

# Capital Education

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## Equity through student empowerment

Student voice is alive, well and resonant in the City School District of Albany.

Whether on a student council, equity committee or leadership team, students in every building are advocating for equity and social justice in their schools and in our community.

The groups vary in size and mission, but they share a common thread: All serve as a forum for students to provide relevant and meaningful input on issues that matter. All align with the district's overarching mission of equity, giving all students the tools they need to succeed academically and beyond.

"This is allowing our students to come to the table, from

the elementary level all the way up to the high school," said Joy Howard, a teaching assistant at William S. Hackett Middle School and a coordinator of the school's Student Equity Team.

"Our children have voices, and it's time for us to actually hear their voices and jump in and aid them as well as be proud of them."

Every school has a student forum.

In elementary school, it's a group of fourth- and fifth-graders that meets at least once a month to identify problems to address in their school or community.

For example, the Giffen Memorial Elementary School

team – including Jamarion Blunt, Nalani Myrie and Koe Pa Moo Ku (*foreground*) pictured above – is working with our community partners at Youth FX on a series of films that serve as a love letter to the South End and the thriving community there.

The Giffen team also wants to see more adult acknowledgement of students being safe, respectful and responsible.

At New Scotland Elementary School, members of the Student Leadership Team recently visited classrooms to talk to other students about identity in their efforts to keep their school free of hate, bias and discrimination.

(Continued on page 6)

## STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

### Albany High 2023 valedictorian Neel Chittur

Neel Chittur lets his conscience be his guide.

Since he's the Class of 2023 valedictorian and a standout student-athlete, you could say his conscience is doing a great job advising him.

Being valedictorian was a goal for Chittur – but not the main one. He said he is motivated to be his best self, whether it's actively engaging in a classroom lesson or pushing himself to do a full workout.

"I have a really strong conscience and I try to always choose the right option," he said.

Doing the right thing has worked well for him in academics, athletics and other parts of his life.

"I've always challenged myself by taking hard classes," he said. "I want to make sure I leave here with no regrets by taking hard classes and being able to keep up my goals."

Chittur has taken a wealth of advanced classes at Albany High.

One of his favorite (and most challenging) classes was

Advanced Placement Physics, taught by veteran teacher John Sawyer. Chittur, who took the class as a junior, said Sawyer made the class extremely enjoyable, which helped him not get overwhelmed.

Sawyer remembers Chittur well.

"Every time Neel walked in the room, we'd talk about sports while we waited for the bell to ring," Sawyer said. "We'd discuss the game the day before or whatever trades had gone down during the day that I didn't know about yet."

"That said, when the bell rang he was ready to go, eager to learn and get all assignments completed. Most importantly, he is a genuinely nice guy who everyone likes and respects."

Chittur has immersed himself in Albany High's opportunities throughout his high school career. He works on the Student Technology Help Desk, is a member of both National Honor Society and Spanish Honor Society, and plays trumpet in Wind Ensemble.

(Continued on page 6)



## FROM THE INTERIM SUPERINTENDENT

# Listening and learning

One of the many special benefits about being an educator is that it involves lifelong learning. I come with many years of experience as a leader in other school districts, and I am still learning in my role as interim superintendent for the City School District of Albany.

I am grateful that you and others trust me to be at the helm as we search for the next superintendent. The district has partnered with Capital Region BOCES to assist with the search process, which involved getting input from employees, students, families and community members through surveys and focus groups. It is the goal of the Board of Education to name a permanent superintendent in June.

I prepared for my tenure by visiting every school in December, meeting with the school principal and visiting classrooms. In January, I then began and continue to hold informal "drop-in" sessions after school where faculty and staff members can share their thoughts and ask me questions. I also met with PTA members and leaders in January.

I had two meetings with PTA leaders from across the district – one virtual and one in-person. They shared what they felt was going well and not going well in the district. A special thanks to district parent Laurie Wheelock for organizing those sessions.

It is my belief that culture largely shapes how well an organization functions. When I talk about our school district culture, I mean the core values and beliefs about our students, our staff, our schools and the district as a whole. When there is a foundation of mutual trust and respect, we will be better equipped to handle the challenges we face. Regardless of our role, when we feel valued and safe, we are better able to commit to the task at hand.

That task, of course, is student learning.

My chief goal for my tenure here is to strengthen our focus on all our students: their safety, their well-being and their learning under an umbrella of equity for all.

I also want to help set the stage for attracting highly qualified candidates for the superintendent position by demonstrating a strong partnership between the Board of Education and the superintendent.

In addition, I am directing my attention to organizational structures and systems. Specifically, I am addressing staffing vacancies in the Maintenance Department, a backlog of school requests on maintenance needs and the overdependence on outside vendors for maintenance services.

I also am working with our Human Resources Division to build a



coordinated and dependable system for tracking positions and exploring new ideas for recruiting staff to fill the significant number of vacancies across the district.

We are in the thick of the annual budget process and establishing clear targets and priorities for the 2023-24 budget that will go before voters in May. Moreover, I am working to assure that we continue our vision for rebuilding Albany High School, complete improvements in our energy performance contract at Albany School of Humanities (ASH), Arbor Hill Elementary School, Stephen and Harriet Myers Middle School and William S. Hackett Middle School.

By listening, I learned a great deal. I was also reminded that everyone – students, staff and faculty members – is still recovering from the enormous physical, psychological and economic toll of COVID-19.

The good news is that the district is full of caring, competent faculty and staff. They engage our students in meaningful learning experiences underpinned by robust curriculum, and they provide extensive supports beyond the walls of the classroom.

Despite the challenges our students face, they are wonderfully resilient. Their families support them, and our schools. Our community also has a history of supporting us, to judge by the number of successful annual budget votes.

That's a lot to be optimistic about. In the meantime, I urge all of us to be patient with ourselves and each other as we continue our important work together.

Sincerely,

**John Yagielski**  
Interim Superintendent

# Voices

**Q:** How do you help make your school a more tolerant and welcoming place?



“ To me, welcoming means accepting and kind. Tolerating means to accept one's differences and beliefs. I try to help people feel accepted despite things like race, religion, gender, disability and appearances using compassion and kindness. I can do this by giving someone a kind gesture such as a smile or a wave just to acknowledge them. When we acknowledge each other, it makes a difference. ”

— **Emmaline Dalland**  
William S. Hackett Middle School  
Sixth Grade



“ I help make my school a more tolerant and welcoming place by being nice to others and saying "hi" to other students in the hallways. Also, I do this by using kind and responsible words. I would say, "How was your day today?" Then they would ask me, and I answer just like how they answer me. That's how I would make my school welcoming. ”

— **Zah'cari Santiago**  
Delaware Community School  
Fifth Grade



“ I am always kind. Being kind shows that all rules are followed at school. This can also help in making my school welcoming. Helping each other also shows being welcoming and tolerant. For example, if someone doesn't understand the classwork, I can help them. Also, if a student does not want to eat lunch at school, I can tell them there are other options or give them something from my lunchbox. Kindness helps with everything. ”

— **Talaisha Janea Travis**  
Arbor Hill Elementary School  
Fifth Grade



“ I always try to make others feel good and accepted. I use my Spanish when friends are new to the country and come into my classroom. This helps them make friends and feel comfortable. I spread positivity and keep a "growth mindset" because it helps when someone is upset. I especially like to use kind words and help others. Sometimes doing small things for others leads to making big connections. ”

— **Eleina R. Corniel**  
Dual Language Program  
Fifth Grade



“ One way that I strive to make our school more welcoming is by keeping our school clean. Whether it be picking up a water bottle on the ground or picking up candy wrappers, little acts of cleanliness will make our school more pleasing. Another way that I do so is by directing students when I can and demonstrating acts of kindness. Being personable and providing kindness is crucial to ensure these welcoming spaces. ”

— **Jakiem Walden**  
Albany High School  
Junior



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

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# Falcon's strength exceeds the wrestling mat

If there was one word to describe Tabriz Khetab, it would be adaptive.

The Albany High School star wrestler, who was a perfect 25-0 during the regular season and finished his senior season 30-2 overall, didn't even learn the style of wrestling most widely practiced in the United States until his junior year.

That's when he began learning English as well.

Two-and-a-half years ago, Khetab and his siblings were hiding from the Taliban in the mountains of Afghanistan.

They eventually made it safely to a neighboring country, flew to Indiana and, ultimately, relocated to Albany in the fall of 2021 because of its status as a sanctuary city.

He lives with his older brother and younger sister. Their parents and all other relatives remain in Afghanistan.

The siblings care for each other, and talk to their parents as often as possible. But it's very difficult to be separated from their family by war, continents and politics.

"They love my wrestling and are proud of me, but we don't have other people," Khetab said.

His coaches and teammates help him as much as possible, and not just in the gym. It's an incredibly close-knit team, led by coaches who you can tell care a lot.

Not just about wrestling, but also about their wrestlers.

If Albany is a sanctuary city for Khetab, wrestling is his sanctuary sport.

"Tabriz wakes up every day happy to be in Albany, at Albany High and relieved to be safe," coach Paul Florio said. "Wrestling is something he loves to do and it's great to be a part of that."

When first enrolled in the City School District of Albany, Khetab attended Albany International Center, an optional program that provides language and transition skills for immigrant and refugee students.

He picked up English quickly, was successful in academics and transferred to Albany High this school year.

"I love it here," he said. "Even more than back home. I love the teachers, kids and coaches."

Teammates, and even parents who watch from the sidelines and witnessed Khetab's growth during the past 18 months, call him a natural leader.

He helps the coaches communicate with teammates who don't speak English (there are 15 student-athletes on Albany High's wrestling team for whom English is not their first language).

He's clearly dynamic – in two languages – and it also helps that his innate wrestling skills are strong, powerful and incredibly impressive. His accomplishments are extraordinary, as is he.

"When I left Afghanistan without my family, I didn't know about my future," he said.

Some of that uncertainty remains, for Khetab and his family.

He wants to go to college to major in computer engineering, and wrestle. But like many refugees and immigrants new to a country, a lot is always up in the air.

However, if Khetab's past is any indication of his future, his determination, positive outlook and adaptability should help him achieve his dreams. On the mat, and off.

"Wrestling is my life," he said. "In my blood is wrestling."

## Searching for our next superintendent

As we look for the next superintendent to serve the students and families of the City School District of Albany, we have partnered with Capital Region BOCES to facilitate the search.

As a first step in this process, we collected input from employees, students, families and community members through BOCES' superintendent search survey, which was open from Jan. 23 through Feb. 22. We also worked with BOCES to hold a series of 20 virtual and in-person focus groups to gain additional feedback during this time.

BOCES and our Board of Education will now work together to conduct a confidential search for candidates based on the feedback received in the survey and forums.

A confidential superintendent search means that all applicants for the position will apply directly to the BOCES consultants. BOCES and the board will work together to identify, from the entire applicant pool, who meets our criteria and who we would like to interview. The board will see

all applications, but they will be submitted first to BOCES.

The confidential search process is followed to attract sitting superintendents and other education professionals who may prefer that their candidacy for the Albany position not be made public.

Without confidentiality, there is often a very limited pool of candidates for the position of superintendent. Conducting a confidential search increases the likelihood that the most qualified candidates will apply for the position.

Interested candidates will submit all application materials to the BOCES consultants by April 5. After that date, the search consultants and board begin the interview process. Selected applicants will complete at least two rounds of interviews with the board.

Once a candidate is chosen, they will be vetted through a process led by the BOCES team before a formal offer is made. The board expects that the new superintendent will be appointed in June.

## Hall of Fame deadline extended

The City School District of Albany Hall of Fame has extended the annual nomination deadline to April 1.

The previous deadline has been Feb. 1.

The Executive Committee voted to extend that timeframe to provide more time for community members

to research and submit new nominations.

Visit [albanyschools.org/hof](http://albanyschools.org/hof) to complete the online nomination form and learn more about our Hall of Fame, including Class of 2021 inductee Margaret Lamar King, pictured below!





(Above left) Tony Clement Center for Education ninth-grader **Lehlani Sanders** and dad Kelvin were all smiles after she was recognized for outstanding attendance during the school's Jan. 11 awards ceremony.

(Above) New Scotland Elementary School super-readers donned their real and imaginary capes on Jan. 20 and attended a Superhero Academy led by our amazing community partners at The RED Bookshelf. Wonder Women who were celebrated that day include first-grader **Jamina Astronomia**, Assistant Principal **Timitra Rose** and first-graders **Madison Mailhotte** and **Eko Braun**.

(At left) Pine Hills Elementary School third-grader **Naomi Messam-McLean** paused to reflect while working on a persuasive essay on Jan. 20.



(At left) Students in **LaQuita Love's** advanced cosmetology classes took a break from making people beautiful on Feb. 11 at their Valentine's Spa Day. From left, they are **Kiera Davis**, **Majhail-Qorin Wade**, Love, **Yanasia Diaz** and **Amaya LaMartz**.

(Below left) Philip Schuyler Achievement Academy third-grader **Talis Brady** nailed a rendition of "Hot Cross Buns" on his saxophone Feb. 14 during music practice club, an after-school program funded by our wonderful community partners at the Albany Fund for Education. AFE also supports an after-school strings club at Schuyler and after-school string and band clubs at Sheridan Preparatory Academy, among other things.

(Below) Fairness was the character trait of the month in January at Thomas O'Brien Academy of Science and Technology (TOAST), and students enthusiastically took part in a school-wide assembly on the subject Jan. 27.





(Above left) During a lab at Stephen and Harriet Myers Middle School on Jan. 24, sixth-grader **Rony Poe** dissected owl pellets. The investigation provided the student-scientists a closer look at the bones of small animals that have fallen prey to an owl and the lab included a bone identification chart, dissecting tools and a pair of “official” examination gloves.

(Above right) Sheridan Preparatory Academy fourth-graders **David Favors Jr., Dierick Martinez Avalo** and **Za’hier Ford** were hard at work during their Feb. 9 math lesson on fractions.

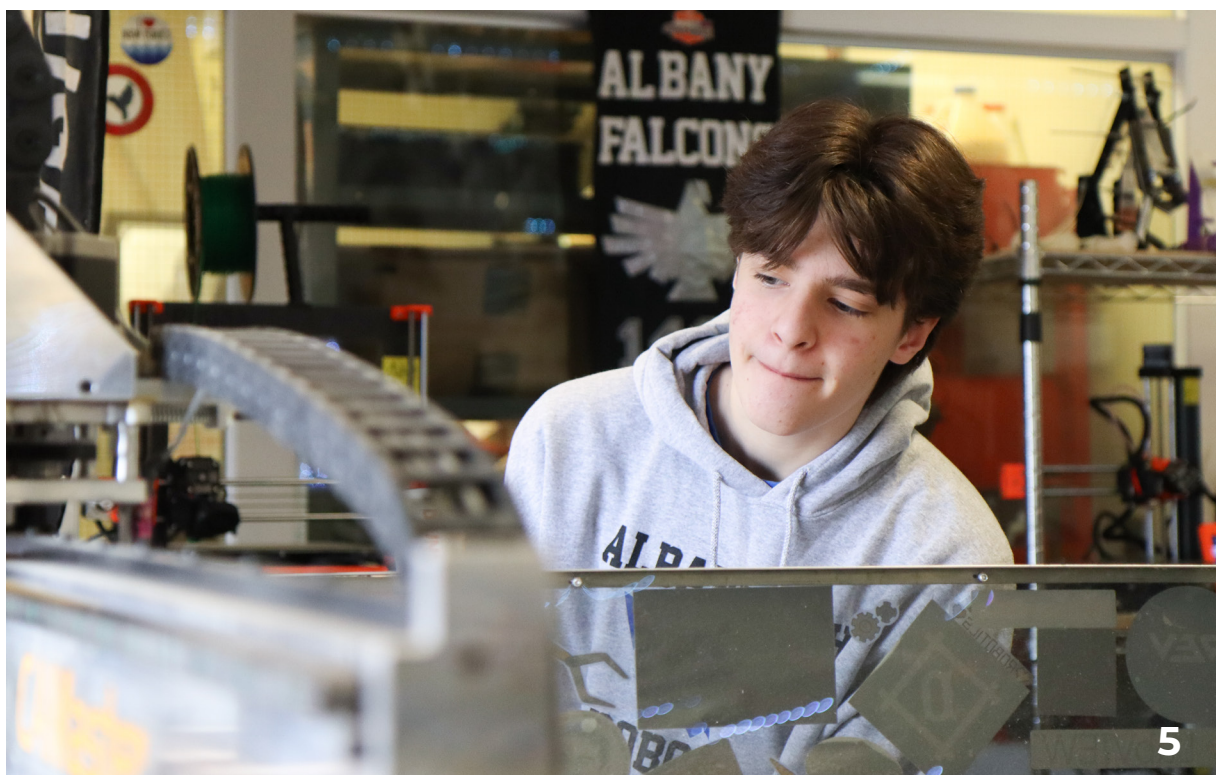
(At right) Students in **Dylon Peertamsingh’s** sixth-grade social studies class at Albany International Center wrapped up their lessons about China on Feb. 1 by analyzing reproductions of the Qingming Scroll, a painting highlighting 12<sup>th</sup> century Chinese commerce. Here, students **Abdallah Alsaeah** and **Mohammad Yasin** consult with teacher Peertamsingh about the activities depicted on the scroll.



(At left) Albany High School music teacher **Kyle Albano** was one of the many talented performers at this year’s Music Teacher Concert on Jan. 24. The event features district music staff, and raises money to support Albany Friends of Music, which helps fund music programs in our schools.

(Below left) One hundred percent awesome! The 100<sup>th</sup> day of school fell on Feb. 14 this year, and first-graders in **Alexandra Clary’s** Dual Language Program spent the day showing off their smarts about the number 100. Pals **Svea Ingram**, left, and **Mahogany Carr** posed wearing the “100 Days Smarter” hats they made in class.

(Below) Members of the Albany High School robotics team were in school during January Regents week – even though there were no classes – designing, programming, building and otherwise tinkering with the robot the Falcon team will enter in two regional competitions this spring. Here, junior **Jackson Shahinfar** works on milling out the belly pan for the bottom of the robot where the battery and various electronics get mounted.





# Preparing for NYS computer-based testing

New York State testing for students in grades 3-8 is coming up, with ELA exams April 19-20, and math exams May 2-3.

**This year, students in grades 4 and 7 will participate in computer-based testing (CBT) for ELA.**

To prepare, our fourth-graders and seventh-graders have been engaging in guided practice sessions to ensure that they are comfortable with the tools and platform used to deliver the CBT experience.

This is a proactive first step along the transitional path towards full CBT for all NYS exams.

The New York State Education Department has identified a plan for full implementation of CBT statewide as part of its commitment to both meeting the needs of 21<sup>st</sup>-century learners and improving test delivery, test integrity, scoring validity and turnaround time on testing results.

The transition to computer-based testing will begin with mandated participation in the spring of 2024, when all students in grades 5 and 8 will be required to take English Language Arts, Math and Science tests via CBT.

To learn more about CBT, please visit [nysed.gov](https://nysed.gov).

## Non-public school transportation deadline

State law requires Albany parents and guardians whose children will attend a non-public school in 2023-24 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 next school year.

The district transports all eligible elementary students (grades K-5) via yellow buses operated by First Student. Eligible non-public secondary students (grades 6-12) are transported via CDTA buses unless their Individual Education Service Plan (IESP) requires specialized transportation, which First Student provides.

For non-public 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, which is available at [albanschools.org/transportation](https://albanschools.org/transportation).

Requests should be mailed to:

Durett Miles  
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.

## 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 Christina Lebrecht at (518) 475-6150 to discuss whether your child should be referred to the Committee on Special Education or the "504 Team" for a full evaluation.

For more information, please visit [albanschools.org/specialed](https://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 is home-schooled or 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 home-school or enroll your child in a non-public school in Albany in 2023-24, 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 committee 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 at left*).

If your child will attend a non-public school outside Albany 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 Christina Lebrecht or the Special Education Department at (518) 475-6150 if you have questions.

## Leadership *(continued from page 1)*

"There are a lot of great things happening with student voice, and equity is the thread that connects all of it," said Assistant Superintendent for Elementary Instruction Cecily Wilson-Turner, Ed.D.

In middle school, the student forum might look like Hackett's "No Place for Hate Team," which consists of about 60 students in grades 6-8 who are working to make their school a safer and more welcoming place for everyone.

In February, team members put red hearts on the locker of every student (about 650) and the door of every teacher with an individual message promoting compassion and respect.

"No Place for Hate" is a student-led initiative of the Anti-Defamation League that seeks to eliminate bullying, racism, homophobia and other forms of intolerance in school.

Schools earn the designation as a "No Place for Hate" school after signing a pledge and completing several social justice projects.

All district elementary and middle schools are working this year to join Albany High School as schools that have earned the "No Place for Hate" designation.

Albany High's student government body is the Falcon Council. Just before

winter recess the Falcon Council sponsored a selfie wall, where students were encouraged to write messages of acceptance and inclusion.

Albany High also is tackling the less glamorous side of governing: Students and advisers are drafting bylaws and a process for problem-solving that goes beyond identifying what's wrong, Principal Jodi Commerford said.

Identifying ways to improve attendance – both in school and in class – is a priority for the Falcon Council this year, she said.

Each school has its own set of issues that it works on. There are also district-wide teams composed of representatives from each elementary and middle school, and those teams meet monthly to identify opportunities to improve the student experience across the board and identify systemic barriers to success.

"As adults in this school district, we should be very proud of the student leadership that is coming up," Howard said.

"Look forward to seeing them. You will hear from them, and there will be nothing greater than seeing them put what we've been working on into action."

## Chittur *(continued from page 1)*

Chittur ran cross country for the Falcons for six years and distance events in track for four years. He is a captain on both teams, and last May broke a 40-year-old school record in the 3,200. He said he's most proud of qualifying to compete in state meets in both cross country and track.

He heads to Stony Brook University this fall, where he'll study applied math and statistics. He'll also run Division I track and cross country.

Chittur is excited for the next chapter to begin, but leaving high school, his group of friends and the City of Albany is bittersweet.

"Being at Albany High is like real life," he said. "It's so diverse. It's shaped me and prepared me to live in the real world after I leave."

As for the future beyond college? It all tracks back to his inner compass.

"I want to work as a data analyst or statistician for a company or corporation that's helpful to the world," he said. "I want to be part of something bigger and show that I'm selfless, not selfish."

"It's all about my conscience. It's like every second of my day."



# Awards & Achievements

## Nineteen chosen for music festival

Congratulations to the 19 middle and high school virtuosos selected to perform at the Suburban Council Music Festival in April!

The festival is April 28-29 at Ballston Spa High School. To qualify, students had to apply, audition or be recommended for the ensembles (sometimes all three, depending on the ensemble).

Ten choral and two jazz students from Albany High School were chosen, as well as seven band members from Stephen and Harriet Myers Middle School and William S. Hackett Middle School. You can visit our website for a full list of the students selected.

## Falcon artwork on display

Artwork by 10 Albany High School students was exhibited throughout February at the 2023 Capital District Urban High School Invitational.

The event highlighted artwork by Albany, Schenectady and Troy art students. The artwork was submitted by their teachers and selected based on a student's unique experiences, expressiveness or mastery of technique. The exhibit ran all through February at the Henry and Miriam Butzel Art Gallery in Schenectady.

Five other Albany High artists had their work chosen for the Art in Three Dimensions adjudicated exhibition sponsored by the Capital Area Art Supervisors and the New York State Art Teachers Association. The exhibit was on display at the W.B. Haessig Art Gallery at Mohonasen High School in Schenectady. You can visit our website for a full list of the students selected.

## Hackett experiment heads to final frontier

For the second year in a row, an experiment proposed by a team of eighth-grade scientists at William S. Hackett Middle School will be performed on the International Space Station.

Late this spring, astronauts on the space station will perform "The Effect of Microgravity on *Oryza Sativa* (rice)." The proposal was crafted by the team of **Everett Mercier**, **Sadeer Othman**, **David Stefano Rosales**, **Yomar Santiago** and **John Thang**, all students of science teacher **Craig Ascher** (*Thang is missing from the photo at right*).

In the fall, eighth-graders in the district's three middle schools took part in the Student Spaceflight Experiment Program (SSEP) and worked in teams to design an experiment that tests the effects of microgravity – weightlessness – on a particular scientific variable.

The Hackett experiment was selected from others submitted from 39 areas around the country.

## Four more master STEM teachers

Four City School District of Albany teachers have been accepted into the

prestigious New York State Master Teacher Program.

Congratulations to **Craig Ascher**, **Tina Cardettino**, **Allison Griner** and **Allen Landman**. Ascher and Griner both teach eighth-grade science at William S. Hackett Middle School. Cardettino and Landman both teach at Albany High; Cardettino teaches Living Environment and Landman teaches Computer Science.

They are among 221 educators around the state selected for Master Teacher Program, which recognizes high-performing teachers of STEM – science, technology, engineering and math.

## Another 'Top Teacher' at Hackett

WNYT/Ch. 13 has named a veteran City School District of Albany teacher as a Top Teacher for the 2022-23 school year.

**Kelly MacNabb**, a special education teacher at William S. Hackett Middle School, was selected from a pool of more than 400 educators nominated from throughout the Capital Region.

## Falcon athletes flying high this winter

Several Albany High School student-athletes and teams turned in exceptional performances during the winter season.

In wrestling, senior **Tabriz Khetab** went 30-2 and finished his season with a third-place finish at 138 pounds at the Section 2 meet Feb. 11 (*read more about Khetab on pg. 3*).

In hockey, senior goalie **Alex Doehla** earned All-Section 2 honors playing for the Mohawks in the Capital District High School Hockey League. Doehla had a goals-against average of .920 this season.

In boys' swimming and diving, four Falcons advanced to the state meet March 3-4 at Ithaca College. Senior **Louie Cassella** qualified in two individual events (50-yard freestyle, 100 breaststroke), and classmate **Carson Engstrom** qualified in the 100 backstroke. They were joined at states by senior **Cosmo Martinelli** and sophomore **Ya'ir Sasson** in the 200 medley relay.

In indoor track and field, three Falcons won championships at the Section 2 meet Jan. 28: senior **Graham Richard** (1,000 meters), junior **Maximus Boettner** (triple jump) and senior **Adam Oblisk** (long jump).

In girls' basketball, Albany High won the regular-season Suburban Council title with an overall record of 17-3. It is Albany High's first overall Suburban title in any sport since joining the league in 2015.

The defending Section 2 Class AA champions entered sectionals ranked No. 20 in the state and advanced to the Class AA title game with playoff wins over Guelderland and Colonie (*Capital Education went to print before the March 3 sectional final*).

Senior **Shonyae Edmonds** was recognized by WNYT/Ch. 13 as one of the area's top players, and the *Times Union* also recognized her at midseason as the area's top large-school player.



Hackett's student scientists



Four newest master STEM teachers



WNYT's "Top Teacher"



Albany High's swimming and diving team

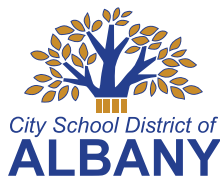
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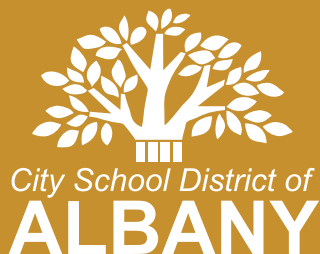
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in this newsletter and more at:

[albanschools.org](http://albanschools.org)



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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:

# Nicole Newman

Assistant Principal  
North Albany Middle School



Nicole Newman joined North Albany Middle School last summer as the building transitioned to a new enrollment pattern. Chief among her duties is leading the school's Social-Emotional-Behavior Team, which helps create an atmosphere conducive to learning. The team provides a compass of clear expectations for behavior, guidance on managing emotions and reactions to situations, and incentives and rewards for effort.

The team also is leading North Albany's "No Place for Hate" initiative, part of a district-wide effort to implement the Anti-Defamation League's anti-bias, anti-bullying program in every school.

### Q: Why are the climate and culture of a school important?

If students don't feel a sense of belonging and connection, they're not going to engage in academics, or in any other way. For whatever reason – the pandemic, social media, loss of institutions – some students haven't developed social-emotional skills like empathy and integrity, community and responsibility. We're working to develop those skills.

### Q: Tell us about PBIS, character theme days and "No Place for Hate."

PBIS stands for Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. That means we highlight and acknowledge what students are doing right. It can be as simple as a teacher giving a student an incentive like a "Falcon feather" for a good deed, or something bigger, like holding a school dance.

Each month we have a character theme, such as kindness. We lean in with lessons the whole building engages in. Sometimes it's a town hall meeting, sometimes it's a class lesson around that theme. Sometimes it's infused in core classes.

We are also taking steps to become a "No Place for Hate" school. This allows students to lead activities to eliminate bullying, racism, homophobia and other forms of intolerance.

### Q: What are you doing to get buy-in from students, faculty and staff?

When we first began, the team was unsure how we were going to do this work. Now, our work could be a model for any other middle school. Kudos to our core team of Toni Bergin, Kimberly Bramfeld, Jake Brodmerkel, Joseph Conway, Sarah Essa, Julie Gall, Melissa Parker, Roderick Perry and Erin Speed, along with Principal Andrea Piper and Assistant Principal Emma Steckman. They are supporting and leading this work and getting colleagues to do it. Student voice also is a big part of this, and we listen to what our students have to say. Everyone has a role.



## ALUMNI ACHIEVEMENT

# Owen Daniels '10

It should come as no surprise that the valedictorian of Albany High School's Class of 2010 still stands out among his peers.

Owen Daniels is a 2022 winner of the Andrew W. Marshall Paper Prize on New Revolutions in Military Affairs, a national research competition. His winning article focused on artificial intelligence (AI) and revolutions in military affairs.

The Andrew W. Marshall Foundation sponsored the competition and since has supported Daniels' work as the Andrew W. Marshall fellow at the Center for Security and Emerging Technology, the Georgetown University think tank where Daniels has worked since 2021.

Daniels, who went on to Princeton University after Albany High, also was named a Penn Kemble Democracy Forum fellow and heads Publications for Young Professionals in Foreign Policy's global leadership team. His previous work has included research on ethical implications of AI and autonomy, autonomous weapons norms and joint operational concepts.

Critically analyzing writing and research has been crucial in Daniels' career. He cites the rigorous AP and IB classes he took at Albany High that helped prepare him.

"Albany High allowed me to explore my passions for history

and writing, exposed me to new perspectives and laid strong foundations for skills I still use today," Daniels said.

Daniels was a three-sport student-athlete in high school and played piano in the Jazz Ensemble. The teamwork, camaraderie and collaborative skills he developed outside of the classroom also have benefitted him professionally.

Another lifelong lesson garnered from the City School District of Albany: the importance of community and inclusive spaces.

"Albany High is such a unique environment and I continue to appreciate the chance it gave me to be a part of a big, welcoming family," he said. "I gained perspective and insights into the range of different experiences students bring to an urban public school, and that inspired me to work in the public sector. I hope that perspective has also made me an empathetic, open-minded friend and colleague."

Daniels encourages the members of the Class of 2023 to embrace new experiences and opportunities, and to remain curious and open-minded beyond graduation.

"Don't feel pressured to accept a particular definition of success or look for external validation," he advised. "Find enjoyment in what you do and get out there and explore."