

## Voices

**Q:** *What do you see as the three biggest challenges facing the City School District of Albany today?*



I feel there are three issues in particular that we face daily. The first is leadership amongst our students. Many of the behavior issues I have come across deal with students gravitating to other students who make poor choices. Each of our students has the potential to be a leader rather than a follower; we as educators have the important duty of helping each child find the leader within. Another issue I feel is facing our district is student motivation. Many students are entering the classrooms lacking what I like to call “academic self-motivation.” Students lacking this motivation seem to encounter academic difficulty. Through the use of a plethora of new strategies (many from the NUA), we are finding new ways to increase student motivation. The third issue has to do with parental involvement. Getting parents more involved in school continues to be a difficult task, especially during these times when they are working diligently to provide better lives for their children.

**--Malik Jones, fifth- and sixth-grade social studies and writing teacher, North Albany Academy**



The three most significant challenges facing Albany city schools are safety and fighting, discrimination (child-to-child) and parent-teacher communication. I think these issues are important because it is important that we are safe and feeling safe; child-to-child discrimination comes when we work in groups, no one likes to feel left out; and parent-teacher communication because parents like to know what’s going on at school and teachers like to know what’s going on at home. It’s hard when you have one teacher that calls to say “good job” and others that don’t call at all.

**--Abigail McCormick-Foley, sixth grade, Hackett Middle School**



We have similar challenges to every school district, though some of the symptoms of these struggles may manifest themselves in unique ways. Communication with parents and community groups has been a constant struggle. I believe both the district and members of the Albany community are passionately committed to building a more effective relationship for the benefit of our students, but we still have a great deal of room for improvement. Finances affect our ability to update our vastly outdated technology and ability to address the pockets of rapidly climbing student-teacher ratios – both of which are keys to closing the achievement gap. Finally, as a high school educator I am acutely sensitive to public perception of our schools. Mass media coverage is largely focused on negative events. This affects the morale of students and the teachers, as the

underlying message is a negative comment on the moral character of our students and quality of education they are receiving, when the reality is that our students, teachers and programs are among the best and most challenging in the Capital Region. Where is the catalog our successes?

**--Margot Plumadore, math teacher and Math Department co-team leader, International Baccalaureate (IBO) Diploma Program assistant coordinator, Albany High School**



The City School District of Albany is facing many challenges. Issues such as budget cuts force many teachers to use personal funds to pay for classroom supplies. These cuts also cancel courses and students are denied valuable opportunities. Additionally, the problem of overcrowded classrooms distracts students, causing class disruptions. Also, the media depicts negative incidents and not the positive things that deserve attention. Despite the challenges, Albany city schools have much to offer.

**--Deja Smith, senior and Class of 2008 co-vice president, Albany High School**