift to my daily routine. I start at 7 a.m. reviewing our employee screener and I begin making calls. Some days 60-plus people indicate they have COVID-19 symptoms, and each one gets a phone call. A large part of my work also involves contact tracing for every report of a COVID-19 case in the district.

Q: What is the greatest challenge of your job?

It's not what you might think. My biggest personal challenge has been getting comfortable using a wide range of technology. Charting a child's health record was about as computer savvy as I ever was. Since COVID-19, I've learned to arrange virtual meetings on Google, make on-screen presentations and share documents while I'm doing them and more. I'm slowly mastering new skills. I am not afraid to ask for help and watch a lot of YouTube videos.

Q: What are the main reasons students go to the nurse?

First, the nurse's office is a safe haven for a child. It's quiet and kids get 1-to-1 attention and emotional support. The second reason is what I call general malaise: a strange rash, ringworm, head lice, their glasses need fixing or their eyes need checking. The third reason is true emergencies: seizures, head injuries, broken bones, life-threatening allergic reactions – the list goes on. We are not afraid to call 911.

Q: What do you like best about your job?

The people. Our kids, who have a lot to teach us. Our wonderful nursing staff and our community partners. The staff members I have spoken to and hopefully helped. And my COVID-19 support team: Dr. Kerri Canzone-Ball (Pupil Personnel Services director), Dr. Laura Staff (district medical director), and Lori McKenna and Dr. Cecily Wilson-Turner (assistant superintendents for instruction).



Alumni achievement

Crickett Thomas-O'Dell '76

Crickett Thomas-O'Dell is a member of the second class to graduate from the then "new" Albany High School in 1976. She would have been in the third class but graduated a year early, thanks to a City School District of Albany program that allowed her to enroll in higher-level courses beginning in fourth grade.

"I credit the faculty and administration for taking a keen and supportive interest in my education and providing me with the foundation to be successful," Thomas-O'Dell said.

A three-sport student-athlete, Thomas-O'Dell thanks her Albany High physical education teachers for helping with college applications and pointing her toward Russell Sage College in Troy, then an all-women's college.

The experience at Russell Sage taught her the importance of being an active and positive participant in all situations, and to not think twice about entering the male-dominated telecommunications industry upon college graduation.

Thomas-O'Dell's first job was with AT&T Information Systems. After 10 years she returned to Russell Sage for a career change and a job in the admissions office.

She then moved on to the University at Albany and several non-profits before landing her current position as regional director of the Workforce Development Institute of the Capital Region. She works with area businesses, organizations and educational institutions, including Albany High, that have a positive impact on the workforce.

"I am truly grateful to be actually 'giving back' in a meaningful way to the academic entity that helped to mold me and make me into the person I am today," she said.

In December, the institute donated 100 Chromebooks to seniors at Albany High's Abrookin Career and Technical Center, pathways Thomas-O'Dell believes in personally and professionally. Living and working in the place where she grew up has a great deal to do with who Thomas-O'Dell is. She sees nurturing and supporting that same community as opening doors for others.

"There are so many good people going above and beyond in giving of themselves – their talent and their time and energy – to provide opportunities for our students to grow in very important ways," she said. "To be a part of that process in some small way is very rewarding and humbling."