

Leading the way

Meet David C. McCalla, Ph.D.

Principal, Albany High School



Education always has been a priority for David McCalla. Albany High School's first-year principal graduated from high school at 16 and had a bachelor's degree in chemistry at 20. He holds two master's degrees along with his doctorate, taught science, math and chorus, and was an assistant principal, principal, district director and assistant superintendent before coming to Albany. He spent the first 25 years of his career in Miami, the nation's fourth-largest public-school system.

Q: What are the biggest challenges facing Albany's young people?

A: The first challenge is to not be distracted by the plethora of community problems on "the street." I have tremendous respect for the tenacity of the students who come in spite of all the problems in their neighborhoods. Second, there are two types of kids: ones who get support from home and ones who don't. The ones who don't often are easily distracted by the negative influences.

Q: How would you describe your administrative style?

A: I'm very rarely behind my desk. To be an effective administrator and principal you have to do it that way. You can't be isolated in your office. You have to greet people, be in the hallway, be in classrooms. I spend most of my time monitoring students and staff.

Q: What's your vision for Albany High?

A: I want to aggressively market Albany High School. I want to invite people in the building to see what we offer. You think we're unsafe? Come on in. I'll give you a visitor's pass and let you walk down our halls. I guarantee we can do this and win back students and parents. You have to have a vision if you're a principal and you have to make sure it's followed all the way down the line. It comes from the top. We need more students to graduate in four years and pass Regents exams. I want scholar-athletes who are students first. When I put my name on a diploma, it means the student is a credit to this school and whatever college they go to.

Q: You studied organ with world-class musicians, have a Ph.D., in music education and have a CD out. Do you perform in public? What type of music do you listen to?

A: I studied organ and piano and, yes, I still play. I had a concert in Nyack (N.Y.) in December. Sometimes I practice piano in the school at night. The night custodian hears me. I don't like to mix my job and music, though. I find the two don't intersect well. I don't ever listen to music during the day. I end up being too analytical and it turns out to be work, another job. It's a distraction. That's why we don't have any music playing around my office. The music plays in the outer office, which the staff enjoys.