

Middle school enrollment

Feeder model, neighborhood zones set for 2009-10

The majority of middle school students in the City School District of Albany will attend two schools next year through a feeder system the Board of Education approved in February. North Albany Academy will continue to serve students in prekindergarten through grade 8.

Students will attend either Stephen and Harriet Myers Middle School off of Whitehall Road or William S. Hackett Middle School on Delaware Avenue based on the elementary school they attend (see related stories, page 5).

Each brand new, state-of-the-art school will accommodate up to 650 students. The board's action followed a months-long study of enrollment options that was necessary because the middle school at Philip Livingston Magnet Academy will close after this school year due to declining enrollment.

North Albany Academy, located on North Pearl Street, will serve up to 150 students in grades 6-8.

"This has been one of the most important decisions our school district has addressed in recent years, and I believe we have reached an excellent, thoughtful conclusion that will serve all of our students and families well," said Board President Barbara Gaffuri.

"I am grateful to our administration, and to the district and community volunteers who came forward to assist us with this work, for the great attention to detail and the great care they took in helping us make this decision."

(continued on page 5)



Stephen and Harriet Myers Middle School opened in 2005.



Built in 1926-27, William S. Hackett Middle School was completely renovated in 2007-08.

Student achievement

Hitting all the high notes

The absolute best of the best.

That's how Albany Pro Musica describes the company Albany High School senior Ariel Hellwitz is keeping these days. She is one of 12 Capital Region singers selected for the organization's prestigious high school apprentice program.

"She is an incredibly talented student," said Albany High choral director Brendan Hoffman.

A gifted soprano from a talented musical family, Ariel was chosen from the most competitive applicant pool in Albany Pro Musica's history. It is the most recent honor in a rapidly expanding resume for Ariel, who didn't take up singing seriously until her sophomore year.

Since then, she has made All-State twice and spent two intensive weeks last summer in one of the finest programs in the eastern United States.

Yet, there was a moment during that summer experience, at Crane Youth Music at the State University of New York at Potsdam, that challenged her resolve to continue the hard work that has helped turn her natural gift into a unique talent.

Her first bad review.

"She tore apart my solo," Ariel said. "I was thinking, 'I'll never sing again.'"

Understanding that singing is a subjective craft – "Everyone has a different idea of how a voice should sound," Ariel said – she continued on her musical journey.

"You have to step away and say, 'What can I take from this experience,'" she said.

While singing is her greatest love, Ariel's interests are many. She plays the flute, piano and guitar, and also enjoys literature and conservation. In the spring, she plays rugby.

Yes, rugby!

"It's a great challenge for anyone and I don't think you have to be really 'diesel' to play," she said. "You just have to have confidence."

Ariel is considering music or literature as a major; teaching in an urban school district is her ultimate goal.

She is grateful for the opportunities Albany High has provided her in every aspect, and credits Mr. Hoffman in particular as an inspiration.

"To have somebody make a comment like that, that means everything," he said. "That's why we're here, all of us, as teachers. That's the goal, to be able to pass that feeling along and to have it continue."

Ariel hopes for a chance to return the favor some day.



Ariel Hellwitz is participating in a prestigious apprentice program for high school singers.

We choose Albany public schools because ...

'New' New Scotland Elementary returns home

Wearing a purple-and-white jersey with a new name and an old number, New Scotland Elementary School Principal Gregory Jones welcomed his school back to its familiar home at 369 New Scotland Ave.

"I chose this number for a very specific reason," Mr. Jones said of the #19 jersey with "New Scotland" on the front that he wore at the school's Jan. 6 ribbon-cutting celebration. "This may be a new school, but we are very proud of our tradition and we will always remember School 19 and what it has meant to generations of families in this community."

More than 400 people turned out for the ribbon-cutting and public tour on New Scotland Elementary's first full day back

home (the first day was delayed two hours by the weather Jan. 5!). The new cafeteria – the former gym/auditorium – was standing-room-only, and visitors filled the halls and classroom for a look at the fully updated space.

Originally constructed in 1919 and expanded in 1924 and 1950, the former Public School 19 is the 11th school to be rebuilt or renovated through the City School District of Albany's current facilities project.

In addition to the new cafeteria, New Scotland Elementary features a new gym that was added on in the back of the school, a new library/media center on the second floor and a new main office just inside the stately front doors. That space became



Superintendent Eva C. Joseph, Ed.D., (center) cuts the ribbon at the New Scotland Elementary opening ceremony with help from Board President Barbara Gaffuri (center, left) and Principal Gregory Jones (center, right).

available when the Albany Public Library chose to relocate its New Scotland branch, which had been housed near the school's front entrance since the 1950s expansion.

New Scotland Elementary also features entirely new mechanical, electrical, plumbing, communications, security and

technology systems. Unique features include three 1,000-pound ice storage containers in the basement and 40 geoechange wells drilled 400 feet beneath the play area to help cool the building more efficiently.

From the superintendent Keeping our focus in these critical times



Superintendent
Eva C. Joseph, Ed.D.

How do we make up for millions of dollars in lost state aid during these hard economic times?

What is the best system for enrolling students in our new middle school configuration?

Which of the important priorities in our strategic plan do we tackle first?

There always are difficult decisions to be made when you are charged with the education and well-being of thou-

sands of children and teen-agers. This year, there are challenges for us on every front as we continue to focus on our future amid the worst fiscal crisis our state and nation have faced in decades.

How easy it can be to get distracted by a program's cost or an administrative process.

Yet, though the bottom line may seem daunting when it is counted in dollars and cents, there is only one bottom line that matters to us in the end.

What is best for our students?

That question always is front and center. It guides us and ensures that we maintain the right focus in our planning.

We are pleased to have arrived at a final decision on middle school enrollment for 2009-10 (*see related stories, pages 1 and 5*). It was a demanding process, most especially for the 30 volunteers on our Middle School Enrollment Planning Committee.

The importance of the decision before them, the information they were required to digest and the critiques they were required to absorb made the process trying at times. The committee brought forward two solid options to me and the Board of Education that were united in one goal – to implement the most equitable system for all of our students.

The committee never lost track of our one essential question, nor did our administrators and the board.

The process was similar throughout our strategic planning process (*see related stories, page 6*). The conversations and the decisions sometimes were hard, but everyone involved maintained a steadfast focus on our students.

The end result was an excellent blueprint for our district's growth over the next 3-5 years. The strategic plan will guide us toward the best solutions for our schools because it was developed with the right purpose in mind.

Now we are in the middle of the most difficult budget development process in memory. How do school districts statewide balance grim financial realities with the duty to educate and nurture the young people of our communities?

It is an especially difficult task for high-needs districts like ours.

I assure you we will make our budget decisions based on the critical task of maintaining an environment of constant improvement for our students. We will be forced to make hard choices, but in the end we will make those choices focused squarely on our bottom line.

What is best for our students?

Eva C. Joseph, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools



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Voices | Q: Tell us about your favorite book



My favorite book is "The Greatest," the autobiography of three-time heavyweight champion of the world Muhammad Ali. It chronicles Ali's life as a young kid from Louisville, Ky. He began boxing at age 12 when someone stole his new bicycle. A policeman stopped to help. Ali told him that someone stole his bike and if he found them he was going to beat them up. The officer asked Ali if he could fight. Ali replied no. So the officer said that before he attempts to beat up somebody he should learn how to fight. The officer ran a local boxing gym and invited the angry kid to the gym, and the rest is history.

– Stephon Frost '84, home-school coordinator, Arbor Hill Elementary School



I recently read "Mountains" by Semour Simons. The book has many facts about the names, places and part mountains play in nature. I learned that lots of the mountains are very popular and many were formed by volcanoes. Hawaii was made from underwater volcanoes. Mountains have rigid edges and sides because of the glaciers. Mount Rushmore is another famous mountain with the carvings of famous Americans. I would recommend this book because you learn many facts and get to see the many different mountains in our country and in the world.

– Allie Gardner, fourth grade, North Albany Academy



My favorite book is "May Bird" by Jodie Anderson. I like the story and how the author describes things. "May Bird" is about a 10-year-old girl who has to save the land of the dead. I know it sounds creepy, but by the middle of the book you will love everything about it. You won't care if it is a little creepy! I love this book!

– Makenzie Garrett, seventh grade, William S. Hackett Middle School



My favorite book that I read recently is called "Money Hungry" by Sharon G. Flake. I liked it because it is what people go through in real life today. The book is about a young girl named Raspberry that would do just about anything to have money. Raspberry and her mother were poor; they lived in cars for months and would ask just about anybody for money so they could eat and buy clothes. One day, Raspberry's mother got tired of asking people, so she went out and found a job. After that they were in a two-bedroom house. Raspberry still wasn't satisfied. Read the rest of the book to find out how it ends.

– Itisha Jones, eighth grade, Philip Livingston Magnet Academy



Many of us may be familiar with Jamie Lee Curtis as an actress, but she is also a well-known author of children's books, including "I'm Gonna Like Me," "Today I Feel Silly" and her most recent, "Big Words for Little People." My students enjoy listening to and reading her stories. Each captures their attention as it is told through a child's point of view and voice. The illustrations are delightfully vibrant and depict a very diverse group of children with ideas and issues they can relate to. These books can also be used to construct and encourage an atmosphere of community among our students, which is an important ingredient to a successful school year!

– Sandy Lee La, third-grade teacher, Thomas O'Brien Academy of Science and Technology (TOAST)



One of my favorite books is "Angels and Demons" by Dan Brown. It is a mystery novel that is about a secret society called the Illuminati and the adventures of the protagonist, Robert Langdon, at the Vatican. This book incorporates anagrams, which contributes to its unique and suspenseful plot. It is the prequel to the best-selling novel "Da Vinci Code." The "Angels and Demons" movie is coming out this spring, which I am very excited for and I highly recommend reading and/or seeing both.

– Avery Sohn, senior, Albany High School



One of the best books I have read so far this year is "Of Mice and Men" by John Steinbeck. This book addresses important issues such as friendship, disability and sacrifice. Through Steinbeck's use of imagery and characterization, the story really comes alive. This book is easy to relate to because the characters' emotions are expressed so well. Despite the sad ending, a glimmer of hope can still be found. I thoroughly enjoyed "Of Mice and Men," and I will probably read it again someday.

– Julia Steppich, sophomore, Albany High School



Do you like exciting stories? Well, "The Ghost, The White House and Me" is so cool. I just read the most sparkling book you will ever read because it's about a girl whose mom turns into the president. Then she thinks the White House is haunted. I couldn't stop reading it. That's why I decided to read it a second time. It's just breathtaking. If you read this book be ready to explode with enjoyment that will last forever, I'm sure. It's amazing and exciting. You will love this book as much as I do, so be sure to read it.

– Nyzaaria Ussery, third grade, New Scotland Elementary School

At a Glance: Stephen and Harriet Myers Middle School

Constructed in 2005 through the City School District of Albany's current facilities project, Myers Middle School is a modern three-story, 140,000-square foot facility. The school's name proudly honors the leaders of the local branch of the Underground Railroad, which played an important role in assisting thousands of African-Americans to freedom in the mid-1800s.

Students: 530 | Teachers: 61 | Total employees: 92

Points of distinction:

- Active Parent-Teacher-Student Association (PTSA)
- Extensive variety of after-school clubs and activities
- More than 25 percent of students actively participate in arts and music programs

Partnerships:

- Big Brothers/Big Sisters
- Capital Leaders
- Delta Sigma Theta Society Inc.
- Engineers for the Future
- General Electric
- Habitat for Humanity
- Lego Robotics Engineering Academy
- National Urban Alliance for Effective Education
- New Netherland Museum—Halfmoon ship
- NYS Department of Health
- Pathways to Engineering programs
- Police Athletic League (PAL)
- Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
- Siena College
- Skidmore College
- Teachers College, Columbia University
- Temple Israel
- Underground Railroad-Myers House

What makes our school special?

The Myers Middle School mission is to develop and support student academic achievement while fostering respect, responsibility and self-empowerment. Together with a dedicated staff, parental involvement and community connections, the school provides a culturally diverse learning environment that enables students to reach their full potential. The educational program offers the same opportunities of learning to each student, encouraging them to pursue their personal interests and engage in the many school activities offered. The school provides a safe and nurturing environment, which allows students to flourish academically and continue to develop on their individual strengths. Myers focuses on assuring high-quality instruction, offering challenging course content and providing supports for academic excellence and personal development. The school recognizes the importance of working with parents, families and communities to ensure that students successfully meet the requirements of middle level education while preparing them for high school and college.

Did you know?

Stephen and Harriet Myers lived in Albany in the 1850s and '60s and published an abolitionist newspaper, *The Northern Star and Freeman's Advocate*.

Beginning a journey, building a foundation

Full-day pre-K and kindergarten programs start children off on the right foot

No step is more important to a child's education than the first one.

Establishing a solid foundation for young children is vital in shaping the critical first years of the school experience – an experience that will last a lifetime.

The City School District of Albany offers excellent full-day prekindergarten and kindergarten programs to provide students and families with an array of quality options for these critical first steps.

The district's pre-K and K programs ensure that children build the skills, confidence and relationships they need to begin a lifetime of learning.

"Our goal is to create confident and excited learners whose enjoyment for school spills into their next and future years in school," said Melissa Hasty, the district's early childhood coordinator.

Prekindergarten

In pre-K, work is play and play is work.

The district offers 622 total pre-K seats in all 12 of its elementary schools and at 10 off-site locations throughout Albany.

Classes have no more than 18 children to ensure that each receives the individualized attention that makes the pre-K experience meaningful. The program is based on activities that will nurture this enthusiasm in a safe and caring environment.

"Prekindergarten is all about nurturing and supporting young learners so that they know daily successes," said Tamara Armstrong, a pre-K teacher at Eagle Point Elementary School.

Kindergarten

The district's kindergarten program builds an educational foundation on the expectation and wonder that fill children at this age.

"Kindergarten students take chances that they have never taken before in a school setting – to experience and explore their worlds," said Sheridan Preparatory Academy kindergarten teacher Melissa Hunt. "They develop friendships and flourish in an environment that is safe and predictable."

The district's kindergarten curriculum focuses on these areas: English language arts; math, science and technology; social studies; the arts; and social and personal development.

For additional information about the district's pre-K and K programs, visit our Pre-Registration Blast for Pre-K and Kindergarten on Saturday, March 28 from 11 a.m.-1 p.m. at Schuyler Achievement Academy, 676 Clinton Ave.

You also can call the Office of Central Registration at (518) 462-7207 or visit us online at www.albanyschools.org.

¡Se habla español!

Would you like your child to be bilingual – to be able to read, write and speak in two languages?

We invite you to come explore the Dual Language Program at Delaware Community School. A language-immersion program in Spanish and English, the program is open to students from prekindergarten through grade 5.

Like the City School District of Albany's three magnet elementary schools, the Dual Language Program is available to children from all over the city. Class sizes are limited.

Registration begins Monday, March 30 during prekindergarten and kindergarten registration at the Office of Central Registration in Lincoln Park.

We also invite you to an Open House on Wednesday, March 4 from 5:30-7 p.m. at Delaware Community School, 43 Bertha St., to meet the faculty and learn more about the program.

For more information, visit www.albanyschools.org or call Delaware Community School Interim Principal Gary Beadnell at 475-6750.

Save the dates!

Enrollment dates for prekindergarten and kindergarten will be earlier than ever this year so families can make these important decisions as early as possible.

• Saturday, March 28

Pre-Registration Blast for Pre-K and Kindergarten 11 a.m.-1 p.m.

Philip Schuyler Achievement Academy, 676 Clinton Ave.

• Monday, March 30

Pre-K and K registration begins

All students must be registered at the Office of Central Registration, located in the Sunshine Building in Lincoln Park (see related story, this page, for information about what you will need to register).

The **Pre-Registration Blast for Pre-K and Kindergarten** is sponsored by the Albany Public Teachers Association and supported by New York State United Teachers. The event will provide families with a wide range of information about pre-K and K programs throughout the district.

The fair also will provide information about registration, and special services and resources available to Albany families. Lunch will be provided free for all attendees.

We hope to see you there!



What do I need to register for pre-K or K?

Here is what you'll need to register your child for full-day prekindergarten or kindergarten for the 2009-10 school year. Registration begins Monday, March 30.

- Proof of birth
- Official immunization records
- Two proofs of residency (see below)
- Custody papers, if applicable

Proof of residency must include the name and address of the parent or guardian, and must be dated within 30 days prior to registration. Items accepted as proof of residency (two are required):

- Telephone bill or "welcome letter" from telephone company
- Utility bill (gas, electric, etc.)
- Cable TV installation receipt
- Furniture rental agreement
- Auto insurance policy
- Original lease agreement (acceptable only from an apartment complex or real estate company)
- Valid NYS Driver License
- Payroll check dated within the two weeks prior to registration

Unacceptable items:

- U.S. mail
- Bank or credit card records
- Property tax deed
- Tax bills
- Any proof older than 30 days
- Rent receipts

All students must be registered at the Office of Central Registration, located in the Sunshine Building in Lincoln Park. The office is open weekdays from 8:30 a.m. through 4 p.m. For more information, call (518) 462-7207.

Strategic plan charts a course for district's future

The City School District of Albany Board of Education unanimously approved a comprehensive strategic plan in November that will guide the district's growth and progress in the years ahead.

The board's approval capped a year-long process that involved more than 70 volunteers from the school district and community.

The strategic plan will guide the development of all aspects of district operations, including curriculum, academic programs, instruction, communication, hiring, facilities and extracurricular activities.

The district already has begun the important work of prioritizing the work outlined by the seven action teams, 38 specific projects as sweeping as redesigning all aspects of Albany High School and as focused as establishing a new phone line to make information

more accessible to the community.

"We are very appreciative of the thorough work our Strategic Planning Team and the members of our seven action teams have done to position the district for continued progress in the years to come," said Superintendent Eva C. Joseph, Ed.D. "Building on our strengths and addressing our challenges head-on, we recognize that there is much we need to accomplish.

"We look forward to working together with our community to achieve these important goals."

Implementation

The district implementation schedule takes into account a number of factors as it prioritizes the 38 action steps developed during the year-long process.

The schedule takes into account several

The City School District of Albany's Mission Statement:

The mission of the City School District of Albany is to educate and nurture all students to be responsible citizens, critical thinkers and lifelong learners to successfully compete in the global community by providing an academically rigorous and safe environment in partnership with parents, students and the community.

criteria. It considers each action step's role in improving student achievement, the urgency and manageability of each step, available or anticipated resources, and congruence with ongoing work.

The schedule identifies strategies and action steps to be implemented over the next five years, identifies resources allocated to

the plan and identifies the manager and staff that will be assigned to plan the implementation timeline and completion of each step.

Following are the 38 result statements developed by the seven action teams. Visit www.albanyschools.org to read the full action plans or to download the district's full comprehensive strategic plan.

STRATEGY 1

We will design and implement a more effective way to engage parents and families in the education of their children at home and at school.

Result statements

- 1.1 Create a standard elementary orientation program, customized at each school site, in collaboration with parents and community, to help parents and families contribute to student success in school.
- 1.2 Provide information and training for families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities.
- 1.3 Involve parents in school governance, ensuring that parents and families of a diverse nature such as socio-economic, race, special needs and English language learners are represented on district and school-wide planning committees and shared decision-making bodies.
- 1.4 Orient and connect parents and families to available key services and resources to empower them to be active participants in their children's education.
- 1.5 Design, in coordination with the City Council PTA or other agencies, a quality program framework and implementation strategy for effective volunteerism in our schools.
- 1.6 Provide modules of study to teachers and parents in school-based forums to foster and improve communication skills to support effective parent-teacher collaboration.
- 1.7 Implement effective forms of one-way/two-way communication about children's progress, including report cards, progress or interim reports and biweekly updates (at the elementary level).

STRATEGY 2

We will ensure the emotional and physical safety and well being of our students in collaboration with community and family partners.

Result statements

- 2.1 Provide a school-based district-wide professional development for all school staff to respond constructively to unproductive, off-task behavior of students, helping all feel emotionally and physically safe.
- 2.2 Provide a school-based safety program on a quarterly basis that reinforces personal responsibility and teamwork through a variety of techniques (such as movies, invited guest speakers, field trips to law enforcement, etc.)
- 2.3 Create a think tank to evaluate how our existing alternative educational programs are doing and research new innovative ideas.
- 2.4 Conduct a two-day summer orientation program for students transitioning to a new school that instills team-building and cooperation needed to succeed.
- 2.5 Create an accountability system that ensures all programs geared to ensuring the emotional and physical safety and well-being of our students are being implemented throughout our schools.

STRATEGY 3

We will assess and redesign all aspects of the high school with the community to ensure academic rigor and high-level student performance.

Result statements

- 3.1 Develop, design and implement a formal advisory/mentorship program to be built into all student schedules to foster true and positive relationships between students and faculty.
- 3.2 Create smaller learning communities for all Albany High School students.
- 3.3 Redesign the high school facility to support the creation of smaller learning communities.
- 3.4 Provide mandatory professional training development for all administrators, teachers and paraprofessionals that will help them work with economically and culturally diverse students to ensure academic rigor and higher-level student performance.
- 3.5 Implement a series of programs to inform, engage and increase participation of all students to enroll in and pass at least one advanced course of study prior to graduation.
- 3.6 Create a full service community resource center to provide parents/guardians with opportunities to interact with staff, to become familiar with program and curricular requirements for graduation and to participate/support their child in achieving success.

STRATEGY 4

We will improve education in grades 6-8 in partnership with our community to address academic rigor and the disparity in academic achievement.

Result statements

- 4.1 Implement an annual middle school orientation program for all parents and students.
- 4.2 Create a comprehensive middle school mentoring program in collaboration with community partners, staff and students.
- 4.3 Identify the needs of at-risk middle school students and make resources available to address these needs.
- 4.4 Offer enrichment opportunities for all middle school students.
- 4.5 To address enrollment and ensure academic success, transition the middle school programs to two 6-8 middle schools and one PK-8, and evaluate other options in collaboration with parents and community members to address any excess enrollment.

STRATEGY 5

We will develop and implement more effective communications, ensuring input from all district stakeholders about matters affecting the well-being of our students.

Result statements

- 5.1 Research and develop outreach and communication efforts to more effectively reach all families and communities, taking into account how messages are shaped and received.
- 5.2 Develop an annual communication blueprint to guide efforts at the district, building and classroom levels to provide greater integration and enhance clarity and access to information.
- 5.3 Support the establishment of a newsletter in each building of at least monthly frequency during the school year.
- 5.4 Implement a weekly or biweekly TV show featuring a variety of constituents to communicate the work and importance of public education in Albany.

- 5.5 Create public engagement models, including meeting and hearing to ensure that public input on major decisions is heard and processed.
- 5.6 Establish an informational phone line to provide access to information 24 hours a day.

STRATEGY 6

We will use all assessment data to drive academically rigorous instruction, PK-12, to improve the performance of every student.

Result statements

- 6.1 Provide school-level and district-wide training for building and district administrators, teachers and instructional support staff in the use and application of a variety of assessment to target instruction that will promote students' academic success.
- 6.2 Provide a series of trainings and information (written, face-to-face, Web-based) to support parents, students, family, community members and other stakeholders in their efforts to read, understand and interpret student, building and district reports presented in a variety of formats (SED report cards, student ISR, etc.).
- 6.3 Develop a data warehouse system that allows for the collection of individual student assessment and other pertinent data points (i.e., absenteeism, mobility, number of elementary schools attended, services provided, etc.), which can be accessed by teachers, administrators and staff for the purpose of making informed academic program decisions.
- 6.4 Develop a program evaluation tool (template) that can be applied to existing programs that would assist in establishing programmatic benchmarks that determine the success of the program. This tool must use both student and program expense data to help inform decision making for future programming.

STRATEGY 7

We will develop a variety of ways for ensuring every student's access to all school education and extracurricular activities.

Result statements

- 7.1 Design a Personalized Educational Plan (PEP) format that will be used for each student that drives and supports academic rigor and high-level performance.
- 7.2 Develop a plan to implement and monitor pilot to integrate Personalized Education Plans into the City School District of Albany.
- 7.3 Develop a Community and School Resource Guide to be used in support of the implementation of Personalized Education Plans.
- 7.4 Standardize and publicize in a guide requirements for class and program placements in clear and concise layman's terms.
- 7.5 Provide professional development training to all teachers, guidance counselors and support staff on the concept of vertical integration that will work with economically and culturally diverse students to ensure academic rigor and high-level performance.

Middle school enrollment

(continued from page 1)

The board also approved half-mile neighborhood enrollment zones for Hackett, Myers and Livingston.

Students living within that distance of Hackett or Myers will have the option of attending the closer school. Families living within a half-mile of Livingston will have the option of choosing either Hackett or Myers.

Additionally, students in grades 6-7 at Livingston this year also will be able to choose Hackett or Myers for 2009-10.

For additional details about the choice options for Livingston families, please call the Office of Central Registration at (518) 462-7207 or visit www.albanyschools.org.

The transition to two main middle schools is happening because Livingston's enrollment has shrunk dramatically in recent years. Once enrolling more than 800 students, Livingston serves about 250 this school year.

A 30-member committee made up of district and community volunteers met for several months during the fall and winter to research enrollment options.

Assistant Superintendent for Secondary Education Tresa Diggs, Ed.D., led the Middle School Enrollment Planning Committee, along with Assistant Director of Special Education Michele Bridgewater and New Scotland Elementary School Principal Gregory Jones.

"Dr. Diggs, Ms. Bridgewater and Mr. Jones provided exceptional leadership and guidance during this process," said Superintendent Eva C. Joseph, Ed.D. "I also would like to thank the committee members for their dedication to this extremely important undertaking for our school district and our community. Their careful study of this complex issue has been a tremendous benefit to our children and families."

The committee focused on two primary options – the feeder system, and a random school assignment system in which stu-

Feeder schools for Hackett Middle School

- Arbor Hill Elementary School
- Delaware Community School
- Eagle Point Elementary School
- New Scotland Elementary School
- Thomas O'Brien Academy of Science and Technology (TOAST)

Feeder schools for Myers Middle School

- Albany School of Humanities (ASH)
- Giffen Memorial Elementary School
- Montessori Magnet School
- Pine Hills Elementary School
- Schuyler Achievement Academy
- Sheridan Preparatory Academy

dents would be assigned to Hackett and Myers through an annual, random, computer-generated process.

The committee presented the two options to the board Dec. 2, then held six public forums in early January to provide information to the community and gather feedback. After receiving an update on the community input at its Jan. 15 meeting, the board voted in favor of the feeder system and neighborhood zones at its Feb. 3 meeting.

The board approved the feeder groupings Feb. 12.

Myers, Hackett and North Albany each have been part of the district's current facilities project for elementary and middle schools.

Myers is a completely new facility that opened in September 2005. Hackett (September 2008) and North Albany (September 2005) both were completely renovated. As a result, all students in grades 6-8 will have the opportunity to access state-of-the-art school buildings beginning next fall.

William S. Hackett Middle School

45 Delaware Avenue
475-6475

Constructed in 1926-27 and named in honor of Albany's 67th mayor, William S. Hackett Middle School was completely updated in 2007-08.

The restored and renovated building combines many of architect Marcus T. Reynolds' original design elements – exquisite marble, ornate plasterwork and a stained-glass skylight above the majestic central staircase – with complete upgrades to the mechanical infrastructure and the academic wings on each floor.

The result is a state-of-the-art learning environment that preserves important pieces of Albany's history while providing an outstanding educational facility for students in grades 6-8.



Stephen and Harriet Myers Middle School

100 Elbel Court
475-6425

Opened in 2005, Stephen and Harriet Myers Middle School is a modern three-story, 140,000-square-foot facility.

The school proudly honors the leaders of the local branch of the Underground Railroad, which played an important role in assisting thousands of African-Americans to freedom in the mid-1800s. Stephen and Harriet Myers also published an abolitionist newspaper, *The Northern Star and Freeman's Advocate*.



North Albany Academy

570 North Pearl Street
475-6800

The former Public School 20 is the City School District of Albany's only school serving students in prekindergarten through grade 8.

Renovated in 2004-05 as part of the district's ongoing facilities project for elementary and middle schools, North Albany Academy enjoys a unique partnership with the adjoining North Albany YMCA, which provides the school's students access to a pool, gym, track and a branch of the Albany Public Library.

As a PK-8 public school, it is only natural that staff members get to know students and families well and strengthen these bonds over time. North Albany has monthly "family" activities that are informative as well as social, bringing together parents, faculty, students and alumni, and instilling pride in both the school and community.



Information for parents of students with disabilities

The City School District of Albany has an obligation to evaluate students with suspected disabilities who reside in the district and attend our schools to determine their eligibility and need for special education and other special accommodations to benefit from and access the educational services and programs it offers.

If you believe your child has a disability that requires special education or special accommodations to benefit from our academic programs and/or access school-sponsored activities, we encourage you to contact your child's building principal or the director of special education at 462-7217 to discuss whether your child should be referred to the Committee on Special Education or the 504 Team for a full evaluation.

For students with suspected disabilities who attend non-public schools located within the boundaries of the City School District of Albany, parents may refer their child by writing to our Committee on Special Education to request an evaluation to determine eligibility and need for special education. For a student found eligible prior to April 1, a parent may request special education services to commence that year within 30 days of such determination.

For the 2009-10 school year, for students who are state residents, who were previously identified disabled and found eligible for special education under state regulations, (not students identified under 504) parents who plan to enroll their child in a non-public school located within the district must provide to the Committee on Special Education a written request for such services no later than June 1. In such cases, we urge you to provide your request as soon as you know your plans to enable us to work with you and develop your child's plan early.

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

Feel free to contact the Special Education Department at 462-7217 if you have any questions.

2009-10 non-public transportation deadline

New York state education law requires that parents residing within the boundaries of the City School District of Albany whose children will attend a non-public school in the City of Albany in 2009-10 submit a written request for transportation to the district by April 1.

For 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. Requests should be mailed to:

Joseph Verrigni
Director of Transportation
City School District of Albany
830 S. Pearl Street
Albany, NY 12202

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.

Albany public school students who will be attending a public school in 2009-10 will receive a transportation application in May.

For more information, contact the Transportation Department at 462-7320.

Teaching history as it happened

Students across the district learned from President Obama's historic victory

Students throughout the City School District of Albany participated in a wide range of activities to mark the inauguration of Barack Obama as America's 44th president and the nation's first African-American president.

The events included all-school assemblies, inaugural galas, student presentations

and performances, a mural dedicated to the incoming president's children and a service project in honor of the presidential puppy.

Schools throughout the district televised the inauguration ceremony live, and local and national media visited Albany's public schools to cover the events, making the voices of the district's teachers and students

heard throughout the Capital Region, across the country and around the world.

"The presidential inauguration offered many teachable moments, both historically and socially," said Bryan Cartwright, the district's social studies instructional supervisor. "Often, we learn history in terms of the past. Yet, through the use of live broad-

casts, our schools made sure that the inauguration of our nation's first African-American president was witnessed as it unfolded, literally right in front of us.

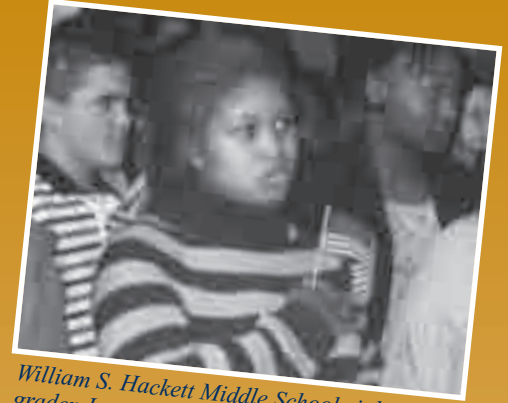
"Our students will remember where they were when this event happened."



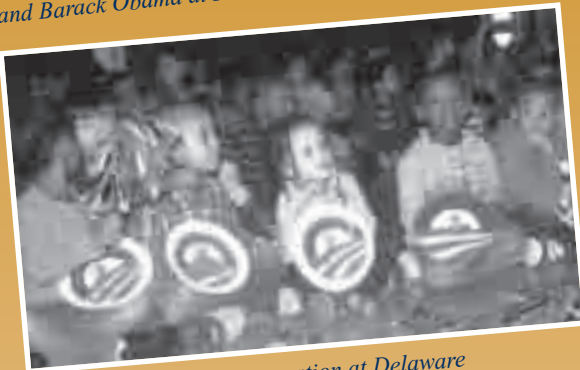
Shanquell Melton and Patrick Ghyll portray Michelle and Barack Obama at Pine Hills Elementary School.



Agija VanDerweil's first-grade class at North Albany Academy received books about the new president through a Donors Choose grant.



William S. Hackett Middle School eighth-grader Jennay Jones participates in the school's assembly.



Students watch the inauguration at Delaware Community School.



Eagle Point Elementary School student Lauren Wiley portrays Lady Liberty during the school's assembly.



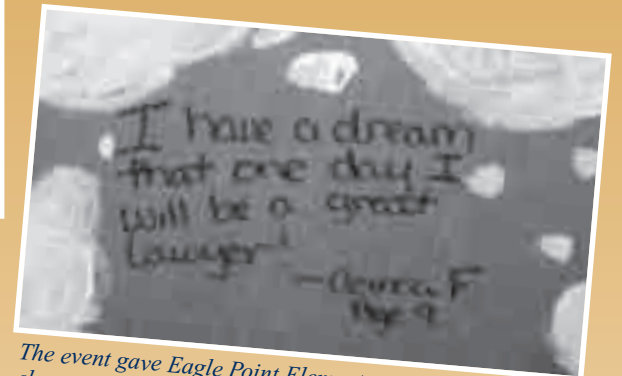
An All-American lineup at Eagle Point Elementary School!



Pine Hills Elementary School's Barack Obamas - Patrick Ghyll, Perriel Rich and LaQuan Ward.



Giffen Memorial Elementary School's celebration included a parade of states - here, Louisiana.



The event gave Eagle Point Elementary School students a chance to share their dreams.



Watching the big day's events during the inauguration luncheon at Pine Hills Elementary School.



Juliette Geraghty and Mitchell Ringwald were the presidents in Jodi Commerford's third-grade class at New Scotland Elementary School.



William S. Hackett Middle School sixth-grader Katherine Sharp reads her award-winning essay on freedom.

Eighth-grader Sanaya Arrington's poem about President Obama was part of the celebration at Philip Livingston Magnet Academy.



Montessori Magnet School fifth-grader Andrew Kosinski reads the morning announcements during the school's Inauguration Day assembly while Principal Kenneth Lein looks on.



Shanquell Melton shows off the message of the day at Pine Hills Elementary School.

Hackett teacher 'changing minds'



Valarie Karas takes readers into her Hackett Middle School classroom through her Times Union blog, "Changing Minds."

Valarie Karas and her seventh-grade students at William S. Hackett Middle School have a lot to say. About their school, about their city, about their world and about themselves.

Now they have a forum: "Changing Minds," a blog Mrs. Karas created last summer at TimesUnion.com (check it out at <http://blogs.timesunion.com/changingminds>).

Mrs. Karas, an English language arts teacher, wants to give people a chance to see what students in Albany's public schools are really like.

"What I wanted is for the kids to be empowered by it and for people to see the truth in what goes on in our classrooms, and that has happened," she said.

Mrs. Karas posts several entries a week on a wide range of topics, and regularly includes her students' work. They have received feedback from across the city and region, and around the

world. Her students appreciate that people are listening.

"It's very cool and it's very fun getting to be a part of it," said student Sean Logue. "The blog has no doubt been one of the best things so far in school, one of the things that makes Hackett very unique."

Albany High students learn leadership skills

Four Albany High School students have been selected for prestigious leadership programs.

Maya Carrasquillo, Danyel Matthews and Clinton Mathai attended the annual Youth Leadership Training Conference in Orlando, Fla., in January. All three were members of the Albany Police Athletic League's Youth Leadership Council and were nominated by their peers to attend.

Senior Carlos Saavedra was selected to participate in the Puerto Rican/Hispanic Youth Leadership Training Series from Jan. 14 through April 1.

The program includes three hours of training each week and Carlos also will be eligible to be chosen to participate in the 2009 Angelo Del Toro Puerto Rican Hispanic Youth Leadership Institute, to be held in Albany later in April.

Learning in bloom at Giffen



Albany City Gardener Judy Stacey shows tulip bulbs to Giffen students before they planted them in the fall.

For the third straight year, Jacqueline Johnson's second-grade class at Giffen Memorial Elementary School is participating in an international science project involving tulips.

Ms. Johnson's students planted tulip bulbs in November after recording observations about the bulbs in their personal Tulip Journals. During the winter, they are making predictions on when their bulbs will emerge and bloom, giving them one more reason to look forward to spring!

Students then will observe when the tulips bloom and how long they live, recording and posting the data on the Internet. Viewing the results in a broader, global context, students will use the data to investigate and make inferences about the relationships between geography, temperature and the arrival of spring.

The students also will take one bulb home to plant in their neighborhoods.

Keeping it moving behind the scenes

While many people were enjoying time off over December's holiday vacation, the Buildings and Grounds staff was hard at work helping New Scotland Elementary School move back home (see related story, page 1).

And that really was a vacation compared to the way Buildings and Grounds, led by Director Anthony R. Catalfamo, spent last year's summer break!

There were 10 moving projects in seven exhausting weeks last summer to keep the district's ongoing facilities project on track.

Crews moved things in, out and around at Albany School of Humanities (ASH), Arbor Hill Elementary School, Giffen Memorial Elementary School, Harriet Gibbons High School, Philip Livingston Magnet Academy, swing space at the former Schuyler Elementary School, Stephen and Harriet Myers Middle School, Thomas O'Brien Academy of Science and Technology (TOAST) and William S. Hackett Middle School.

There was asbestos training in the midst of it all. Construction and renovation in the Albany High School cafeteria and at Abrookin Vocational-Technical Center also stayed on track, while 65,000 square feet of outdoor benches at Albany High got a fresh coat of paint!

Eagle Point Caldecott club

The students in Eagle Point Elementary School's Caldecott Book Club didn't pick the winner in this year's prestigious national competition for children's illustrators, but they had a lot of fun trying!

Reading teacher Jennifer Carey Fusco organized the club to emulate the Caldecott Book Award, chosen annually by the American Library Association.

The students learned about the history of the award and the man it is named after, 19th-century English illustrator Randolph Caldecott. They also learned how to evaluate illustrations according to ALA guidelines, and they discussed parts of books (double-page spreads, gutters, etc.) as well as the different mediums used by illustrators, such as watercolors, acrylics, colored pencils and pastels.

Eagle Point's club picked "Old Bear" as its winner and "In a Blue Room" as the runner-up. The ALA selected "House in the Night" as this year's winner.

NYS first lady visits Albany schools



Michelle Paige Paterson (left) visited Myers Middle School in February to promote her "Healthy Steps to Albany" fitness initiative.

Some of the first steps New York State First Lady Michelle Paige Paterson took in her new health and wellness initiative for children were in Albany's public schools.

Mrs. Paterson visited William S. Hackett Middle School in the fall to discuss her "Healthy Steps to Albany" initiative. She returned in February to promote the program during visits to North Albany Academy and Stephen and Harriet Myers Middle School.

"We, as parents, educators and community leaders, must promote healthy activity, eating and living so that our children can lead long, healthy and active lives," she said.

Throughout the spring, students will use the "Healthy Steps" Web site to convert various exercises into steps. Class teams across the state will compete for a chance to attend a luncheon hosted by Gov. David Paterson and Mrs. Paterson, and other prizes.

'Maniacs' excel at robotics event



North Albany Academy's "Mindstorm Maniacs" celebrate their outstanding performance at this year's robotics tournament at RPI.

North Albany Academy's "Mindstorm Maniacs" turned in an outstanding second-place performance in the fourth annual FIRST LEGO League Tech Valley Challenge at RPI.

Coached by Kevin Allen and Mike Lai, North Albany's robotics team took home three awards, more than any of its competitors in the 24-team field of middle schoolers from the Capital Region and Vermont. North Albany took third place for Consistency and second place for Design in addition to finishing second in overall points.

"Hats off to our team," said Principal Dale Getto. "The team was terrific, as were our 'cheerleaders' at the event. We missed first place by a very slim margin and we are so proud of our students and their great coaches, Mr. Allen and Mr. Lai."

Check us out online!

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

- Academy of Engineering new next fall
- ASH recycling makes an impact
- Distance learning course at Albany High
- Elks contest lets freedom ring
- Giffen students help fight hunger
- 'Kids of the Week' at ASH, Myers
- Making a difference at Albany High
- Montessori hosts Russian educators
- Talking with Tonko at North Albany
- The 'bear' facts about geography

You also can check out our District News section!

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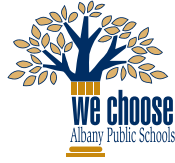
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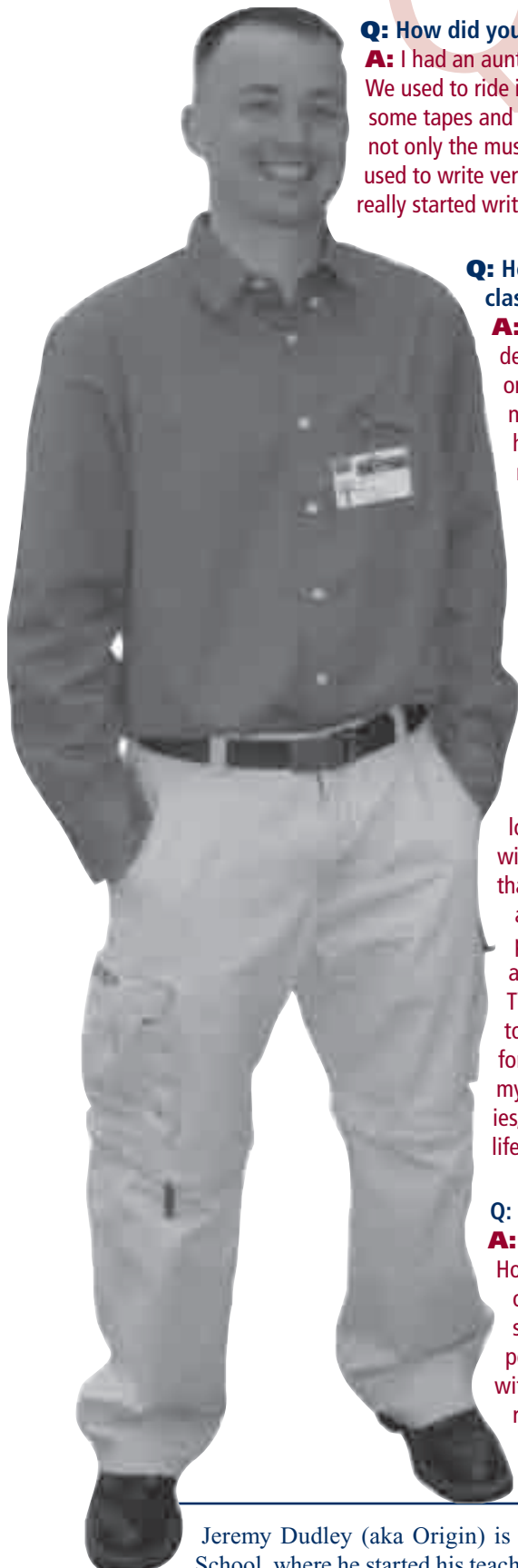
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Leading the way Meet Jeremy Dudley

Fifth-grade teacher, Giffen Memorial Elementary School



Q: How did you get started as a hip-hop performer?

A: I had an aunt who used to listen to hip-hop when I was young. We used to ride in her car and it was always on. She let me borrow some tapes and I was hooked. I'm sure I was drawn to the rhythms, not only the music but also the voice, the cadence. My friends and I used to write verses in high school, but it wasn't until college that I really started writing songs with messages.

Q: How do you incorporate your music in the classroom?

A: I try to use rhythm and repetition to help the students remember different things that we're working on, but I'm not rapping with the kids everyday. It definitely does a lot for our relationship. A lot of them live hip-hop culture. Since I listen to and write my own music, it gives us something we can relate to. I'm also currently working on publishing songs that are content-based and can be used in classrooms.

Q: How does your passion for your music make you a better teacher?

A: My passion for music gives me another avenue to reach my students. It goes beyond having a few songs to help memorize facts. Having a common interest in hip-hop definitely leads to real-world discussions about things that are relevant to my students. What do you see when you watch TV? Just look at the imagery of what we're being bombarded with constantly. Sometimes it conflicts with the goals that we want to achieve in education. What are the images of black men and women in hip-hop? Who's a positive role model? There are some, but not many and that's an issue for me. A lot of music, videos and TV programming send less-than-responsible messages to our children and our society as a whole. It's an issue for me both as an artist and educator. I want to teach my students more than just math, science, social studies, reading and writing. I want to teach them about life. I feel like it's one of our major jobs as educators.

Q: Do your students get involved in your music?

A: Yes. One of my most well-known tracks, "Come Home Dad," has current Albany High students on it. Another track, "Believe It," also features an Albany High student. Every one of my classes has helped write or perform an original song on stage. We've collaborated with other schools, and all of the students have been really receptive to it.

Jeremy Dudley (aka Origin) is in his ninth year at Giffen Memorial Elementary School, where he started his teaching career. He's also a three-time winner of the Best Hip-Hop Artist award in the annual *Metroland* reader's poll. He currently is working on his sophomore album, "Front Lines." Emphasizing a positive message, his thought-provoking music stresses open-mindedness, self-awareness and independence. Check out his classroom page at NYlearns.org/jdudley.

Alumni achievement

Shawn Hamlin '85 – Building blocks for success



Shawn Hamlin '85

Shawn Hamlin '85 still remembers the classroom and the way it shaped his life.

The room was at Abrookin Vocational-Technical Center, a part of Albany High School's academic program. The class was drafting and design, taught by a licensed architect.

"It was a unique opportunity for a high school student," he recalled. "The classroom had all of the accoutrements, computers and drafting tables that you would find in many professional architectural firms. It was really an inspiration and helped fuel my interest in architecture as a career."

That career has included notable projects right here at home.

Shawn designed Philip Schuyler Achievement Academy on Clinton Avenue, one of the City School District of Albany's newest elementary schools. He played an important role in the creation of the district's current facilities plan, and served as the district's senior architect from 2001-05.

He was the managing architect for the acclaimed renovation of William S. Hackett Middle School.

During his career he also has participated in planning for the proposed Albany Convention Center as well as designing award-winning parking structures for the State University Administration building and Albany International Airport.

Now the managing principal of his own firm, Hamlin Design Group, Shawn is leading the planning of Syracuse's \$180 million school renovation project.

Looking back on his education in Albany's public schools, Shawn sees the myriad opportunities it afforded him, and the same opportunities for families today.

"Families living in the city have the ability to choose from different types of educational models," he said. "From the Montessori program to something more traditional, there are options."

"Working with the district has widened my eyes to the fact that these opportunities are not available in many other communities."

Word of wisdom: As an architect, Shawn sees his hometown from a unique perspective. "Albany has a wonderful breadth of diverse buildings. From Philip Schuyler Achievement Academy, a building that was originally built in 1897 for railroad workers as the city was expanding at the turn of the century, to something more modern and fun like Sheridan Preparatory Academy or Stephen and Harriet Myers Middle School, to something more reserved like Eagle Point, it reflects an urban environment where buildings either lead to, or support the identity of the communities that they are in. I know buildings aren't everything, but they really add to the quality of life and the quality of education."