

Online success = student success

Albany High School's graduation rate has jumped significantly in recent years thanks in part to a web-based education program offered alongside the school's numerous traditional academic options.

The Online Success Program is one of several initiatives the school put in place in the last decade to help more students stay on track for graduation. The efforts are paying off: the graduation rate went from 50 percent in 2010 to 65 percent in 2017.

That's Albany High's highest graduation rate since the state started using its current methodology in 2005.

"The Online Success Program is one of our biggest game-changers," said Tom Vacanti, a science teacher and coordinator of the program at Albany High.

The program is available in the Online Success Center every period of the school day, for two hours after school Monday through Thursday, one hour after school on Friday and four hours on Saturdays.



Albany High School teacher Tom Vacanti, right, recently gave guidance to senior Mais Azzawi in the school's Online Success Program, which has contributed significantly to the school's increased graduation rate.

Lessons and coursework are aligned with state standards, and there's always a team of teachers helping students that run into problems.

"It's created a stepping stone for kids to be college- and career-ready," Vacanti said.

The program offers students the option to:

- "Recover" credit in 38 classes, meaning students relearn material in a subject and take additional tests to show they've mastered that subject.

- Take online electives in media literacy

(continued on page 6)

Student achievement

Albany High cancer survivor pays it forward

In November 2009, Rylyn Swierzewski woke up with a sore leg. She was in second grade and the youngest sister of three rough-and-tumble older brothers, so the pain didn't slow her down and she went to school that day as usual.

As the day wore on, she spiked a dangerously high fever – 105 degrees. She went to the school nurse and then her pediatrician, who sent her and her parents straight to the emergency room.

By midnight, Swierzewski was admitted to the hospital and diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia, a cancer of the blood and bone marrow.

"I spent the next two years in and out of the hospital fighting for my life," she said.

Today, Swierzewski is a healthy Albany High School sophomore and honor student. Cancer-free for six years as of Feb. 1, she is paying it forward by raising money to benefit the Upstate New York/Vermont Chapter of the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society.

She's also in the running to be the group's Student of the Year.

She doesn't remember much about being sick, although she underwent chemotherapy, blood transfusions, spinal taps and a variety of medicines.

"I'd wake up from a spinal tap and want to ride my bike afterward," she said. "That was not allowed."

What she recalls is the effect the disease had on her family, especially her brothers.

There were times during treatment when a touch resulted in a bruise. Her oldest brother had to remind her other brothers to be gentle with her – a bit of a challenge for siblings "big on beating each other up," she said.

Other times when she was sick, her brothers had to stay with relatives. That was difficult for everyone, too.

Still, it never dawned on her that she might not get better.

"All I did was focus on the good," she said. "I always had a smile on my face."



Cancer survivor Rylyn Swierzewski is pictured undergoing cancer treatment in 2009 (top photo) and today. She's paying it forward now by raising money for research and treatment.

Not only for my parents, but for myself.

"I didn't want my number one characteristic to be that I was a kid with cancer. I wanted people to think of me as a smart person who could ace a test or be great at track."

Swierzewski first got involved with the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society in 2012, shortly after her last chemotherapy treatment, when she was named the group's Girl of the Year. In the following years, she helped raise money and awareness at several events, and was named an Honored Hero last fall.

She wants to help because she's been there and knows what it's like for cancer patients and their families. She also knows she has a powerful message that can inspire people to support efforts to beat the disease once and for all.

To support Swierzewski's efforts, visit <http://events.lls.org/uny/unysoy2018/rswierzews>.

JROTC cadets earn trip to Girls State

Albany High School JROTC cadets Irene Nelson and Christina Black will represent the City School District of Albany this summer at the 2018 American Legion Auxiliary Empire Girls State program.

"I am happy to have the chance to represent my school, my JROTC battalion and my family," Black said. "I will make you proud."

"Being selected for Girls State is something I could have never imagined," Nelson added. "I am delighted that I will be able to represent my school."

Empire Girls State is a hands-on, week-long educational workshop focusing on the traditions, institutions and ideals of America and the political process.

Nelson and Black, both juniors, will have the opportunity to network with peers from across the state and meet with government leaders when they travel to the State University of New York College at Brockport for the event this July.



Albany High School juniors and JROTC cadets Irene Nelson, left, and Christina Black will represent the district this summer at Girls State.

"Both students live the Army values of loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity and personal courage on a daily basis," said Albany High JROTC instructor David Erickson, a retired Army major. "They represent all that is right with Albany High School and America's young people."

Members of The Joseph E. Zaloga Post #1520 selected and sponsored Nelson and Black to attend.



Delaware Community School prekindergarten pals Torres Sang, Issa McDowell and Sabir Abdul-Hameed recently paused from building a Lego bridge to pose for this photo. The City School District of Albany offers full-day pre-K in all 12 elementary schools and at 20 locations in the community. Pre-K seats are enrolled in a lottery open to all Albany children. Learn more on page 3.

From the superintendent Forward momentum continues



Kaweeda G. Adams
Superintendent

“Great things are happening in Albany’s public schools” is a statement you will see on the school calendar, in school district publications and even on the sides of some city buses.

After six months on the job – six months of sitting in classrooms, talking to students, meeting with administrators and working with faculty and staff, parents and community members – I can say with certainty this statement is true.

For example, the Albany High School graduation rate is at its highest in more than a decade. That is due to school-wide efforts to improve teaching and learning, including the Online Success Program (*learn more on page 1*). I am confident that the momentum will continue under the leadership of Albany High’s new principal, Jodi Commerford (*learn more on page 8*).

In addition, during the next school year the City School District of Albany will offer more than 1,000 seats in our 3- and 4-year-old prekindergarten programs – meaning children throughout the city will have the opportunity to take part in pre-K in our elementary schools and community agencies (*see page 3 to learn about this year’s pre-K lottery for 4-year-olds*).

That will allow us to continue to bolster our efforts to ensure that our youngest learners have the skills they need to succeed in school.

Despite the gains, we still have numerous challenges in our school district. Moving forward, we look to see across-the-board improvement in student achievement as we implement best instructional practices to close the achievement gap in academic performance that exists between African-American and Hispanic students and their white peers; there is a similar academic disparity among students in different socio-economic groups.

To address these challenges, we look to continue to strengthen and build leadership capacity, provide instructional support to enhance the delivery of quality instruction, differentiate instruction and engage our students in the educational experience in more meaningful ways. These include community service activities, community partnerships, project-based learning and leadership opportunities beyond school.

One of the tools we are using to narrow the achievement gap is the integration of the best practices of AVID – Advancement Via Individual Determination. The program currently is in place at two elementary schools, all three middle schools and Albany High.

Initiatives like AVID, the Online Success Program and prekindergarten-for-all are part of our larger mission “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 school.” We are excited about moving forward, and we can be even better when we join together.

Whether you are a family member, business or community member, I urge you to embrace our mission and be part of the great things happening in Albany’s public schools.



**CAPITAL
education**

Capital Education is published by the City School District of Albany.

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Voices

Q: What makes you excited about coming to school?



I am excited about going to school because I get to learn new things. It also prepares me for my future and makes me a better me. I also get to meet new people and have new experiences. I also like how we get to do different activities every week such as gym, art, music and library. Those are some reasons why I am excited about going to school.

– Marcus Andrews, fifth grade
Pine Hills Elementary School



I really enjoy coming to school because it’s comforting to be able to attend a diverse school like Albany High. It’s a place where everyone is just free to be themselves and that creates a strong feeling of connection and friendship for all of us. I have seen relationships spring up between two completely different people here, and that, I think is something worth staying for and appreciating.

– Vaughn Albert, junior
Albany High School



I am excited to come to school and work with my friend Michael. We like to complete our science packets and shelf work together. I also get excited to come to school so that I can play my trumpet in the school band with Mr. Affatigato. I like my awesome teachers, Ms. Bakes, Ms. Dorato and Ms. Gaetano, because we do work together and they help me finish my work board assignments. I also like playing my Pokemon cards with my friends.

– Riley LaVigne, fifth grade
Montessori Magnet School



I get excited about coming to school because I can see my friends and teachers, and I get to learn things that will help me in the future. School is a safe place for me and I can be myself. School is also a happy place to be and my teachers help me with anything. My classes are pretty fun, too. When I am in math, I have all these different problems that are fun to work on. In social studies, I get to learn about world history – how the world was before us. In ELA, we learn how to “read between the lines.” In science, we get to learn about what everything is made of. That is why, every day, I am excited about coming to school.

– Selina Lora, eighth grade
William S. Hackett Middle School



Everything about school makes me excited! The one class that makes me the most excited is gym! I like the multiple sports we’ve learned how to play this year like basketball and floor hockey. I also get excited about going to music class because I get to play different instruments and sing songs. My favorite instrument to play is the xylophone because of the different notes each bar makes. I also get excited when my class works on group projects with our Chromebooks. I get excited about coming to school because I get to see my teacher and friends and learn something new every day!

– Ky/Zhjamir Mojica, fourth grade
Arbor Hill Elementary School



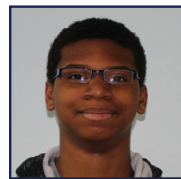
School is exciting to me because it opens me to new experiences. School is very important to me and my family, and I enjoy it as well. I am able to make new friends and do fun activities. School is exciting because it will help me succeed in my career choice and with future references. The school has many books for me to read, and I am able to explore my surroundings. Finally, school is exciting because there are many fun after-school clubs and field trips that are interesting.

– Sehaya Bedell, freshman
Albany High School



I am excited to come to school each day because I love to learn and read books. Also, I like to dress up every morning to see all my friends and my nice teachers.

– Star White, second grade
Delaware Community School



Learning new things is a great reason to come to school. Your teachers might give you information that gets you ready and want to learn more. Whether it is math, social studies, ELA or science, you can be interested in learning some new things. After-school programs are a great way to end the day. Some, like PAL, give you choices of what you want to do after school that you don’t get to do during the day. Plus you and your friends can hang out more and have fun. Learning new things every day, spending time with your friends and doing fun things after school is why it is exciting to come to school every day.

– Justin Whittle, eighth grade
Stephen and Harriet Myers Middle School

At a glance: North Albany Academy

Principal: Lesley Buff | **Grades:** Prekindergarten-5 | **Address:** 570 North Pearl St.

North Albany Academy strives to build a foundation for student success in college and career through a school-wide initiative called Advancement Via Individual Determination, or AVID. Starting with its youngest learners, the school uses AVID to teach students skills and behaviors that will help prepare them for more rigorous academic work and eventually college or a career. The skill-building lessons are incorporated into daily classroom work and continue throughout the grades. (*Learn more about AVID on page 3.*)

Students: 317 | **Teachers:** 29 | **Total employees:** 61

Points of distinction:

- The only district elementary school using AVID in all grades
- AVID Regional Showcase School

Programs and partners:

- Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID)
- Albany College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences
- Albany Police Athletic League (PAL)
- Albany Public Library
- All About Kids after-care program
- Black Child Development Institute
- Capital Repertory Theater
- Dental care through the Ronald McDonald Care Mobile Van
- Extended-day learning opportunities
- Junior Achievement
- JustRun
- Mentoring

- North Albany YMCA
- Park Playhouse
- Parsons Child and Family Center
- PTA
- Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
- Siena College
- Whitney Young Health Center Mobile Van

What makes our school special?

As part of its AVID work, North Albany Academy enriches student instruction by partnering with community businesses and local colleges and universities. The school expects its students to attain high levels of achievement and encourages them to pursue personal interests, take part in school activities and develop into lifelong learners.

Did you know?

Students can apply for school-wide AVID jobs that include photographer, newscaster, computer technician and ambassador.

Magnet, pre-K lotteries March 14

The City School District of Albany will hold lotteries for its prekindergarten and magnet elementary programs March 14, giving families plenty of options when it comes to their child's elementary school education.

Prekindergarten and magnet school spots for 2018-19 will be assigned through two random lotteries that will be held March 14 at 10 a.m. at Thomas O'Brien Academy of Science and Technology (TOAST).

Prekindergarten

The district provides full-day pre-kindergarten for 4-year-olds at all nine neighborhood elementary schools, its three themed magnet schools, its bilingual Dual Language Program and several community locations.

A complete list of prekindergarten programs and locations is at right.

Magnet schools or programs

A magnet school or program focuses instruction on a particular theme and incorporates that theme across all subject areas.

Albany's three magnet schools – Albany School of Humanities (ASH), Montessori Magnet School and Thomas O'Brien Academy of Science and Technology (TOAST) – and one magnet program, the Dual Language Program at Delaware Community School, give families a choice in public education.

The lotteries

An independent national firm conducts the lotteries to assure fairness and impartiality.

Once families have ranked their top choices on their magnet or pre-K application, certain factors can affect a child's eventual assignment through the lottery:

- **Sibling preference.** A child with a brother or sister already at an elementary school, both magnet and neighborhood, will have a better chance of getting into that school. This is called sibling preference.

- **Neighborhood preference.** A child who lives within his or her neighborhood elementary school zone or within a half-



Prekindertener Sarah Camilo proudly displayed her reading skills in the bilingual Dual Language Program prekindergarten at Delaware Community School.

mile of a magnet school will have a better chance of getting into that school. This is called neighborhood preference.

- **Number of applicants verses number of seats.** Some programs are in greater demand than others, meaning more families apply to those programs. Also, these limited seats often fill quickly with students who have sibling or neighborhood preference.

The names of children with a sibling preference are drawn first in the lottery. The names of children with neighborhood preference are drawn second in the lottery. All other names are drawn for remaining spots.

Sibling preference and neighborhood preference do not apply to pre-K classrooms located in community programs, only to those programs located in district schools.

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

After the lotteries

Once the lotteries take place March 14, the district will send letters to all families who submitted applications. If your child is awarded a seat, you must register your child for that seat by the deadline indicated in the letter. If you do not register by that deadline you risk losing your child's spot.

Visit www.albanyschools.org for more information.

Middle school studies continue

The City School District of Albany is evaluating three possible facilities options that could be a part of the district's long-term plan to meet its middle-school enrollment needs.

At its Feb. 1 meeting, the Board of Education authorized architecture and engineering consultant CSArch to explore costs of potential facilities projects at Arbor Hill Elementary School, North Albany Academy and Edmund J. O'Neal Middle School of Excellence.

The board also authorized the district to update its 10-year enrollment forecast, last completed in 2015.

The three facilities scenarios under discussion were among those considered by the Grade Configuration Steering Committee, a group of parents, staff and community members that studied and made recommendations about the district's long-term middle-school enrollment and facilities needs.

One plan calls for Arbor Hill Elementary School to be converted to a middle school. Under this scenario, North Albany would be enlarged to accommodate Arbor Hill's elementary population and O'Neal would remain a middle school permanently.

A second plan proposes that North Al-

bany be converted to a middle school, with Arbor Hill remaining an elementary school and taking in the elementary students from North Albany. O'Neal also would continue as a middle school under this option.

The third scenario would convert O'Neal to an elementary school and both Arbor Hill and North Albany into middle schools. Elementary students from Arbor Hill and North Albany would shift to O'Neal under this option.

In all three scenarios, Stephen and Harriet Myers Middle School and William S. Hackett Middle School would continue in their current use.

Any facilities work the board would authorize would have to be approved by voters before moving forward. New school configurations would not be in place until at least the start of the 2021-22 school year.

Each of the three scenarios that are being studied could require the relocation of other programs or services, such as the district-wide food service facilities currently at Arbor Hill and the Albany International Center program currently at North Albany.

The potential costs of those factors also will be included in the study, which the board expects to be completed this spring.

Pre-K programs in Albany's public schools

Neighborhood schools		
Arbor Hill Elementary School 1 Arbor Drive (518) 475-6625	Giffen Memorial Elementary School 274 South Pearl St. (518) 475-6650	Pine Hills Elementary School 41 North Allen St. (518) 475-6725
Delaware Community School 43 Bertha St. (518) 475-6750	New Scotland Elementary School 369 New Scotland Ave. (518) 475-6775	Schuyler Achievement Academy 676 Clinton Ave. (518) 475-6700
Eagle Point Elementary School 1044 Western Ave. (518) 475-6825	North Albany Academy 570 North Pearl St. (518) 475-6800	Sheridan Preparatory Academy 400 Sheridan Ave. (518) 475-6850
Themed programs		
Albany School of Humanities (ASH) 108 Whitehall Road (518) 475-6575	Dual Language Program at Delaware Community School 43 Bertha St. (518) 475-6750	Thomas O'Brien Academy of Science and Technology (TOAST) Lincoln Park off Delaware Avenue (518) 475-6875
	Montessori Magnet School 45 Tremont St. (518) 475-6675	
Community-based programs		
Albany Jewish Community Center 340 Whitehall Road (518) 689-0039	DIGI Academy of Learners 82 Madison Ave. (518) 818-0976	Nursery School at The College of Saint Rose Saint Rose campus (half-day program) (518) 337-2337
Arbor Park Child Care Center 96 Second Street (518) 465-8466	Ernestina DiCioccio Bilingual Day Care Center-Centro Civico 230 Green St., 1st Floor (518) 465-1145	St. Anne's Institute 160 North Main Ave. (518) 437-6735
Capital Milestones 3 Harriman Campus Dr. (518) 457-3210	Head Start (four locations) • Early Learning Center, 25 Monroe St. - (518) 463-0655 • Hackett Boulevard Head Start - (518) 436-0013 • Nathan Lebron Early Learning Center, 170 Ontario St. - (518) 729-2001 • Olivia Rorie Center, 7 Morton Ave. (518) 462-5411	St. Matthew Lutheran School 75 Whitehall Road # A (518) 463-8672
Children's Place at the Plaza Swan Street Building, Core 2, Empire State Plaza, Crystal Room Pavilion (518) 474-4736		Temple Israel 600 New Scotland Ave. (518) 438-7858
Children's Place at the Plaza State Ed. Building 10 North Hawk St. (518) 474-2918	Infinite Care 43 Quail St. (518) 432-2750	Trinity Nursery and Daycare 215 Lancaster St. (518) 436-4514
A Child's Place at Unity House 50 Philip St. (518) 434-0815		

North Albany showcases AVID work

North Albany Academy Principal Lesley Buff began implementing AVID at her school three years ago. During a workshop on goal-setting at that time, she wrote on a small card that her goal was to become an AVID Showcase School.

On Feb. 1, Buff's dream became a reality when educators from across the northeast visited North Albany to see the exemplary progress she, her staff and her students have made with AVID.

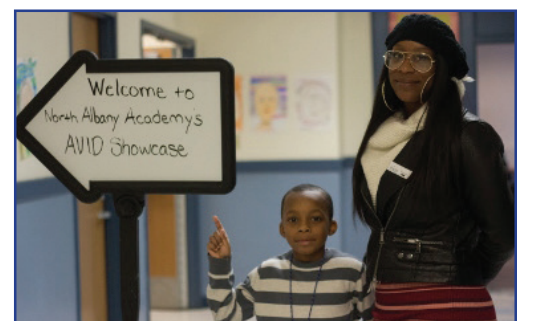
AVID – or Advancement Via Individual Determination – is an educational initiative in use across the country designed to close the achievement gap by preparing all students for college readiness and success in a global society.

North Albany is now fully immersed in AVID. Being selected as a Showcase School gave Buff and her staff and students the opportunity to display their success to 32 visiting educators from eight different school districts.

The showcase included an overview of North Albany's AVID journey, student-guided tours, classroom visits and student, staff and leadership panels.

"I can't even begin to describe how proud I am of our students and staff," Buff said. "To see their hard work and dedication to success showcased as an example to other schools is beyond amazing."

"The culture that they've developed in the building is unbelievable, and shows their kids that they will be career and



As part of his work with AVID at North Albany Academy, fourth-grader Mekhi Holmes applied for, interviewed for and earned the "job" of building ambassador. Part of this responsibility is to greet visitors during special building-wide events, and there was plenty to do on the morning of Feb. 1 as Holmes welcomed guests to the showcase – including his mother, Brandee Perkins.

college ready when they graduate from the City School District of Albany," said AVID Program Manager Pam Leibring, who supports schools throughout the northeastern region of the AVID Center. Leibring helped select North Albany for this distinction.

One parent echoed these sentiments and was moved to tears while describing the positive growth she has seen in her fourth-grade son since he arrived at North Albany and began working with AVID.

Delaware Community School is currently working toward full AVID implementation as well, with a primary focus on grades 3-5 in its first year of implementation. AVID is also present at the secondary level in the form of elective classes as well as teachers trained to use AVID strategies on a daily basis.

WE CHOOSE



Albany High School senior and culinary student Christina Murphy hoisted a tray of cookies fresh from the oven on Jan. 31 as she and her classmates prepared for their first community dinner held later that day at Abrookin Career and Technical Center. Under the leadership of Chef and Culinary Teacher Lisa Valentine, students will cook and serve a community dinner in March, April and May. All are welcome. Stay tuned for details!



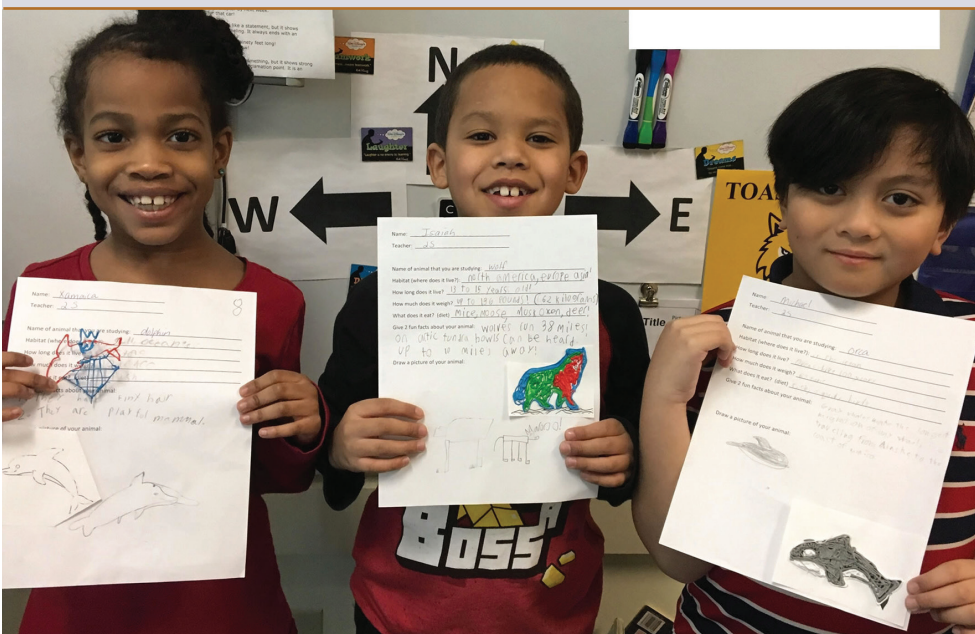
During December, eighth-graders in Melissa Hirt's technology class at Stephen and Harriet Myers Middle School worked with Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute students to use a computer programming language to explore the mathematics of Ghanaian Adinkra symbols. After learning about the history of symbols and programming designs of their own, students made Adinkra stamps out of foam that were used to decorate T-shirts. Pictured with their designs, from left, are Alexandra Roter, Zarron Bartley-Hughes, Mays Othman and James Benoit.



Albany High School junior Hasijna Gaddy lines up her shot during the varsity girls' home game against Guilderland on Jan. 24. The Lady Falcons defeated Guilderland 71-50, and Gaddy helped lead the team to victory with 10 points in the game.



The talents of the City School District of Albany's music department were on display on Jan. 25 for students, families, staff and community members during the annual Music Faculty Concert at Albany High School. Pictured performing is Ed Newell, band teacher at Arbor Hill Elementary School and William S. Hackett Middle School.



During January, second-graders at Thomas O'Brien Academy of Science and Technology (TOAST) learned about different animals in the classroom and picked one to study in-depth. Students researched and wrote about their chosen animal's habit, diet, life span, weight and appearance, and then, using a 3-dimensional pen, drew the animal! Xamaica Taylor-Skervin, Isaiah Mack and Michael Oasan proudly display the animals they're now experts on.



Family, friends and community members gathered at William S. Hackett Middle School on Feb. 6 for the school's annual Black History Celebration and Midwinter Feast. Along with Willie White, executive director of AVillage, students sang, danced and shared information about important African-Americans throughout history. Pictured after their performance are Mary Booker, Yuma-zhe' Oliver, Christanna McCray-Franz, Amelia Rodriguez and Natalie Harris.



The Pine Hills Elementary School community joined together on Feb. 8 for a Black History Month program and potluck dinner. Students sang, danced and shared their dreams, and everyone feasted afterward! Third-grader Zayden Butler was among several students who shared their vision of a better world.



Albany High School sophomore Dreme Baker was all smiles while giving blood for the first time on Jan. 11. She was one of 119 students and staff members who turned out to donate blood at Albany High that day, an effort by the school to help alleviate critical blood shortages locally and nationwide. Albany High will hold another blood drive on May 3, the third one of the school year, and will be in the running for scholarship money for the seventh year if enough pints are collected.



Delaware Community School fourth-grader Ja Den Watkins proudly showed off his AVID binder – the repository for all his subjects and assignments – on Jan. 29. On page 3, learn more about how AVID, or Advancement Via Individual Determination, is helping our students succeed.

ALBANY SCHOOLS



Fifth-grader Rihanna Roldan was among students in grades 3-6 who took part in a Jan. 20 Saturday Academy at Giffen Memorial Elementary School. There, students connected computing and culture with the help of researchers and undergraduate students from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. Saturday Academies meet twice a month at Giffen.



Albany High School seniors Jesenia Ramos, left, and Imahjai Sutherland put the finishing touches on two of their classmates' haircuts during their cosmetology class at Abrookin Career and Technical Center on Feb. 3.



Timothy Reaport, a fourth-grader at Albany School of Humanities (ASH), was all smiles after correctly spelling a word at the City School District of Albany Spelling Bee on Jan. 19. Learn more about the event on page 6.

Myers student wins district Spelling Bee

Stephen and Harriet Myers Middle School sixth-grader Isaac Allen spelled his way to victory in the City School District of Albany's annual Spelling Bee on Jan. 19.

The event features the top speller from each elementary and middle school throughout the district and is open to students in grades 4-8.

Allen – who placed second in the 2017 competition – set a new personal best when he claimed first place this year after correctly spelling “retrospective” in the final round.

New Scotland Elementary fifth-grader John Gormley and William S. Hackett Middle School eighth-grader Hidayet Chowdhury finished second and third respectively and advanced with Allen



From left, Isaac Allen, Hidayet Chowdhury and John Gormley were the top spellers in the school district's annual bee on Jan. 19.

to the Capital Region Spelling Bee at Proctors Theatre on Feb. 13 (*Capital Education* went to press before the outcome of the regional bee was determined).

Albany High student-athletes break the ice

In the beginning, everyone was a stranger. Every practice was a road trip.

And as the cold weeks and months passed, unfortunately almost every game turned into a loss.

So how did it feel to be the first Albany High School student-athletes to play high school hockey? C'mon ... it was hockey!

“It was lot of fun,” said sophomore Chris Gallagher.

“It's been cool,” said junior Patrick Trippany.

“We had some good bonding,” said junior Yoni Eligberg, the driver for all of those road trips to practice and “home” games at Union College in Schenectady.

Eilgberg, Trippany and Gallagher played for the Niskayuna-Schenectady-(and now)-Albany Mohawks this winter.

The other two schools were well-established partners in the Capital District High School Hockey League. The addition of the Albany High student-athletes for the first time was very welcome, said coach Sean O'Connell.

“They've been very positive on the ice and they bonded really well with the other players, and our players have been great with them,” O'Connell said.



Albany High student-athletes (L-R) Chris Gallagher, Yoni Eligberg and Patrick Trippany, with Niskayuna-Schenectady-Albany hockey coach Sean O'Connell.

Albany High does not offer hockey among its 14 varsity sports. Thanks to the new partnership, Director of Health, Physical Education and Athletics Kathy Ryan was able to add this unique opportunity.

For all three pioneering student-athletes, the season was memorable just for the chance to play the game they love in high school. They are all looking forward to 2018-19 – with an even larger group of Albany High student-athletes joining them, they hope.

“When I was little I always wanted to play high school hockey, and I was worried we weren't going to have it,” Trippany said. “Now that we do it's been great.”

Please visit the Athletics section at www.albanyschools.org to read more.

State tests on the horizon

Each year the New York State Education Department requires schools around the state to administer tests that measure student skills in English, math and science.

The tests begin in third grade in English and math, and students take them every year through eighth grade. Students in fourth and eighth grade also take science tests. Students throughout the state take the same test at the same time.

Other exams State Ed issues include:

- Regents exams – high school exams that measure ability in English, math, science, social studies and foreign language.
- New York State Alternate Assessment (NYSAA) – these tests in English, math, science and social studies measure the progress of students with disabilities in grades 3-8.
- New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT) – these tests measure the progress of English-language learners from kindergarten through grade 12.

The testing schedule for this year follows:

DATE	TEST
March 12-June 8	Alternate assessment tests in English, math, science and social studies (dates vary from school to school; families will receive a letter from school indicating the dates)
April 11-13	English-language arts (ELA) exam, grades 3-8 (make-ups April 16-18)
May 1-May 3	Math exam, grades 3-8 (make-ups May 4-9)
April 9-May 18	Speaking part of NYSESLAT exam begins (dates vary from school to school; families will receive a note from school indicating the date)
May 7-18	Listening, reading and writing parts of NYSESLAT exam (dates vary from school to school; families will receive a letter from school indicating the dates)
May 23-June 1	Performance part of science exam, grades 4 and 8 (dates vary from school to school; families will receive a letter from school indicating the date)
June 5-6	Written part of science exam, grades 4 and 8 (make-ups June 5-6)
June 12-21	Regents exams in a variety of subjects, grades 8-12

Please make sure your child comes to school well-rested and with a good breakfast so he or she is prepared to do his or her best on the days of the exams.

Volunteer spotlight

Name

Michael Karlin

Age

64

Occupation

Retired after 35 years as a teacher and case manager for the Office of People with Developmental Disabilities.

Volunteers at

Pine Hills Elementary School three days a week, four hours a day. He tutors English-language learners in grades 2-5 in math and English-language arts.

Why he volunteers

“I think it's very important to help people. I am retired, and to me, the definition of



Volunteer Michael Karlin works with fourth-grader Zakarya Hadi at Pine Hills Elementary School.

retirement is to volunteer. The definition of volunteer is to help people, and I really enjoy helping children.”

The AHS Theatre Ensemble Presents
Hair Spray
 THE BROADWAY MUSICAL
 BOOK BY MARK O'DONNELL, THOMAS MEEHAN • MUSIC BY MARC SHAIMAN • LYRICS BY SCOTT WITTMAN, MARC SHAIMAN
 DIRECTED BY GREGORY THEODORE MARSH AND WARD DALES
MARCH 15-17 @ 7PM + MARCH 18 @ 2PM + 2018

Online success = student success

(continued from page 1)

studies, multicultural studies, reading skills and strategies, and creative writing.

• Prepare for tests in English, math, living environment, U.S. history, and the SAT and ACT, to name a few.

Students sign up in the areas they want or need to improve and they get a digital learning plan. Because it's all online, any student with access to a computer, tablet or smart phone can learn, relearn, catch up or study even when school's not in session.

Additional help is available online as well.

“They can do it anytime, so there's no excuse,” Vacanti said.

The program isn't for slackers bent on taking the easy way out. Students looking

to recover credit – the biggest users – need to go to the computer lab to take assessments and have good attendance records in their other classes. They need to meet deadlines.

Vacanti keeps tabs on each student to make sure all that happens. If it doesn't, the student doesn't get credit.

“Living in Albany, I run into students all the time who were part of the Online Success Program during their time at Albany High,” Vacanti said. “Countless have said how much it helped them get back on their feet when they really felt like there was no chance of passing.”

“They claim that they simply would not have graduated without it, and that certainly puts a smile on my face.”

Young adds to bowling superlatives

Albany High School senior **Jahlil Young** added to an exceptional varsity career Feb. 12 by becoming the first member of the Falcons bowling team to qualify for the state tournament in at least two decades.

Young, whose resume already included a perfect game in his junior season, rolled a six-game series of 1,258 to qualify for states. He finished among the top six individuals out of 320 bowlers competing at all levels in Section II.

His high game of 269 also was the high game out of all 100 competitors in the Class A tournament.

Young led the Falcons to a fifth-place finish in Class A, also the team's top finish in at least two decades, said coach Nancy Madsen. The state bowling tournament is March 10 in Syracuse.

"I am extremely proud of Jahlil for reaching his goal of making it to the state tournament," Madsen said. "He has worked extremely hard to improve his game and I am so happy all his time and effort has paid off."



Bowler Jahlil Young rolls to state tournament.

Senior makes Presidential Scholar cut

Albany High School senior **Max Heller** is on the short list of nominees for the 2018 U.S. Presidential Scholars program.

Assemblymember Patricia Fahy nominated Heller for this distinction. Heller is pictured with, from left, Superintendent Kaweeda G. Adams, former Interim Principal Dale Getto and Fahy.



From left, Superintendent Kaweeda G. Adams, retired Albany High Principal Dale Getto, President Scholar nominee Max Heller and Assemblywoman Patricia A. Fahy.

Each year two students from every state, one young man and one young woman, are selected as Presidential Scholars, one of the nation's highest honors for high school students. Through his hard work and dedication, Heller is now in contention to receive this honor.

Albany High was one of only three schools in the Capital Region to have a 2018 nominee. Presidential Scholars are selected in the spring.

Lawson passes the century mark

Albany High School girls' basketball coach **Decky Lawson** achieved a career milestone when the Lady Falcons won the final game of their Suburban Conference season at Schenectady on Feb. 9. The win was the 100th of Lawson's varsity coaching career, making him just the second coach in school history to reach that plateau.

Lawson, who won a sectional championship as a member of the Albany High boys' basketball team in 1993, entered this year's Section II Class AA playoffs with a 101-25 coaching record over six seasons, including the 2013 Class AA championship.

Albany High's career leader in coaching wins in girls' basketball is Albany School of Humanities (ASH) physical education teacher **Leslie Bogucki**, who was 214-181 in 26 seasons before retiring from basketball in 2009.

Albany High librarian earns prestigious appointment

Albany High School librarian **Alicia Abdul** has been appointed to a prestigious committee of the American Library Association.

Abdul is a member of the committee that will determine the association's 2019 William C. Morris Young Adult Debut Award. The honor goes to a first-time author writing for teens and young adults.

"Only the best in our profession are asked to serve on these national committees and it takes some significant time, grit and effort to even be considered," said Abdul's Albany High colleague, Kristen Majkut.

Abrookin culinary teacher stands out

Chef and culinary teacher **Lisa Valentine** of Albany High School's Abrookin Career and Technical Center has been recognized for excellence.

WNYT/Ch. 13 named her as one of 13 top teachers in the Capital Region for the 2017-18 school year. WNYT profiled Valentine in January. You can watch the story in the In the News section at www.albanyschools.org.

Students win Creative Expressions contest

Two City School District of Albany students were among area winners in the Black History Month Creative Expressions Contest sponsored by Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Alumnae Chapter of Albany.

Albany High School senior **Shafiq Grady** won for his essay "Being Black in America." Montessori Magnet School fifth-grader **Karly Grant** won for her artwork "Journey North."

The students were featured in public-service announcements on local TV and radio throughout February.

New Scotland student artwork

featured on national journal cover

Artwork by New Scotland Elementary School fifth-grader **Jacky Nguyen** graces the cover of the January issue of Language Arts.

The original piece of art, created when she was in third grade, was spotted in May 2016 at the annual 1st Friday art show at the Albany Institute of History & Art. Kelly Wissman, one of the magazine's co-editors and a University at Albany faculty member, asked for permission to use the picture on the magazine's cover.

Language Arts is a journal that focuses on issues concerning children of preschool through middle-school age. It is published by the National Council of Teachers of English.

The November issue of the journal also featured the artwork of another Albany student, **Isabella Romeo**. Now in eighth grade at William S. Hackett Middle School, Romeo was a sixth-grader at Eagle Point Elementary School when her artwork was selected.



Cover art by New Scotland Elementary student Jacky Nguyen.

Important special education reminders

The City School District of Albany has an obligation to evaluate students who may have disabilities to determine their eligibility and need for special education, special accommodations or other programs.

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

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 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 2018-19, 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 soon as you know your plans so we may work with you and develop your child's plan early.

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 at right.)

If your child will attend a non-public school outside the City of Albany in 2018-19 and you want services, you need to request the services in writing from the public district where the school is located, also by June 1.

The district's Committee on Special Education will develop an Individual Education Service Plan (IESP) for students with disabilities. An IESP is developed in the same manner and includes the same contents as an Individual Education Plan (IEP).

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

Non-public school transportation deadline April 1

State law requires Albany parents whose children will attend a non-public school in 2018-19 to submit to the district a written request for transportation 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.

For non-public-school students who move into the city after the April 1 deadline, parents 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 the Transportation section at www.albanyschools.org for that policy.

Requests should be mailed to:

Denise Towne
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.

Check us out online!

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

- Albany High grad rate continues to rise
- Need a shed? Abrookin construction students can help
- District and police partner to support students exposed to trauma
- March is 'Music in Our Schools Month'
- Flu season reminders
- Albanettes perform for governor
- Clement student gives back to community
- Winter weather reminders

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

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Leading the way Meet Jodi M. Commerford '93 Albany High School principal

Jodi Commerford grew up in Albany's South End and she continues to call the city home. A 1993 graduate of Albany High School, Commerford earned a bachelor's degree in elementary education from The College of Saint Rose, a master's degree in reading from the University at Albany and her administrative certification at St. Rose.

She joined the City School District of Albany in 1999 as a teacher at the former School 19, now New Scotland Elementary School. She served there for the first 13 years of her career before gaining her first administrative experience as the substitute principal at Pine Hills Elementary School in the fall of 2010. She moved to Albany High as the Discovery Academy principal from January 2011 until August 2016, when she was elevated to operations principal and, the following May, vice principal. She took the helm at Albany High in January.



Jodi M. Commerford

Q: How does being an Albany native and Albany High graduate inform the work that you do now?

A: I was the first in my family to attend college. It was with the support of a few integral teachers that I found the confidence to pursue my education beyond high school. With the support of my parents, I learned to navigate college while working full-time.

I knew early on that I wanted to be a teacher in the city where I grew up. As soon as I graduated from St. Rose, I began teaching for the district. I realized I wanted to have more impact on educational systems, which led me to the administrative program for urban leaders. I thought I wanted to become an elementary principal, but immediately after starting at Albany High I knew I didn't want to work anywhere else.

Q: What's the most significant change you've seen at the school between the time you were a student and now?

A: The vast number of student opportunities, including AP/IB course offerings, after-school programming, tutoring, clubs, activities and sports. There are so many ways for students to participate and excel in becoming college- and career-ready. Other big changes are the rigor in our courses and the amount of dedication and time our teachers give to our students.

Q: What's the first item on your top 10 list of things you'd like to accomplish at Albany High?

A: To ensure, with our staff, that all students are successful in graduating and being college- and career-ready.

Q: What kind of student were you?

A: I was a student who struggled after attending private school through grade eight. When I started attending "the High," I needed to work hard at catching up to my peers in reading, writing and math. There were not academic intervention services to assist me when I was in high school. The diverse student body that I was a part of made me strive for more for myself. Because of positive college-bound peers in high school, I wanted to pursue the same college opportunities.

Alumni achievement Holly Fernandez Lynch '99

As a high school student, Holly Fernandez Lynch didn't have a clear idea of a career path. But her Albany High School education provided a foundation that prepared her for two decades of success ... and counting!

Fernandez Lynch attended the University of Pennsylvania after Albany High, earning three degrees at the Ivy League institution. Now she's on the faculty at her college alma mater.

"I was a typical high-schooler, not really knowing what I wanted to do," said Fernandez Lynch, who was inducted into the City School District of Albany Hall of Fame last September. "What Albany High did for me was set me up for success in college.

"I was completely prepared."

As a third-grader, Fernandez Lynch showed great promise as a student. So much so that she tested into the district's Academically Talented Program, a program for accelerated students. Her standout performance continued through high school.

Besides getting a great academic foundation at Albany High, she ran cross country and track. With the same determination and endurance, she took several Advanced Placement classes that transferred to Penn for college credit.

A course she took as a Penn freshman piqued her interest in bioethics, the study of ethical issues emerging from advances in biology and medicine. She earned a bachelor's in health and societies in 2003, then went on to earn both a master's in bioethics and a law degree in 2006.

Over the course of her career, Fernandez Lynch has become a renowned bioethicist with a special interest and expertise in the ethics of human subject research and conflicts of conscience in health care.

In 2017, Penn wooed her from Harvard Law School, where she was executive director of the Petrie-Flom Center for Health Law Policy, Biotechnology and Bioethics.

Today, Fernandez Lynch wears many hats at Penn.

She is an assistant professor and the assistant faculty director of Penn's first online master's program, a Master of Health Care Innovation at the Perelman School of Medicine. She conducts research and writes; her most recent scholarship involves studying the ethics of paying research subjects.

She serves on a federal advisory committee. She gives presentations on a range of bioethics issues and is a sought-after speaker nationwide.

In her career, she's written or co-written more than 50 articles that appeared in law and medical journals, online forums and newspapers, including *The New York Times* and *Boston Globe*. She also wrote a book, *Conflicts of Conscience in Health Care: An Institutional Compromise*, and has written and edited well over a dozen books and book chapters.

She's also married and the mother of three children – all within 19 years of graduating high school.



Holly Fernandez Lynch '99