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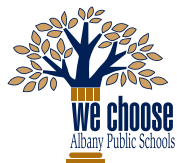
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Leading the way Meet David C. McCalla, Ph.D. Principal, Albany High School



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.

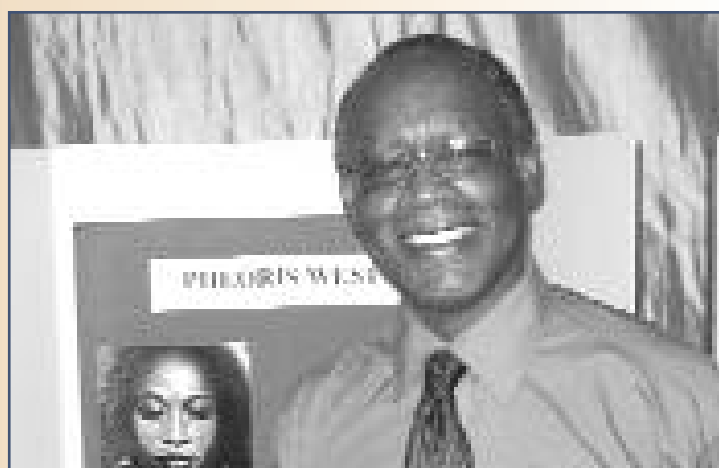
Q: What's your vision for Albany High?

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.

Alumni achievement Pheoris West '68



Life is sweet for acclaimed artist and art professor Pheoris West.

To Pheoris West, life has 31 flavors – and then some. "In so many ways I feel like I'm the same little child from the ice cream store that's experiencing all new things," he said.

The strategy serves the acclaimed artist and art professor well.

West, 59, spent much of his childhood living "a blessed kind of existence" above the family's ice cream parlor at the corner of Lark Street and Livingston Avenue. West's Ice Cream is long gone, but West retains the passion that fueled his early years.

A standout from the start, West's kindergarten teacher at the former Public School 5 predicted he would be president. He flourished when he entered the first class of the academically talented program at the former School 20 (now North Albany Academy).

"People talked about my future in such a positive way and it meant a lot. And I was surrounded by [students] who had high expectations for themselves," West said. "Everyone seemed to have a passion for learning."

West went on to William S. Hackett Middle School and then Albany High School, where he continued to excel. He headed for his 1968 graduation with honors. Although colleges offered scholarships, he turned them down and instead set his sights on the military.

But during the graduation ceremony, then-Principal John Bach vowed that West would not go into the service. Instead, Bach challenged him to go to college. West did, and it changed his life – saved it, he says.

"We lost most of our males to the Vietnam War. Those who did not go survived," West said. "I realized that if I had gone ... I would not have come back."

He studied political science for two years at the State University of New York College at Brockport, but found his calling – art – during a field trip to New York City. He attended Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, studied in Africa and Europe, and earned a master's from Yale University.

Today, West paints, draws and teaches art at The Ohio State University, where he has been an associate professor for 34 years. His work has appeared in the Philadelphia Museum, Boston Museum, the Studio Museum in Harlem and the Cincinnati Contemporary Art Center – among others. He was in the inaugural class of the City School District of Albany's Hall of Fame last fall.

His goal as an artist?

"I want to make art that has a life of its own, to create an experience that is unique as opposed to the re-creation of something that occurred already," he said. His study of psychology, physics and magic helps infuse his work with what he calls "a life force."

West considers himself lucky to be able to do what he does and see new challenges each day – whether in the classroom or on the canvas. "It feels like I just got here," he said.

New pre-K lottery set for 2010-11

Applications welcome in March for April 16 selection

Prekindergarten students in all 20 City School District of Albany schools and programs will be enrolled through a new lottery designed to assure access and opportunity for all families.

The prekindergarten lottery will be held April 16 in conjunction with the annual magnet lottery, which this year will apply only to kindergarten and above (see related stories, page 3). All 591 pre-K seats, including those seats at the three magnet schools, will be filled through the new lottery.

Applications for the prekindergarten lottery will be available beginning March 1 at the Central Registration Office in Lincoln Park, at www.albanyschools.org and at each elementary school and community-based organization. The district

offers prekindergarten in all 12 elementary schools, including the Dual-Language Program, and at seven additional sites operated by community-based organizations (see chart, page 3).

In the past, prekindergarten seats have been filled on a first-come, first-served basis. The State Education Department has mandated the new lottery system. The Board of Education approved the plan at its Feb. 4 meeting following a months-long study that included many opportunities for community feedback.

“The new lottery system will provide all families equal opportunity and access to quality prekindergarten programming in all of our schools and sites,” said Assistant Superintendent for Elementary Education Linda Rudnick. “The readiness

(continued on page 3)



Sheridan Preparatory Academy prekindergartener Ijalaye Bethea expertly trims the outline of a gingerbread man.

Student achievement

Senior excels on many fronts



What *can't* Owen Daniels do?

Owen Daniels is a Renaissance man in the making, and a busy one at that.

The Albany High School senior is brainy – he entered his senior year as the top-ranked student in the Class of 2010 and scored in the top 5 percent of U.S. students taking the National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test.

He's athletic – he was one of the leading scorers in the Capital Region last fall to help the soccer team to an unbeaten regular season and a Big 10 title, and this winter he plays forward on the basketball team.

He's a musician – a jazz piano virtuoso who is teaching himself electric guitar.

Juggling school, sports and music with the rest of life doesn't faze him, though.

“Finding a balance between these activities helps me stay centered,” Daniels said. “Besides, I like having a lot of subjects to work on and focus on.”

Columbia University is his first choice for next fall. Sports and music will take a back seat then, and he'll focus on his major: history.

“I've always been sort of a history guy,” he said.

He credits Albany High social-studies teachers Edward Smith, Paul Contento, Ralph Pape and Thomas McGurn for nurturing his interest in the subject. He credits his parents, Jackie and Jim, for allowing him to focus on whatever interested him.

And he credits Albany High for giving him a sense of perspective. Daniels arrived at the school as a freshman after getting his first nine years of education at a small private school.

“I went from a class of 18 people to a class of 541,” Daniels said. “Culturally, it had a huge impact on me, and it's given me a greater sense of perspective.”

“You find out how you can correct misunderstandings,” he said. “And you learn that at the end of the day, we're not all that different. We're all looking for the same thing.”

These days Daniels keeps busy with school, basketball and college applications. He also squeezes in his music. And of course, there's socializing.

“Usually there's time to see my friends,” he said. “But I'm sure they'll tell you I've been holed up in my house.”

Superintendent to stay another year

Raymond Colucciello, Ed.D., who has led the City School District of Albany as interim superintendent since last summer, has agreed to stay on through the 2010-11 school year.

Board of Education President Daniel Egan made the announcement Feb. 9 during the ribbon-cutting ceremony at Thomas O'Brien Academy of Science and Technology (TOAST).

“I am looking forward to continuing to work together with the board, our district staff and our community as we strive for the best possible programs and services for our students and families,” Dr. Colucciello said.

The board conducted a national search after Eva C. Joseph, Ed.D., retired last July. Mr. Egan said there were several highly qualified candidates, but the board opted for the stability Dr. Colucciello would provide during an important time for the district.

“From the beginning, this community made it clear that our search had to be about more than skills and qualifications – that our next superintendent had to be the right fit for Albany,” Mr. Egan said.

The board will continue its search for a new superintendent for 2011-12.

Forums seek input on high-school restructuring

Three March forums will give parents and community members more opportunities to weigh in on how the City School District of Albany should restructure Albany High School.

The forums will be held:

- **Tuesday, March 9** from 6:30-7:30 p.m. at North Albany Academy, 570 North Pearl Street
- **Wednesday, March 10** from 6:30-7:30 p.m. at Albany Housing Authority, 200 South Pearl Street
- **Monday, March 15** from 6:30-7:30 p.m. at Stephen and Harriet Myers Middle School, 100 Elbel Court, off Whitehall Road

The charge to redesign Albany High with community input was a key recommendation in the district's strategic plan, “A Vision for Tomorrow,” which the Board

of Education approved in November 2008. The district began seeking community input in December in an online survey that received more than 800 responses..

Seventy percent of the respondents favored keeping the high school and creating smaller schools in different locations.

Other survey findings:

- Most (84 percent) would support a “School of the Arts” or “School of the Arts and Technology” if the district pursues theme-based schools.
- The majority (54.3 percent) oppose separating ninth-graders from other high-school students.
- People who responded were district staff members (47 percent), parents (35.8 percent), community members (23.5 percent) and students (9.8 percent).

From the superintendent A good school that will get better



Raymond Colucciello, Ed.D.
Superintendent

While the recent designation of Albany High School as a “persistently lowest-achieving school” is sobering news, we have known for several years that the high school had to undergo important changes. That is why its future was among the most important elements in our strategic plan, “A Vision for Tomorrow,” which the Board of Education adopted in November 2008.

Forty years ago when the district built Albany High it made sense to have one comprehensive public high school. Today, we believe smaller learning communities will best serve Albany High students. Community feedback from a December survey that drew more than 800 responses supports this notion.

How we will structure these communities is the focus of a district-wide committee of administrators, staff and parents that has met every week since November. The committee will present a basic structure of a retooled high school during a series of March forums to be held throughout the city (see related story on page 1).

The forums will give students, families and community members an opportunity for input on the plan that will transform the school to meet the needs of all students.

Should Albany High be one building divided into several small schools? Should the learning communities be located throughout the city? Should each one have a special focus? We will raise these and other questions at the forums, and we look to you for advice and direction as we move forward.

In addition to smaller learning environments, restructuring Albany High also could mean changing how we evaluate teachers and how we connect students to the services they need in and outside school doors.

The latter subject is the focus of the Alternative Education Think Tank (see related story on page 6), another component of our strategic plan. The think tank began its work in November and anticipates its first report this spring.

You can visit www.albanyschools.org to find out more about the work of both committees. Should you wish to become involved with the think tank or the high-school restructuring committee, please contact my office at 475-6010.

There is no more “business as usual” at Albany High. By June you will see higher pass rates on Regents exams and lower failure rates in the classroom. By September you will see fundamental changes in the way the school and its programs are structured. I urge you to be an active part of decisions about these changes.

Together we can and will help Albany High meet its vast potential, and we look forward to working with you on this exciting and important endeavor.



**CAPITAL
education**

Capital Education is published by the City School District of Albany.

Please direct comments about the newsletter, story ideas and questions to Ron Lesko at (518) 475-6065 or rlesko@albany.k12.ny.us, or Lisa Angerame at (518) 475-6066 or langerame@albany.k12.ny.us.

City School District of Albany
Academy Park
Albany, New York 12207

Voices | Q: Who is your favorite U.S. president, and why?



As an American one of my rights is to vote at age 18. Election Day 1992 was one I will never forget. I was finally able to pull the lever in the polling booth for a presidential election! On that day I voted for my favorite president, William Jefferson Clinton.

— Kandi Antonetti, sixth-grade social-studies teacher, Stephen and Harriet Myers Middle School



My favorite president is Barack Obama because he is the first black president and he wants to treat everyone the same. I saw a sign that said, “I have a dream...” by Martin Luther King Jr., and Obama says, “I AM the dream!” And he is right!

— Azsjeny Brown, sixth grade, William S. Hackett Middle School



My favorite president of the United States of America would have to be our current president, Barack Obama. He is my favorite because he is the first African-American president, and because he stayed strong through adversity and tough times in his own life. He gives people hope that they can also make it through adversity, stay strong and become somebody. I feel that Barack Obama has a lot to offer this country and I believe he will be a very successful president.

— Corey Buckner, senior, Albany High School



My favorite president is George Washington because he was a great leader and a great general. He was a great general because of his actions in the Battle of Trenton. He cared about his troops and did not leave them in battle. In the end he won, and I believe they persevered because of his brilliant tactics. He was a great leader because in the winter at Valley Forge his troops did not give up even though they were barefoot, close to death and starving. He lived with them and worked alongside them. He is my favorite president because he was a great American hero.

— Keishla Hernandez, fifth grade, Thomas O'Brien Academy of Science and Technology (TOAST)



My favorite president is Thomas Jefferson. I picked Thomas Jefferson because he is a wonderful person who wrote the Declaration of Independence. The Declaration of Independence is important to us today because it is the basis and foundation for everything in America. Also, if there was no Declaration of Independence we would not have a Constitution or Bill of Rights.

— Kayla Hemingway, fifth grade, Giffen Memorial Elementary School



Abraham Lincoln is a magnificent person who led our country through one of the greatest internal crises. His mission was to preserve the union and abolish slavery. As an immigrant, it means so much to me that Lincoln was successful in both. Without Lincoln can you picture our country? We probably would not have the rights we have now. Instead, our country would be divided in two. We should never take this amazing country for granted. “America will never be destroyed from outside. If we falter and lose our freedoms, it will be because we destroyed ourselves.” — Abraham Lincoln.

— Thanh Nguyen, eighth grade, North Albany Academy



My favorite president is Thomas Jefferson. Having participated in Colonial Williamsburg’s Teacher Institute and being submerged in the 18th century I found Jefferson to be intriguing. Besides the writing of the Declaration of Independence, I’m fascinated with his political, leadership and governing ideas, his many inventions and his travel to and quote about Lake George, “The most beautiful water I ever saw.”

— Lynn Willigan, fifth-grade teacher, Eagle Point Elementary School



My favorite president is Barack Obama. He might not have done much yet, but it is going to take time. I love the speeches he gives, and how he and his wife are actually trying to change our country. And he’s black!

— K-Von Williams, freshman, Harriet Gibbons High School

At a Glance: Giffen Memorial Elementary School

Originally opened in 1960, Rev. John Giffen, M.D., Memorial Elementary School serves students from prekindergarten through grade 6. Giffen underwent significant improvements that were finished in summer 2009, including a renovated computer lab, new phone connections, new air conditioning and new lighting in the gym, cafeteria and auditorium. Giffen is the 11th school to be completed as part of the district’s sweeping plan to rebuild or renovate every elementary and middle school by September 2010.

Students: 479 | Teachers: 40 | Total employees: 80

Points of distinction:

Giffen is an integral part of the community and fortunate to have partnerships with numerous organizations and agencies.

Programs and Partnerships:

- 15 Love Literacy Program
- Albany County Department of Mental Health
- Albany Housing Authority
- Albany Housing Choir
- Annual science fair and spelling bee
- Band, chorus, orchestra
- Before- and after-school programs
- Columbia Writing Project
- Family Resource and Support Center
- Full-day prekindergarten and kindergarten
- Homework Club
- National Urban Alliance for Effective Education
- NYS Department of Motor Vehicles Reading Buddies
- Reigning Life Church
- Ronald McDonald House
- St. Peter’s Hospital
- Two Together Literacy Project
- Whitney M. Young Jr. Health Services
- YMCA

What makes our school special?

Giffen is truly a melting pot, with students that represent more than 12 countries and speak 13 different languages. Consequently, Giffen students learn to respect and embrace cultural differences. We welcome our English-language learners and provide them with resources to assimilate. Giffen also is an exciting learning place where young people develop their natural gifts and abilities as they gain self-confidence. Students grow to become well-adjusted independent thinkers as they explore their intelligences. They are empowered to become strong, responsible citizens through the dedicated efforts of all members within the learning community.

Did you know?

The school is named after Rev. John Giffen, M.D., a turn-of-the-century minister and physician who served Albany’s South End families for more than 30 years until his death in 1925.

Apply through March 31 for the magnet lottery

Lottery applications are being accepted through March 31 for seats beginning in kindergarten in the City School District of Albany's three magnet elementary schools.

A magnet school is a specialized program that focuses instruction on a particular theme. The district offers families a choice of three magnet schools (*see related stories below*).

Magnet-school programs follow New York state learning standards and the district's

curriculum for English language arts, science, social studies and math. That's in addition to the specifically designed theme for each magnet school.

The magnet lottery will be held April 16 in conjunction with the new prekindergarten lottery. All magnet prekindergarten seats will be filled through the new lottery; the magnet lottery will cover grades K-5 or K-6, depending on the school.

Please call our Magnet Schools Office for more information at 475-6551

Albany School of Humanities (ASH)

Prekindergarten-grade 6, 108 Whitehall Road, 462-7258

This beautiful historic school specializes in the humanities by teaching students about diverse cultures using art, literature, music, drama, dance and government. These theme-based lessons and experiences are taught in conjunction with core curriculum in the areas of literacy, math, science and social studies.



Montessori Magnet School

Prekindergarten-grade 5, 65 Tremont St., 475-6675

A Montessori education is consciously designed to recognize and address different learning styles of children. Learning takes place using all five senses, with a focus on hands-on activities, investigation, and interaction with others. Children learn the core subjects and the Montessori curriculum is carefully structured and integrated to demonstrate the connections among the different subject areas.



Thomas O'Brien Academy of Science and Technology (TOAST)

Prekindergarten-grade 5, Lincoln Park, 475-6875

At this newly renovated school, science instruction is rooted in all subject areas and is reinforced by a variety of technology tools. TOAST students focus on curiosity, observation, problem-solving, and inquiry and discovery skills, allowing them to construct their own understanding of the world and how its parts fit together.



Dual-Language Program offers bilingual education

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

Then consider the Dual-Language Program at Delaware Community School. A language-immersion program in Spanish and English, the program is open to children throughout the city starting in prekindergarten.

The program features one bilingual class for each grade through fifth. The prekindergarten class has 18 seats total, nine for Spanish speakers and nine for English speakers.

Most students begin the program in prekindergarten and continue through fifth grade. Therefore, few spots, if any, are open for older chil-

dren. However, the district keeps a waiting list on the chance a seat becomes available.

Parents who want to enter a child in the prekindergarten class next fall must complete an application for the April 16 prekindergarten lottery. Applications will be available March 1 at the school, at www.albanyschools.org and at Central Registration, located in Lincoln Park's Sunshine School.

The deadline to return completed applications is March 31 at 3 p.m.

For more information, parents may call Marva McFarland in Central Registration at 462-7207 or Delaware Community School Principal Tom Giglio at 475-6750.

New prekindergarten lottery set

(continued from page 1)

experience, especially as it impacts students' growth in the area of hands-on, project-based literacy learning, is an invaluable achievement-gap closing intervention that the district proudly supports.

"We look forward to meeting and serving our newest students in September."

Children must turn 4 by Dec. 1 to be eligible for prekindergarten in 2010-11.

On the lottery application, parents will be asked to select their top three school choices. Student selection will be random, but certain factors will take priority when determining where children will be placed:

• **Sibling preference.** A child with a brother or sister already in elementary school will be given first preference at that school.

• **Neighborhood preference.** Second preference will be given to a child who lives within a half-

mile of a magnet school or within a given neighborhood school's attendance zone.

• **Open enrollment.** This option allows parents to choose a non-magnet school outside their attendance zone if space is available.

Lottery applications will be accepted throughout March; **completed applications must be received by 3 p.m. on March 31.** The prekindergarten and magnet lotteries will be held together at Thomas O'Brien Academy of Science and Technology (TOAST).

All families will receive a letter following the drawings. **Families whose children are selected will have until May 14 to register** at the Central Registration Office in Lincoln Park. Families that miss the deadline will lose their seat and be put on a waiting list.

The district will not provide bus transportation to any prekindergarten program next year.

Save the dates!

- **March 1** – Prekindergarten lottery applications available at all elementary schools, Central Registration and community-based prekindergarten providers, or download one at www.albanyschools.org.
- **March 6** – Pre-K/Kindergarten Blast, 11 a.m.-1 p.m. at Schuyler Achievement Academy, 676 Clinton Ave. Learn about the new prekindergarten lottery and our outstanding full-day early childhood programs. Lunch is free!
- **March 31** – Prekindergarten and magnet lottery applications due, 3 p.m.
- **April 16** – Prekindergarten and magnet lotteries, 10 a.m., Thomas O'Brien Academy of Science and Technology (TOAST).
- **May 14** – Deadline to accept prekindergarten magnet-school seats awarded through the lottery selections.
- **May 17** – Kindergarten and general prekindergarten registration begins.

Prekindergarten programs in Albany

Neighborhood Schools

Arbor Hill Elementary School
1 Arbor Drive
462-7165

Delaware Community School
43 Bertha St.
475-6750

Eagle Point Elementary School
1044 Western Ave.
475-6825

Giffen Memorial Elementary School
274 South Pearl St.
475-6650

New Scotland Elementary School
369 New Scotland Ave.
475-6775

North Albany Academy
570 North Pearl St.
475-6800

Pine Hills Elementary School
41 North Allen St.
475-6725

Schuyler Achievement Academy
676 Clinton Ave.
475-6700

Sheridan Preparatory Academy
400 Sheridan Ave.
475-6850

Magnet Schools and Specialized Programs

Albany School of Humanities (ASH)
108 Whitehall Road
462-7258

Dual-Language Program at Delaware Community School
43 Bertha St.
475-6750

Montessori Magnet School
65 Tremont St.
475-6675

Thomas O'Brien Academy of Science and Technology (TOAST)
Lincoln Park
475-6875

Community-Based Organizations

Arbor Park Child Care Center
96 Second St.
465-8466

Boys and Girls Club
21 Delaware Ave.
462-5528

Children's Corner Day Care Center
Elk and Hawk streets
474-2918

Head Start
3 locations
463-3175, ext. 117

The Nursery School at The College of Saint Rose
1008 Madison Ave.
337-2337
(half-day program)

WE CHOOSE



From left, Thomas O'Brien Academy of Science and Technology (TOAST) kindergarteners Victoria Smith-Wyld, Conner Holt, Alijah Mosley, Layla Acosta and Isaiah Dudley model during a recent "Hats for Haiti" fundraiser to benefit victims of the Jan. 12 earthquake. (Visit www.albanyschools.org for information on our schools' responses to Haiti's tragedy).



North Albany Academy sixth-graders LaReina Torain, left, and Thomasina Nguyen stay cool under pressure at a December robotics tournament at RPI. Both girls belong to "Mindstorm Maniacs," the school's robotics team. The Maniacs turned in an outstanding second-place performance at the RPI event.



Abrookin Vocational-Technical School and architecture firm CSArch teamed up on a project introducing high-school students to architecture and interior design. Fine-tuning their plan are, from left, students Matt Tolman and Markiesha Thompson, CSArch interior designer Kailyn Siebert, and students Danyel Matthews and Jodine Gordon.



From left, fifth-graders Edith Gonzales, Selena Torres, Erick Santana and Chyim Bowen fuse rap and rhyme for their Delaware Community School classmates at a recent poetry "slam."



Arbor Hill Elementary School fifth-grader Naseir Simmons ponders an essay for his reading class.



Philip Schuyler Achievement Academy prekindergarteners Marqui Chandler, left, and Taji'mere Miles scrutinize sea creatures as part of their day at school.



Albany School of Humanities (ASH) fourth-grader Julia Marlett completes a puzzle of South American countries at a museum exhibit she and her classmates created.



Gabriell Karins practices a dance move during a rehearsal for the African-American History Month celebration at New Scotland Elementary School. Every district school held events to recognize and celebrate the achievements of African-Americans in the United States.



Albany High School Theatre Ensemble teacher/director Ward Dales accepts a Human Rights Award at City Hall on behalf of the theater troupe, which was lauded for its performance of "The Laramie Project." The group earned the award for inspiring a host of community and school forums on the effects of intolerance and prejudice.



Beaming Harriet Gibbons High School ninth-grader Jahneira Mackey, left, shows off her high-honors certificate to her mother Shamea and Principal Tony Clement.

ALBANY SCHOOLS



Pine Hills Elementary School sixth-graders Decontee Keta, left, and Simone Zialu glide under a limbo pole held by Principal Vibetta Sanders, left, and social worker Cathy Huttner at the school's first Snow Ball.



Fifth-graders Nidira Johnson, Heaven Williford and Kassondra Gordon of Montessori Magnet School design a parent survey for a school-wide environmental project their class spearheaded.



Mercedes Long, an eighth-grader at Stephen and Harriet Myers Middle School, trumpets her award-winning essay on "The American Dream" at a January ceremony sponsored by Albany Elks Lodge #49 to recognize essay-contest winners in grades 3-8. The Board of Education also recognized the contest winners at its Feb. 4 meeting.

Middle-school maestros compose with a master



Composer Stacy Garrop, left, writes a musical score with Hackett students Ayessa Oasan, Jasmine Romeo, Emily Patnaude, Deyja Fredericks and Mackenzie Garrett.

An up-and-coming composer is collaborating with students at William S. Hackett Middle School on a musical composition the school will feature at its spring concert May 19.

About 50 chorus, orchestra and band students are writing lyrics and music with composer Stacy Garrop, D.M., an associate professor of composition at Roosevelt University in Chicago.

"This is helping kids see they can create something where nothing existed before," Dr. Garrop said. She meets with groups of students one week each month and together they write dialogue, narration, lyrics and music.

The performance they're crafting directly ties to Albany history and the Hudson River. The story within the composition features Henry Hudson as a time traveler who stops at six important periods in local

history. The renowned explorer begins with a visit with 17th-century Iroquois and ends in contemporary New York City.

The idea of writing a piece of music based on local history came to Dr. Garrop the first time she walked across the Hudson River Way pedestrian bridge linking downtown Albany to the Hudson River waterfront.

"I grew up in California and everything there is so much newer," she said. "We didn't have the kind of architecture and history you have here."

Albany Symphony Orchestra partnered with the City School District of Albany on the project because it wanted more involvement with the city the orchestra calls home, said Jim Sector, the orchestra's education coordinator. Dr. Garrop's stint at Hackett is part of the orchestra's "Composer to Center Stage" program.

Adult Learning Center at new home

The Adult Learning Center (ALC) has relocated to the former Philip Livingston Magnet Academy.

ALC has emphasized career-oriented education since its 1964 founding. It provides opportunities to adults age 21 and over through programs that include basic education, GED preparation, English as a

second language and career exploration. ALC also offers full-day, morning and afternoon programs.

If you are interested you may visit the ALC at 315 Northern Boulevard or call 462-7292 for more information. Staff members are eager to work with students to ensure successful results.

Smart Scholars program gives students a free jump on college

Albany High School will be one of just 11 schools in New York state that can send students to college for free while they're still in high school thanks to a \$447,500 grant funded in part by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

The City School District of Albany has been selected to participate in the Smart Scholars Early College High School program. The four-year grant will allow up to 275 Albany High students to attend Hudson Valley Community College for free, earning up to 30 college credits before graduating from high school.

The grant is part of a statewide \$6 million grant the Gates Foundation awarded to the State Education Department. Smart Scholars will give students the opportunity to finish high school sooner while also

earning college credits.

Students will have dual enrollment at Albany High and Hudson Valley, and will receive additional academic support to ensure they are at grade level and ready to participate in rigorous college courses.

The program aims to increase high-school graduation and college-completion rates among African-American and Hispanic students and reduce student tuition costs. At Albany High, the program will be part of the Academy of Engineering, which launched this year. Albany High is one of just 33 U.S. high schools offering the Academy of Engineering.

Along with Hudson Valley, the district partnered with the University at Albany and RPI to earn the Smart Scholars grant.

Sheridan Prep Homework Club takes off

Fourth-grader Tashauna Martin is pretty good at math, but, in her own words, "sometimes I stumble."

That's why she's one of 118 students from prekindergarten through fifth grade who gets extra help every day after school in Sheridan Preparatory Academy's Homework Club.

The club is the brainchild of Principal Cecily Wilson. She started the voluntary program in October to help accommodate working families affected by the decision to start the school day one hour earlier this year.

Sheridan Prep parents enthusiastically embraced the program, which has a waiting list of about 20. Fifth-grader Sulaiman Naser said Homework Club helps him bone up on his favorite subject – spelling.

"It's a good thing," he said.

There are other payoffs as well.

"I think it's going to build better study-



SPA fourth-grader Tashauna Martin grapples with a math problem with guidance from after-school program coordinator John Chaney during a meeting of the school's Homework Club.

ing habits," Ms. Wilson said. That translates into being better prepared for school and more successful, she said.

Homework Club meets Monday through Friday, but it's not all work and no play. Students get a respite after school on Friday, which is game day.

Committee evaluates alternative education

A team of community and City School District of Albany partners is at work this winter on an effort to evaluate and redesign the district's alternative-education programs.

The Alternative Education Think Tank addresses a critical need identified in the district's strategic plan, "A Vision for Tomorrow."

Under the leadership of Raymond Schimmer, chief executive officer of Parsons Child and Family Center in Albany, the think tank is looking at how the district's existing alternative-education pro-

grams are performing, and researching new and innovative ideas.

The committee includes parents, school administrators, teachers, researchers and representatives from the community.

"This is an important educational and team-building opportunity to marshal resources from throughout our community to address the needs of all of our youth," said Assistant Superintendent of Secondary Education Tresa Diggs, Ed.D.

Please call 475-6010 if you would like to get involved with the think tank's work.

Important updates in special education

The City School District of Albany has an obligation to evaluate students who may have disabilities who attend schools within the district to determine their eligibility and need for special education, special accommodations or other programs.

If you believe your child has a disability that requires special education or special accommodations, 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 who attend non-public schools located within the district's boundaries, parents may refer their child by writing to the Committee on Special Education to request an evaluation to determine eligibility and need for special education. For a student found eligible before April 1, a parent may request special-education services to begin that year within 30 days of the determination.

If a child's parents plan to enroll him or her in a non-public school in Albany in 2010-11, they must provide a written request for services by June 1 to the district's Committee on Special Education. We urge you to provide your request as soon as you know your plans so we may 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. An IESP is developed in the same manner and includes the same contents as an Individual Education Plan (IEP).

The district does not provide services to non-public school students found eligible for accommodations under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

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

Newly renovated school fully equipped



Students and staff at Thomas O'Brien Academy of Science and Technology (TOAST) in January returned to a school equipped throughout with 21st-century technology.

The homecoming to the school's Lincoln Park location capped a renovation project that ran from summer 2008 through the end of 2009. During that time, the school underwent a series of renovations that completely updated the building to a state-of-the-art facility. The school temporarily was located in the former Schuyler Elementary School during the 2008-09 school year and the first four months of this school year.

High-tech computer equipment is the most exciting change for this school that emphasizes science and technology. Every classroom from kindergarten through fifth grade has three to five desktop computers. Students and staff also have access to iMacs, Netbooks and SMART Boards.

In addition to new technology, all classrooms got new windows, ceilings, paint, whiteboards and student desks and chairs. Many old doors were replaced or refinished. Still other renovations took place behind the scenes, including a new fire alarm and new heating/cooling, electrical and wiring systems. Also, asbestos found during the renovation process was removed.

2010-11 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 2010-11 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.

District students who will attend a public school in 2010-11 will receive a transportation application in May.

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

Check us out online!

We have created an Online News Center to provide you as much news as possible about the great people and programs of the City School District of Albany. Visit www.albanyschools.org 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:

- Abrookin architects learn tricks of the trade
- District robotics teams prevail
- Flu guidance for families
- Hackett students collect plethora of pennies for patients
- I before E ... maybe? Spelling bee champs reign
- Montessori diners going green
- Students open hearts (and wallets) for Haiti relief
- Winter guard flying high
- Winter weather reminders

You also can check out our District News section!

Giffen educator among area's best

Giffen Memorial Elementary School fourth-grade teacher **Thomas Faulkner** has been named a "Top Teacher" in the Capital Region by WNYT/TV-13.

"The excitement on his face says it all," education reporter Elaine Houston said in her story about Mr. Faulkner.

Mr. Faulkner, 40, began teaching at Giffen in 1998.

"I didn't become a teacher to have a job. I became a teacher to have a career," he said. "I love coming to work."

Mr. Faulkner is one of 13 local educators chosen from those who were nominated during the Top Teacher contest last fall. To see the WNYT story about Mr. Faulkner, visit www.albanyschools.org.

District teachers earn prestigious certification

Two City School District of Albany teachers have earned certification through the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

Technology teacher **Melissa Hirt** of Stephen and Harriet Myers Middle School and art teacher **Debbie Cronin** of New Scotland Elementary School and Eagle Point Elementary School are among the first in the region to earn the prestigious certification in the special subjects they teach.

They join almost 1,000 teachers in New York state who hold national board certification, including these five Albany teachers:

- Albany School of Humanities (ASH) third-grade teacher **Connie Blair**
- Interim district volunteer coordinator and middle-school math coach **Rita Floess**
- Montessori Magnet School third-grade teacher **Maggie Fuller, Ed.D.**
- North Albany Academy first-grade teacher **Betsy Nigro Cushing**
- Thomas O'Brien Academy of Science



District art teacher Debbie Cronin, left, and technology teacher Melissa Hirt join the ranks of Albany teachers certified by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

and Technology (TOAST) fifth-grade teacher **Betsy Tanenhaus**.

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards develops rigorous standards for teaching and certifies teachers who meet those standards. The certification process takes one to three years. Teachers are required to submit four portfolio entries, including video recordings of classroom activities and examples of student work. They also must pass an assessment that is specific to their certification area.

Weiss earns 'Coach of the Year' kudos

Albany High School boys' varsity soccer coach **David Weiss** was named Class AA Coach of the Year by Capital Region Soccer.com.

Under Mr. Weiss' instruction, the boys' team turned in an impressive unbeaten regular season to claim the Big 10 title for the first time since 2005. Led by Big 10 MVP Matt Wu on defense and senior Owen Daniels on offense, the Falcons went 12-0-2 in conference play.

"This season was a great success for the program, not just on the field but off as well," Mr. Weiss said. "In addition to our first Big 10 title since 2005 and our unde-

feated regular season, we led Section II in shutouts and goals against. We also achieved scholar-athlete recognition from the New York State Public High School Athletic Association and two of our players (Daniels and Wu) earned National Merit Scholarship commendations.

"I am extremely grateful to my coaching staff, the parents and the players who all played an enormous role in earning this award."

Weiss, who teaches eighth-grade social studies at Stephen and Harriet Myers Middle School, finished coaching his third season at Albany High.

Senior vaults to new record

Albany High School senior **Alex Schettino** smashed a 29-year old school pole-vaulting record at a Dec. 5 track meet at Hudson Valley Community College.

Schettino cleared 13 feet, 7 inches, breaking the record set in 1980 by Brian Ragule. Schettino went on to extend his school record with a vault of 13-8 at the Big 10 Championships on Jan. 30.

County Stop-DWI lauds teacher as role model

Albany High School health educator **Sue Dwyer** has been honored for her efforts to help young people avoid drug and alcohol abuse.

"She served as a tremendous role model, advocate and resource to help her students make positive decisions in all aspects of their lives," said Staff Sgt. Lenny Crouch, who administers the Albany County Stop-DWI program for the Albany County Sheriff's Department.

The program aims to reduce the number of traffic injuries and deaths caused by underage drinking and drug use.

Mrs. Dwyer was recognized at the Jan. 18 Siena-Manhattan College basketball game at the Times Union Center. She is the first person to receive this award and is a longtime advisor to Albany High's Students Against Destructive Decisions club (S.A.D.D.).