



Capital Education

Fall 2021

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School-based centers good for kids' health

When Dawn Whitman didn't have a car, she didn't have to worry about getting her children to the doctor if they were sick or needed a check-up.

They were able to get primary and preventive health care at school, thanks to four school-based health centers that Whitney Young Health operates in the City School District of Albany.

Whitman's children are among nearly 900 in the district who are patients at school-based health centers, which are located at Giffen Memorial Elementary School, Philip J. Schuyler Achievement Academy, Sheridan Preparatory Academy and – new this year – Albany High School.

At the health centers, students can get physicals, strep and

glucose testing, vision and hearing screening, diabetes and asthma screening, preventive care like immunizations, acute care (including prescriptions) and referrals to specialists.

All the care is free.

In addition to regular patients like Whitman's family (*her son Jaeden is pictured above*), school-based health centers provide care to any student who lives in the district, said Amanda Duff, Whitney Young's director of community-based initiatives and program support.

For example, any student who had a sore throat could visit a school-based health center, where they would be examined by one of Whitney Young's health providers. They might get a

strep test, and if it was positive, Whitney Young could write a prescription and send it to the family's pharmacy.

Whitney Young would then circle back with the student's regular health provider. Each school-based health center has its own schedule, and eventually all will provide services Monday-Friday.

Services are provided under the direction of a doctor, family nurse practitioners and physician assistants. Whitney Young will make referrals for additional health and mental health services that cannot be provided at the school, Duff said.

(Continued on page 6)

Student Achievement

Kaelyana Rios aims to 'Be the 'I' in Kind'

Not everyone can tell, because of the required mask, but Kaelyana Rios is always smiling.

The eighth-grader is new to Stephen and Harriet Myers Middle School this year, and her positivity quickly caught the attention of faculty and staff.

"She is always willing to go above and beyond to help," explained guidance counselor Kristy Koldis. "Even in her first weeks here, she was offering to assist other new students with their adjustment."

Rios recently asked the Myers administration to work with them to help her peers resolve conflicts positively.

That conversation led to Rios' appointment to the school's Equity Team, which includes representatives from all grade levels and many of the school's clubs. Team members will be working together to earn Myers the Anti-Defamation League's No Place for Hate designation.

No Place for Hate aims to adjust school climate by building a community of inclusivity, respect and equity while encouraging students to realize that every person in a school has a role to

play in achieving that.

"I know there are kids with other opinions and perspectives, but I know I can work with them as a team," Rios said.

Rios also has agreed to serve as the student ambassador for the school's soon-to-be-released "Be the 'I' in Kind" campaign, which will promote anti-bullying activities and education. The goal is to empower each student to be the one person to effect change, with the hope of starting a domino reaction of kindness amongst members of the student body.

"I want to use the voice I was given," Rios said.

Rios believes the number of students who think like she does – and just haven't found their voice yet – make up the majority of the student body.

She's also confident it's kids – not the adults facilitating – who will be the ones to make the campaign a success.

"It's important to stand up for victims," Rios said. "My parents raised me that way."



From the Superintendent Working together for our students

The City School District of Albany is here to provide students and families with the academic, social and emotional support needed to be successful. We also continue to encourage and reinforce the importance of being safe, responsible and respectful.

However, we recognize that we cannot do this work alone. We need all of us working together on behalf of each of us so that everyone of us may be successful.

We ask parents, guardians and caregivers to support our efforts by having ongoing conversations at home about appropriate behavior, in school, on buses and in the community.

The pandemic has taken a toll on all of us. Our lives have been changed as we progress through the various stages of dealing with COVID-19. In addition, school districts across the state and nation are experiencing challenges as we adjust to the transition back to full in-person learning.

This adjustment takes time and consistency.

We are reviewing and practicing routines and procedures with our students. We are resetting norms and expectations at each building. We also are focusing on the social-emotional needs of our students.

Early in the school year, teachers and support staff focused on delivering quality instruction and beginning to address numerous social-emotional learning concerns. Through our classroom observation process and support of our instructional supervisors, technology coaches and instructional coaches, we have analyzed our assessment data to determine academic gaps.

We now are at a point where we are able to strengthen our ability to reinforce higher-level thinking strategies and accelerated learning strategies, which foster higher levels of engagement.

We also continue to address the social-emotional learning component by providing services to students and families who are experiencing difficulties



with the stressors of COVID-19.

Parents and guardians are encouraged to speak with school counselors and building administrators regarding challenges their children may be experiencing. Our schools have behavior specialists, school psychologists, social workers and community partners who can assist.

While prevention and proactive measures will always be our preferred strategy, we will continue to hold students accountable for inappropriate behaviors in alignment with our Student Code of Conduct. We also are working with our community partners to provide wraparound supports.

On behalf of our schools and our community, thank you for your continued support. Thank you for talking with your children regarding appropriate behaviors, and thank you for encouraging them to speak to a trusted adult about topics that may make them feel uncomfortable.

We are continuing to brave the unknown. We know that we can get through this. We know that together we are better and stronger, and we know that we will continue to be here for our students and families.

Yours in education,

Kaweeda G. Adams
Superintendent



Voices

Q: What does success in school mean to you?



“ Success in school can be achieved with just two words: working hard. Not all schoolwork has to be perfect, it matters that you did your best. If you just don't feel like it, tell yourself, 'It'll be worth it,' and you'll do that much better in school! Want to go above and beyond? Put in even more fun and effort!

— **Matilda Gish**
William S. Hackett Middle School
Eighth grade



“ Success in school means to me that I am understanding harder material and learning new things each day. It also means that I am kind to my classmates and that I am able to make new friends. Success in school doesn't always mean grades to me; it means how I feel at the end of the day and what I was able to get done.

— **Noah Hamilton**
Montessori Magnet School
Fifth grade



“ Success in school means that you are motivated to do great things in life. Success in school means that you are respectful to the teachers that are trying to get you far in life. Success in school means that you are focused and not worried about the wrong things. Success in school means you're not letting bad things get to you. I am successful and so are you.

— **Alana Harris**
Albany High School
Senior



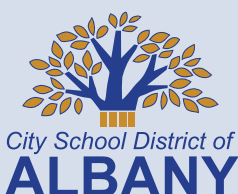
“ Success is reaching your goal to get where you want to be. Success to me means I'm doing something that I thought I could never have done, and I did it because I put my mind to it. Success in school also affects all of your life. If you can't succeed in school, there will be obstacles later in life.

— **Nyleve Rose**
Giffen Memorial Elementary School
Fifth grade



“ I think success in school can be shown in many ways. One way I show success in school is when I learn new things and complete my work. When you know about all subjects, you find jobs and do better. A second way to show you are successful in school is to get to know new teachers and friends. Finally, I think graduation will bring success.

— **Juan Chuqui-Guasco**
Dual Language Program
Fifth grade



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Feeder committee working on middle school enrollment for 2022-23

A team of City School District of Albany parents and staff members has been working through the summer and fall to develop recommendations for a new enrollment pattern for the district's three middle schools. This new feeder pattern would take effect next school year.

The Feeder Alignment Committee's work represents the final phase of a multi-year process to provide equitable elementary and middle school experiences for all students. The committee anticipates making recommendations to the Board of Education this fall. The board then will work toward selecting a final enrollment pattern early in 2022.

The primary goal is to ensure that all three middle schools – North Albany, Stephen and Harriet Myers, and William S.

Hackett – have similar academic profiles and total enrollment (600-650 students each).

As an important step toward equitable enrollment patterns at all schools, the district has shifted this year to prekindergarten-grade 5 enrollment at all elementary schools and 6-8 enrollment at all middle schools. The district has been committed to this configuration for many years, but has not had appropriate middle school space to ensure equity for all students in grades 6-8.

North Albany is undergoing renovations and expansion to bring its facilities to the same level as Hackett and Myers. The construction at North Albany will complete the facilities portion of middle school transition by the start of the 2022-23

school year. The feeder committee's enrollment work aligns with that schedule.

In addition to total enrollment, the main criteria the committee has used to guide its work are:

Academic performance – Each middle school will have similar academic profiles, and enrollment patterns will not discriminate on the basis of race, color or national origin

Geography – Minimizing the distance from school to the greatest extent possible

You can view the materials and videos of the feeder committee's meetings at albanschools.org/committee.

Hall of Fame Class of 2021

The City School District of Albany has added seven members to its Hall of Fame, spanning the disciplines of education, performing arts, athletics and community service in the talents of this year's inductees.

The members of the Class of 2021 are:

John A. Carmello '84

A talented student-athlete at Albany High School and the University at Albany, Carmello went on to a distinguished career in education and now serves as superintendent of the Troy City School District.

Ward Dales

A beloved teacher at Albany High for more than two decades and the acclaimed leader of the award-winning Theatre Ensemble for more than 15 years.

Pat Fahy

A member of the New York State Assembly representing Albany, Fahy is a tireless advocate for public education and a former Board of Education member, serving as president in 2003.

Philo Germano '13

The only Section 2 cross country champion in Albany High history, Germano went on to star on Syracuse University's first cross country national championship team in 61 years.

The late John T. Harris '70

A dedicated district employee and community servant, Harris (a Schuylers High School alum) was committed to creating and sustaining programs to support Albany's youth, with a focus on young men of color. Harris (pictured at right) passed away Oct. 29 at the age of 70.

Margaret Lamar King

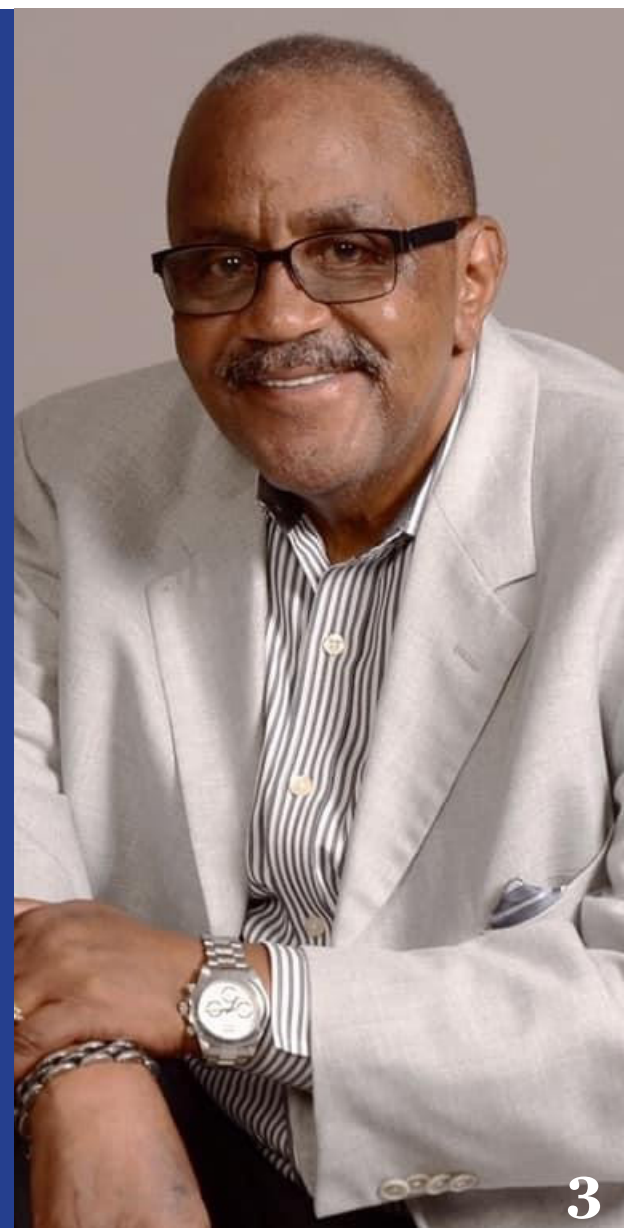
A well-liked physical education and health teacher for more than three decades, King also coached multiple sports and directed theater productions at William S. Hackett Middle School. She remains an enthusiastic supporter of the district and its students.

Emia Willingham-Hurst '13

One of the top basketball players in Albany High history, Willingham-Hurst led the Lady Falcons to the 2013 Section 2 Class AA championship. She was a New York State Miss Basketball finalist, and went on to play Division I basketball at Siena College.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the Hall of Fame induction ceremony planned for September was cancelled and will be held virtually, also celebrating the six members of the Class of 2020.

Learn more about all of our Hall of Fame inductees at albanschools.org/halloffame.





(Above left) Giffen Memorial Elementary School fifth-grade teacher Tiffany Moore served up an order of mathematics with an extra large side of fun for students **Samasia Majors**, **Makiyha Holland** and their classmates during the “Decimal Diner” on Oct. 21. Each year, Moore creates what she calls a “classroom transformation” to celebrate students’ hard work during a particular unit. This year’s classic diner theme was the capstone to their unit on adding and subtracting decimals.

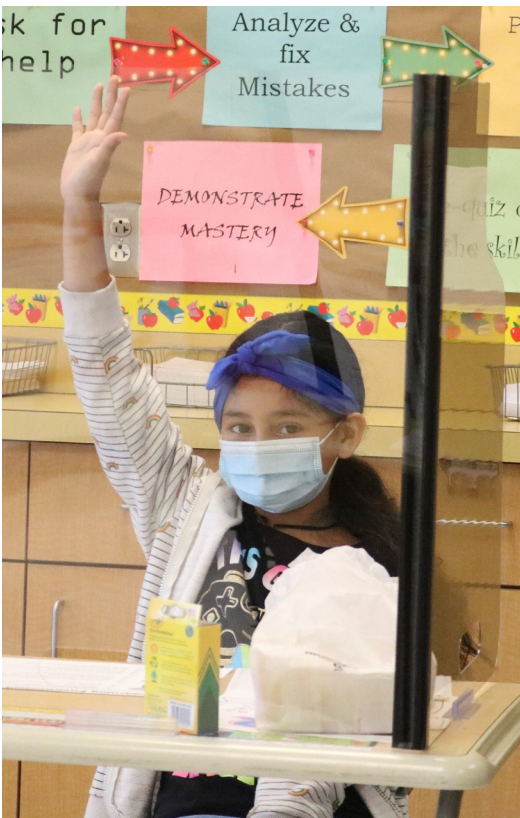
(Above) At North Albany Middle School, and throughout the City School District of Albany, the health and safety of our students and employees is our number one priority. Daily COVID-19 screening includes temperature checks upon arrival. Following his on the morning of Sept. 8, eighth-grader **Joseph Maley** was able to quickly move on with his academic day.

(Above) Arbor Hill Elementary School fourth-grader **Gabriella King** shared a text summary during the class’ literary analysis of Sharon Creech’s *Love That Dog* on Oct. 8.

(Right) New Scotland Elementary School will have hundreds of beautiful flowers surrounding the trees in front of the school come spring, thanks to our community partners at the Vegetable Project and plenty of student muscle. From left, third-grader **Jy’Aire Whetstone**, teacher **Rebecca Thompson** and third-grader **Dai’Quan Brown** were among students and staff who planted daffodils and tulip bulbs outside school Oct. 21.

(Below) Thomas O’Brien Academy of Science and Technology (TOAST) students and families were really STEAMed Oct. 20 – and it was great! STEAM stands for Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math. The school’s Family STEAM event featured a wealth of interactive activities that included moon-gazing through telescopes such as this one third-grader **Maryella Johnson** is using.





(Above left) Sheridan Preparatory Academy's **Emily Campos** knows the answer! The fourth-grader in Shaun Fisher's class demonstrates her academic initiative by enthusiastically answering questions during a lesson earlier this school year.

(Above right) Eagle Point Elementary School fifth-grader **Ismail Ismail** was hard at work during a small-group research project on America's national parks Oct. 22. Each team of four students focused on a different park, delving into its history, geography and ecology before compiling their findings on a poster to share with the class.

(Right) Albany High School sophomore **Rhyne Chedrry Navalta** explored rhetorical devices in speeches, including anaphora – repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of successive clauses to add emphasis – during her World Experience class Oct. 1.

(Below) In prekindergarten we play! **Jasir Proctor-Williams**, who is enrolled in Pine Hills Elementary School's early childhood education program, explores child-friendly science equipment that will pave the way for academic success in the future.

(Below right) Albany School of Humanities (ASH) second-grader **Christian Hymes** spent his ELA lesson on Sept. 24 getting into the fall spirit, reading some seasonal titles, collecting facts about apples and practicing vocabulary and sight words.



Update on snow days

When bad weather hits, New York school districts once again have the option to hold a distance learning day or a traditional snow day this school year.

The City School District of Albany will evaluate these decisions on a case-by-case basis, including whether a two-hour delay may be an option depending on the circumstances.

The simplest way for families to find out about weather-related decisions is to sign up to receive a text message through our SchoolMessenger communication system. Just text "Y" or "yes" to 67587 from a number we have on file in our SchoolTool student database.

Families also will receive a SchoolMessenger email and robocall to the contact info on file if the district closes or switches to distance learning due to the weather or other emergency circumstances.

The district also shares information about weather-related changes at albanyschools.org, and on Facebook and Twitter (@albanyschools).

You also can find information on the *Times Union* website and the following radio and TV stations: CBS6 Albany (Ch. 6), Spectrum (Ch. 9), WTEN (Ch. 10), WNYT (Ch. 13), WROW-AM 590, WGY-AM 810, WFLY-FM 92.3, WYJB-FM 95.5, WTRY-FM 98.3, WRVE-FM 99.5, WPYX-FM 106.5 and WGNA-FM 107.7

Providing high school equivalency test prep

The City School District of Albany is offering a free program to help adults who didn't finish high school prepare for the state's high school equivalency exam.

The exam, called the Test Assessing Secondary Completion (TASC), replaced the GED in 2014 as the only free exam leading to a high school equivalency diploma from the state.

Test prep classes are held in-person from 4:30-6:30 p.m. every Tuesday and Thursday at Tony Clement Center for Education, 395 Elk St. You must take the test-prep class in order to take the TASC.

Each student in the district's test-prep program will receive personalized instruction tailored to meet their needs. A certified teacher works with students to overcome their challenges so they can successfully pass the exam and earn a diploma. A student's level of preparedness will determine when they can take the test.

Class size is limited to 15. Students must be over 21 and residents of the City of Albany to enroll in the district's program.

For more information or to sign up, contact Jenny Evans at jevans1@albany.k12.ny.us or (518) 475-6071.

Centers *(continued from page 1)*

The school-based health centers help kids do well in school, too.

"Giving children and teens access to health care at school puts them in a better position to learn," said Lori McKenna, the district's assistant superintendent for secondary instruction.

"They spend more time in class because they tend to be sick less often and don't have to take as much time off school to get to appointments.

"We're incredibly grateful to our community partners at Whitney Young for providing this important service to our families."

School nurses work closely with Whitney Young

staff to get students enrolled and make the process convenient for families. Families can find enrollment forms at each school and online at wmyhealth.org.

Parents and guardians are welcome to be there for their children's appointments, but their attendance is optional, Duff said. This makes it easier for families with transportation challenges.

For Whitman and her family, school-based health centers have been a lifesaver.

"It's been so easy to have someone at school to look at my children," Whitman said. "I'm sure (the centers) have made a big difference for a lot of parents."

Spooky science with community partners

Regeneron scientists paid virtual visits to every City School District of Albany third grade on Oct. 24 and guided students in hands-on STEM experiments with a Halloween twist.

STEM is short for science, technology, engineering and math. The student scientists learned about density and buoyancy by testing whether Halloween candy favorites Laffy Taffy, Skittles, Smarties and Gobstoppers float when placed in water (spoiler alert: they all sink).

They also created their own "blood" using red licorice pieces to represent red blood cells, marshmallows as white blood cells and sprinkles as platelets, all in a corn syrup solution. As they created

their mixture, they learned about the important role each part of blood plays in keeping us healthy.

Every school's third grade had its own Regeneron scientist that interacted with students and their teachers as the experiments were underway. Students also made windsocks and observed a homemade volcano eruption.

Students were able to take home their creations at the end of the school day.

A huge thank you to our amazing community partners at Regeneron, who provided the scientists and all the materials for the experiments.



Falcon diver keeps crown

A year's interruption due to COVID-19 did not diminish Anna Flanders' dominance in Section 2 diving.

Flanders won the Division 1 championship as a William S. Hackett Middle School eighth-grader in 2019. The pandemic scratched sectionals in 2020, but Flanders, now a sophomore at Albany High School, picked up where she left off, comfortably outdistancing the field for the repeat at the Nov. 4 sectional meet at Shenendehowa High School.

Flanders totaled 516.8 points to win the title. Her closest competitor was 31.6 points behind.

"Anna is a phenomenal athlete – she's graceful, fierce and incredibly talented," said Ashley Chapple, the City School District of Albany's director of health, physical education and athletics.

"We are here to cheer her on all the way to states, and beyond. And we look forward to following her continued success as a Falcon during the next two years."

The 2021 New York State Public High School Athletic Association will hold the girls' swimming and diving championships Nov. 19-20 at Ithaca College. Flanders finished eighth in the state as an eighth-grader in 2019; she heads to this year's championships ranked fourth.

Congratulations on this exceptional achievement and good luck at states!



Awards & Achievements

Seniors participating in prestigious fellowship

Two Albany High School students are participating this school year in a prestigious fellowship program started by former President Barack Obama.

The New York State Education Department chose seniors Gideon Goldmann and Marcus Treece to participate in the My Brother's Keeper (MBK) Fellowship program for 2021. The class of 73 fellows from across the state represents 25 school districts.

This is the fourth year that Albany High students have participated in the state's MBK program. Albany High also offers its own MBK Club, providing similar leadership-development opportunities for a broader group of students.

The state's MBK fellows have the opportunity to develop and execute a service project. Goldmann and Treece are working this fall to build an educational and mentorship program in which members of Albany High's MBK Club will work directly with elementary students.

The high school teacher-mentors will deliver a curriculum developed by KneoWorld that will include monthly themes such as conflict resolution. The lessons will use the monthly themes to examine African-American history and leadership in STEAM-related fields. Goldmann and Treece plan to document the process and the experience through a video for their MBK capstone project in the spring.

Goldman also recently completed the 2021 Academic Challenge sponsored by The Gravenburg Group and Albany High's MBK Club, in partnership with Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Inc.

That program allows students to explore African-American history and the contributions that African-American leaders have made worldwide. The Gravenburg Group, a leadership development and executive coaching firm, presented Goldmann with a Galaxy Book Go Laptop to recognize his achievement.

'84 grad earns football Hall of Fame induction

Congratulations to 1984 Albany High School graduate John Chaney on his induction into the Capital Region Football Hall of Fame.

Chaney was one of the top players in the Capital Region during his time at Albany High. He went on to Wagner College in New York City, playing an important role as the Division III Seahawks won the first NCAA championship in school history during Chaney's senior season.

A multi-purpose player, Chaney played receiver and defensive back, and also returned kicks and punts. His memorable one-handed touchdown catch helped Wagner to victory in the 1987 national semifinals. He also caught a TD pass in the national championship game. Wagner was 22-3 over Chaney's final two seasons. A 2011 inductee into the Wagner Hall of Fame, Chaney also competed on the Seahawks' basketball and track and field teams.

Albany High inducts 101 into honor society

Congratulations to the 101 academic superstars inducted Nov. 9 into Albany High School's Arista Chapter of National Honor Society.

The students, all seniors, were eligible for National Honor Society because each has maintained an overall academic average of 89.5 or higher.

The National Honor Society was founded in 1921 to help create a better-rounded student who would be willing to put their talents to work serving others in society.

Albany High's Arista Chapter was formed in 1957 and admitted 15 students in its first group of inductees.

Visit albanyhighschools.org to see the list of the newest National Honor Society members.

Blood drive helps ease shortage

Albany High School students, faculty and staff did their part to help alleviate critical local and national blood supply shortages at an Oct. 7 blood drive.

The community responded to the call for donations, filling all spots that were reserved. Some potential donors had to be turned away due to COVID-19 social distancing limitations, and the school exceeded its donation goal.

Albany High holds three drives each school year, and this was its first for 2021-22. A partnership with the American Red Cross, the drive was conducted with strict social distancing and sanitizing protocols in place. Donors required an appointment in advance.

The donation of one pint of blood can save up to three lives.

Besides saving lives, Albany High's drives will raise Red Cross scholarship money for two student blood-drive coordinators, seniors Alison and Elizabeth Powell.

Save the date – the next drive is Jan. 27!

Senior heading to Maccabiah Games

Albany High School lacrosse midfielder Liv Nevo has been selected for the USA U18 Women's Lacrosse Team for the 21st Maccabiah Games, which will be played in Israel next summer.

Nevo, an Albany High co-captain, led the team in scoring as a junior last spring.

The Maccabiah Games are the world's largest Jewish athletic competition, bringing together 1,000 athletes from more than 80 countries. The event is held every four years.

Following her senior season in the spring, graduation in June and the Maccabiah Games in July, Nevo plans to attend Massachusetts Institute of Technology or the University of Rochester.



MBK Fellow Marcus Treece



MBK Fellow Gideon Goldmann



Blood drive coordinators Alison and Elizabeth Powell

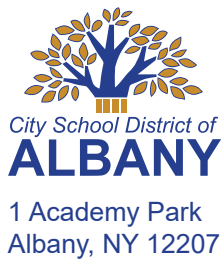


Falcon student-athlete Liv Nevo

Board of Education

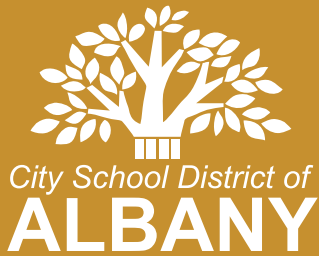
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in this newsletter and more at:
albanschools.org



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: Rachel Stead

*Principal, Albany
International Center and
Dual Language Program*



This fall, the City School District of Albany put two programs under one roof: Albany International Center (AIC), an optional transitional program for students new to the country, and the Dual Language Program, where children learn in English and Spanish and end up fluent in both languages.

The programs are located at Edmund J. O'Neal School of Excellence, and Rachel Stead sits at the helm. A veteran administrator, Stead is fluent in English and Spanish (Spanish is the top language at AIC, followed by Pushto and Arabic). She leads a building that serves about 370 students, split about evenly between the two programs.

Q: Why does it make sense to have both programs in one building?

We can leverage our resources to meet the needs of multilingual learners most efficiently. For example, we have a biliteracy coach who supports teachers in both programs. We also have bilingual staff who are able to provide services to students and families in both programs. The most exciting thing about having these two programs in one building is that it's not unusual to hear multiple languages spoken throughout the day – in the hallways, in the cafeteria, with visitors at the front desk – which helps to reinforce for our students that we value their native language.

Q: What makes the Dual Language Program unique?

Dual language instruction consists of two-way immersion, meaning students learn bilingualism (the ability to speak two languages) and biliteracy (the ability to read and write in two languages). We have the only public-school program of this type between the lower Hudson Valley and Syracuse. What makes the program most special, however, is our bilingual teachers and staff. These talented and dedicated individuals are superb role models. They develop students' pride in their own language and culture while simultaneously helping them learn about other cultures.

Q: How are AIC students' needs different than other students?

Newcomers have a variety of needs beyond learning a new language. They've all arrived here from different circumstances, and some have experienced trauma. Our student support team and teaching staff are trained in trauma-informed practices and we have structures in place to support these students.

Q: How do you communicate in different languages?

On-site translators are critical to helping us communicate with students and families. We also use a phone-based system that allows every member of our staff to be able to call families using a translator. We also provide translated communications to families in their native language.



Alumni Achievement

Jasmine Higgins '15

The most important thing Jasmine Higgins learned during her time in the City School District of Albany cannot be taught in a textbook.

In the classrooms, hallways and athletic fields throughout the district, Higgins was surrounded by people who looked like her. That wasn't the case when she moved on to college, and, even now in her professional life, she finds she is often one of the few African-American people in a room.

That's not to say the current policy analyst and mayoral advisor for the City of Albany doesn't credit her academic foundation at New Scotland Elementary, Albany School of Humanities, Stephen and Harriet Myers Middle School, and Albany High School for her collegiate and career success.

It just means that the experience she had in the district hasn't been replicated elsewhere since graduating from Albany High in 2015.

"It helped me to realize the importance of diversity and inclusion and how to advocate for myself and others who have been historically underrepresented," Higgins said.

Higgins found support at Albany High in the form of hall monitors who would cheer her on at soccer and rugby

games, and in English teacher Megan Donohue, who provided the guidance Higgins needed to apply to, and get accepted at, Siena College.

"Little gestures make all the difference," Higgins said. "It's always nice to have folks in your corner."

Advocacy and fighting for equity, social justice and the city she loves isn't just a job for Higgins. It's in her blood.

She's a descendant of Ida Yarbrough, a local African-American community leader and civil rights activist for whom an apartment complex in Arbor Hill is named.

While some may scoff at attending college and returning to work in the community where she was born and raised, Higgins can't imagine it any other way. She is constantly reminded of her great-great grandmother's quote:

"You don't leave a community if it doesn't have exactly what you want. You want to build it yourself."

Or, at least, be a part of its evolution.

"I love Albany," Higgins said. "I am committed to being part of the solution."