Re-Imagining Albany High School

40th anniversary marked by planning for next 40

Albany High School turns 40 this school year. Back in 1973-74, the school at 700 Washington Ave. represented a state-of-the-art approach to high school education in our city. That version of Albany High, just the third since the city’s system of public education began in the 19th century, reflected the community’s shared vision for a new way to educate all students.

Now, as the school marks its ruby anniversary in 2013-14, the City School District of Albany is continuing its work with the community to plan for a 21st century vision of public high school education. “I am energized by the opportunity we have as a community to re-imagine high school education for our future generations,” said Superintendent Marguerite Vanden Wyngaard, Ph.D. “This is a rare opportunity and we are fortunate to be able to work together as a community in that process.

Driving that process is a shared understanding throughout the community of the critical need to raise achievement for all students and significantly increase Albany High’s graduation rate.

Under Dr. V’s leadership, the district is undergoing a major academic reorganization, focused on aligning resources and staff to support teachers and principals in their mission to help all students reach their highest potential.

A new or fully renovated high school at the current location is another important element in the district’s future plans. It would match the modern elementary and middle schools serving all district students since the successful completion of the facilities project at the start of this century.

(continued on page 7)

Actress and alum Carolee Carmello to return home for September show

Albany High School alumna and award-winning actress Carolee Carmello will be back in town this fall for a performance of standards and songs from her Broadway career. The show will be held at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, Sept. 24 at the University at Albany Performing Arts Center, located on UAlbany’s uptown campus at 1400 Washington Ave. A UAlbany graduate, Carmello’s performance is part of the university’s week-long inauguration celebration for new President Robert J. Jones, Ph.D.

A 1979 Albany High graduate and a 2010 inductee into the City School District of Albany Hall of Fame, Carmello is a three-time Tony nominee for her roles in Les Mis, Parade and, most recently, Scandalous. She also had important roles in Broadway performances of Sister Act, The Addams Family, Mamma Mia!, Urinetown, Kiss Me Kate, The Scarlet Pimpernel, 1776, Falsettos and City of Angels.

Advance-sale tickets for Carmello’s UAlbany High School performance are $15 for the public and $10 for students, senior citizens and UAlbany faculty and staff. Day-of-ticket prices are $20 for the public and $15 for students, seniors and UAlbany.

Tickets can be purchased by phone at 518-442-3997, e-mail at tickets@albany.edu or at the Performing Arts Center box office.

Get the school year off on the right (and left) foot and support Albany’s public schools at the same time at the Falcon 5K and Fun Run/Walk.

The event, sponsored by the Albany Booster Club, will be held Sunday, Sept. 29 in Washington Park. It includes a 5K run, a 5K walk and a one-mile fun run for kids. The 5K race and walk kick off at 9:30 a.m., and the kids’ run begins at 10:30 a.m.

Cost for early registration is $5 for students and $15 for adults. Race-day registration is $10 for students and $20 for adults. Visit www.albanyschools.org to download a registration form.

Registration must be postmarked by Sept. 24. The first 250 registrants receive a free T-shirt. Awards will be presented to top overall male and female finishers, top male and female finishers by age group, and the top three teams.

The races start and finish at the Washington Park Lake House. Race-day registration will take place at the Lake House starting at 8 a.m.

The Albany Booster Club supports extracurricular programs and activities offered throughout the district. All funds raised at this event will be directed toward those programs and activities.

For more information, contact Carol Hill at chill65@ gmail.com or call 221-4381.
Creating a shared vision

From the superintendent

Marguerite V. Vandenberg, Ph.D.
Superintendent

School year begins Monday, Sept. 9

School year begins Monday, Sept. 9. To welcoming all of our students and families when the school year begins, teachers and students.

Our strongest students continue to excel. For example, the top two 2013 Albany High School graduates are entering Harvard now. Yet our hard work and good intentions to raise achievement for the most vulnerable students have been patchwork at best, producing little success.

I believe these students will continue to fail, and we will continue to fail them, unless we dramatically change how we do business.

That’s why the Board of Education and I are in the process of redesigning the school district and its responsibilities to all our students and families. We are looking at the district as a whole organization, rather than as a sum of specific parts.

What will result is “Strategic Roadmap: 2020 Vision” — our guide to move us to excellence.

The plan, still under development, will include a new mission, set of core values and vision. I will hold meetings throughout the fall to seek your feedback and suggestions. Please stay tuned for information about these meetings, which will likely include another round of “Finding Chats with Dr. V” — informal gatherings in individual homes.

Key to the strategic plan is the concept that every classroom should have a caring and competent teacher supported by experienced leaders and staff, all with a passion to serve students. The shared goal is to work with students, parents, community members and other partners to make sure every child graduates ready for college and career success.

I also want to note some new approaches the district has taken in the past year to tackle the issues of struggling students.

I am working with my colleagues to develop a shared understanding of, and language about, effective teaching and learning. When the new school year begins, teachers and principals will continue on “learning walks” — tours of other buildings and classrooms with observation and discussion about what works.

These approaches to teaching and learning are taking place in concert with system-wide changes that begin at the top.

I have realigned the roles of central office staff to better support principals, teachers and other district leaders in their efforts to raise student achievement. We also will create teacher focus groups to ensure stronger communication between the classroom and my office.

We also continue to cement our partnership with Albany Promise. This group of business, community, higher education and social service organizations is dedicated to helping students achieve from cradle to career.

I hope you are having a joyous summer. I look forward to welcoming all of our students and families when the school year begins Monday, Sept. 9.

[Footer information]

At a glance: Pine Hills Elementary School

Principal: Vibetta Sanders | Grades served: Prekindergarten-6 | Address: 41 North Allen St.

Pine Hills Elementary — formerly Public School 16 — opened its doors as a brand-new school in 2007. The 48,347-square-foot building has 26 classrooms, each equipped with computers and most with a mounted LCD projector or SmartBoard. The school is fully accessible to disabled people.

Students: 403 | Teachers: 38 | Total employees: 63

Points of distinction:

• Our guiding principal is that everyone can be a leader, no matter what age. All members of our learning community are exposed to The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People. Students play an integral role in guiding their educational outcomes.

• 100-year history as a neighborhood elementary school

• One of 11 schools in the nation certified for environmental stewardship through the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program

• Professional-development partnership with The College of Saint Rose

• Optional uniform policy

Programs and partners:

• Albany Fund for Education

• Audubon International Environmental School Sanctuary

• Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Capital Region

• Charles L. Tomphey Foundation, Inc.

• Citizens Bank

• Club Fed

• The College of Saint Rose Help Yourself Academy

• The College of Saint Rose Professional Development School Partnership

• Franklin Coney Education

• Full-day prekindergarten and kindergarten

• Girls Inc.

• LemosCrafters

• New Albany Neighborhood Association

At the top was Christian Blyth, sixth grade William S.ackett Middle School.

My favorite person from history is actually Ruby Bridges. The reason I like her is because she was the first African-American to attend an all-white school. She also got taught by a white teacher. She mainly wanted to learn. She taught me to not be afraid to go to a new school. She also helped me because I’m from Africa and it was very hard to learn how to read, write and speak English at the same time.

—Yecia Reuma Braddy, fourth grade Philip Schuyler Achievement Academy

My favorite person from history is Martin Luther King Jr. He is my favorite historical person because I wouldn’t have friends who were a different skin color than me if not for him. I would not be able to go to school or play football or basketball with some of my best friends.

I don’t even understand why blacks and whites were separate to begin with! It makes no sense! Martin Luther King Jr. brought justice and fairness to the world by speaking up. That is why I picked Martin Luther King Jr. as my favorite person in history.

—Neil Shannon, fourth grade North Albany Academy

If I were to pick a single person from history as my favorite person, I would choose Isabella I, Queen of Castile and Leon. Born in 1474, she managed to live to old age at the time, which was 51 years old. She was not a queen until much later in her life. During her royal life, she fought against poverty and political domination. She seemed to be a very strong woman who went through a lot for the good of her country.

—Harter Marilla Mosley, junior Albany High School

My favorite person from history is Rosa Parks because of her determination to make this world a better place. Rosa Parks fought against what was wrong as everyone could notice what she was fighting for was right. A lot of people say she just sat on a bus, and maybe to them she did. While Rosa Parks sat on the bus she fought against all discrimination and for people who did not have equal rights. Rosa Parks was a phenomenal person, and her actions meant everything to history.

—Riselia Nance-Bragg, freshman Albany High School
The FAQs about bus transportation

The City School District of Albany transports all eligible students — those who live 1.5 miles or more from their school — by yellow bus or Capital District Transportation Authority.

Eligible elementary-school children are transported via yellow bus, operated by Durham School Services. The district provides a CDTA bus pass, also known as a swiper card, to eligible middle- and high-school students.

Some regular-education students in kindergarten through grade 12 may receive yellow busing, or qualify for busing if they live closer than 1.5 miles to their school, or

• They live in a district-designated transportation zone (created for special circumstances such as when a school is in a temporary space); or
• There are no CDTA routes to their school.

Regular-education students who live closer than 1.5 miles to their school also may be eligible for yellow-bus transportation if their individualized education plan (IEP) specifically requires it.

Also, a child may be transported to a child-care provider if the provider is located more than 1.5 miles away from the child’s school.

The district does not provide transportation to prekindergarten students.

What you need to know about yellow busing

Bus stops and routes for Durham yellow-bus services are determined each year from information submitted in the annual transportation application you should have received from your child’s school.

If your child did not receive a transportation application for the 2013-14 school year, please pick up one at school as soon as possible. Applications also are available in the Transportation section at www.albanyschools.org or at Central Registration, located at 75 Watervliet Ave.

Completed forms should be returned to your child’s school.

Requests for bus service

The City School District of Albany’s goal is to provide students with safe, reliable and efficient transportation. But we need your help.

If your child uses a Durham yellow-bus route and pick-up times are planned using the information provided in the student transportation applications. If your child was provided transportation last year, you should have received and resubmitted a transportation request form in June.

If you did not receive or submit an application, or if you have moved, please pick up an application at Central Registration, located at 75 Watervliet Ave. You also can pick up the form at your child’s school or download it in the Transportation section at www.albanyschools.org.

Transportation requests received by Aug. 18 are processed in time for the start of school. Requests or changes received after that will be processed within 5-7 business days through September, and within three business days at other times of the year.

Every attempt will be made to expedite each application. However, your child will not be assigned to a bus route until a completed application is received.

We appreciate your cooperation and encourage you to contact the Transportation Department at 475-6170 if you have questions.

Important information about your child’s bus stop

The City School District of Albany’s Transportation Department sends a letter in late August to families who have completed transportation request forms for the upcoming school year, informing them of their child’s route number, pick-up and drop-off times, and the location of the neighborhood bus stop.

If you have any questions concerning this information, contact Transportation immediately at 475-6170.

Please have your child at the bus stop at least 10 minutes before the designated pick-up time. If your child receives curb-to-curb pick-up, he or she must be outside of your home when the bus arrives.

Please note that pick-up times, bus stops and bus routes are subject to change during the school year.

Sample bus stop information

Approximate Pick-up

Route Number: A101
Time: 7:30 a.m.
Bus Stop Location: Lancaster St. & N. Main Ave.

Approximate Drop-off

Route Number: P101
Time: 2:51 p.m.
Bus Stop Location: Lancaster St. & N. Main Ave.

Attention parents of first-graders

Curb-to-curb bus pick-up and drop-off service typically is not provided to students once they begin first grade.

Please pay particular attention to the location of your child’s new bus stop.

Students will not have to walk more than one-half mile between their home and their pick-up or drop-off site.

If you have any questions about your child’s bus stop, contact Transportation at 475-6170.

Important transportation information

In case of bad weather

Sign up for School News Notifier to receive text and e-mail messages about school closings and delay announcements. Visit www.albanyschools.org, click on the Albany SNN logo and follow the quick and easy steps to register (see related story, page 7).

You also can find us on Facebook at “Albany city schools,” another great way to keep up with timely news from the district.

Announcements about closings and delays also will be posted on the district’s website, or you can check out the following TV and radio stations: CBS/Albany (CH. 6), YNN (Capital News 9), WTEN (CH. 10), WNYT (CH. 13), WXAA (FOX-Ch. 23), WROM-AW 590, WG-AW 1080, WFLY-FM 92.3, WYJB-FM 95.5, WTRY-FM 98.3, WRVE-FM 99.5, WPYX-FM 100.5, WGAN-FM 107.7 and www.timesunion.com.

Call the Transportation Department at 475-6170

• To determine if your child is eligible for transportation
• If you have a temporary transportation need (i.e., your child has a broken leg or other injury). Contact your school principal and nurse for details of how to obtain temporary transportation.

Transportation requests

To request a change in your child’s pick-up or drop-off site, contact the main office of your child’s school. If you change addresses during the school year, please notify Central Registration immediately by calling 475-6125.

Call Durham School Services at 598-0600

• If you have routine questions like pick-up and drop-off places and times for your child
• To alert us when your child will not ride the bus for a period of time and to let us know when he or she will return
• With any questions about transportation cancellations or late route times due to bad weather
GREAT THINGS ARE HAPPENING
IN ALBANY’S PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Whether onstage, in the classroom or on the athletic field, great things are happening in the City School District of Albany. The students highlighted on these pages exemplify that statement. They also are highlighted in the 2013-14 district calendar and are but two dozen of the thousands of students in our schools with big dreams and bright futures. We are proud to recognize them for being part of what makes Albany’s public schools great places to learn and grow.
How to apply for free and reduced-price meals

To get free or reduced-price meals for your children, do one of the following:

- Submit an Eligibility Letter for Free Meals from the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (this letter used to be called a Direct Certification Letter); OR

- Carefully complete one application for your household. An application in both English and Spanish is stapled to the inside of this newsletter.

Return either form to:
Food Service Department
City School District of Albany
1 Arbor Drive
Albany, NY 12207

Four easy steps to apply

1. An ADULT must sign the application and note his or her Social Security number.
2. Submit a complete application to the address above
   Students without an approved application as of Oct. 21 will have to pay full price for their meals.
   For more information, call the Food Service Department at 475-6644.

The ABCs of the free and reduced-price meal program

An empty stomach can keep kids from learning. That’s why the City School District of Albany offers a healthy breakfast and lunch every day in every school.

Breakfast costs $1.50. Lunch is $2.25 in elementary school and $2.50 in the middle and high schools.

However, your child can receive breakfast or lunch free or for as little as 25 cents for each meal if your family is eligible for the free and reduced-price meal program.

Q: What is the free and reduced-price meal program?
This federal program reimburses the district for the cost of a school breakfast and lunch for eligible children. In exchange, the district provides free or low-cost meals that meet federal nutrition requirements.

Q: Do I need to fill out an application for each child?
No. You can use one application for all students in your household. We cannot approve an application that is not complete, so be sure to fill out all required information.

Q: Who can get free meals?
All children in households receiving benefits from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations or Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) can get free meals regardless of income.

Also, your children can get free meals if your household’s gross income is within the free limits on the Federal Income Eligibility Guidelines. An application in both English and Spanish is stapled to the inside of this newsletter.

Q: How much will my child have to pay?
No, your child will have to pay. Reduced-price meals are $2.50 for breakfast and $3.00 for lunch.

Q: What if I disagree with the school’s decision about my application?
You should talk to school officials. You also may ask for a hearing by calling or writing to: Assistant Superintendent of Business, City School District of Albany, 1 Academy Park, Albany, NY 12207. You also can call 518-475-6020.

Q: May I apply if someone in my household is not a United States citizen?
Yes. You or your child does not have to be a U.S. citizen to qualify for free or reduced-price meals.

Q: Will the information I give be checked?
Yes, and we also may ask you to send written proof.

Q: What if my income is not always the same?
List the amount that you normally receive. For example, if you normally make $1,000 each month, but you missed some work last month and only made $900, put down that you made $1,000 per month. If you normally get overtime, include it, but do not include it if you only work overtime sometimes. If you have lost a job or had your hours or wages reduced, use your current income.

Q: We are in the military. Do we include our housing allowance as income?
If you get an off-base housing allowance, it must be included as income. However, if your housing is part of the Military Housing Privatization Initiative, do not include your housing allowance as income.

Q: My spouse is deployed to a combat zone. Is combat pay counted as income?
No, the combat pay is received in addition to basic pay because of deployment and it wasn’t received before deployment, combat pay is not counted as income. Call 475-6645 if you need more information.

Q: My family needs more help. Are there other programs we might apply for?
To find out how to apply for SNAP or other assistance benefits, contact your local assistance office or call 1-800-342-3009.

Q: Can we apply if we have no income?
Yes, and we also may ask you to send written proof.

Q: My children’s application lost a job or had their hours or wages reduced or lost a job or had their hours or wages reduced?
If you have questions, call the Food Service Department at 475-6644.

Reduced-price meal eligibility

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<th>Monthly</th>
<th>Twice a month</th>
<th>Every two weeks</th>
<th>Weekly</th>
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For each additional family member

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</table>
Re-Imagining Albany High School
(continued from page 1)

“We know that new facilities alone are not the answer, and we fully recognize that we must remain mindful of what our community can afford,” said Board of Education President Alexandra Strezemkowski.

“But we cannot ignore the powerful message that the learning environment communicates to students, and the strong impact it can have on their educational outcomes in tandem with highly trained and highly motivated staff.”

The board and district have partnered with the community since the start of the year in a conversation about the types of programs and services that will best serve high school students in the decades to come.

More than a dozen small focus groups in the work, followed by larger planning events in June, provided opportunities to hear concerns and ideas.

Students from grades 8-12, parents, graduates, community members and district staff joined in planning sessions in July and August to begin to talk about how facilities would support programs designed to prepare all students for college and career success.

An online survey remains available in the Re-Imagining Albany High School section at www.albanyhighschools.org. You also can find Frequently Asked Questions with more information.

This fall, the focus on facilities planning will expand. More opportunities for community input and participation will be part of that process.

A fall 2014 vote is anticipated on a construction plan.

“A high school that creates appropriate and effective places for students to learn and teachers to teach, for team collaboration, and for parents and community members to feel welcomed and involved is vital for the growth and well-being of our students,” Dr. V said.

“I look forward to continuing this work together as we build a vision for the next 40 years of Albany High School.”

Meal service to children with disabilities

Schools are required to serve meals at no extra charge to children with a disability that may restrict their diet.

Federal regulations define a student with a disability as one who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one major life activity or more. Major life activities include functions such as caring for one’s self, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning and working.

You must request the special meals from the school and provide the school with medical certification from a medical doctor.

If you believe your child needs substitutions because of a disability, please get in touch with our Food Service Department at 475-6644 for further information, as there is specific information that the medical certification must contain.

Asbestos notification


Asbestos abatement projects were completed during the building and renovation of district elementary and middle schools. Also, asbestos abatement was undertaken this past summer on the roof of North Albany Academy.

In all cases, the district posted specific notices in buildings where asbestos abatement took place.

Periodic inspections are done every six months. The triennial re-inspection that reviews and updates the asbestos management plan for all district buildings was completed in June 2013.

The plan is kept on file at the district’s administrative headquarters in Academy Park. These records are available for review. For more information, contact the Operations and Maintenance Department at 475-6160.

2013-14 school schedules

<table>
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<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Breakfast starts</th>
<th>Classes start</th>
<th>Classes end</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Albany School of Humanities (ASH)</td>
<td>7:30 a.m.</td>
<td>8 a.m.</td>
<td>2:30 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arbor Hill Elementary School</td>
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<td>9:05 a.m.</td>
<td>3:35 p.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Delaware Community School</td>
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<td>9:05 a.m.</td>
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<td>Eagle Point Elementary School</td>
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<td>Giffen Memorial Elementary School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Montessori Magnet School</td>
<td>7:40 a.m.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Scotland Elementary School</td>
<td>8:25 a.m.</td>
<td>9:05 a.m.</td>
<td>3:35 p.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Philip J. Schuyler Achievement Academy</td>
<td>8:30 a.m.</td>
<td>9 a.m.</td>
<td>3:30 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pine Hills Elementary School</td>
<td>7:30 a.m.</td>
<td>8 a.m.</td>
<td>2:30 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheridan Preparatory Academy</td>
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<td>Thomas O’Brien Academy of Science and Technology (TOAST)</td>
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<td>William S. Hackett Middle School</td>
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<td>High schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>Albany High School</td>
<td>7:15 a.m.</td>
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Leading the way
Elizabeth A. Ten Dyke, Ph.D.

Chief learning officer

Elizabeth A. Ten Dyke, Ph.D., is the City School District of Albany's new chief learning officer, responsible for leading all of the district's work in academics and curriculum. This is the top position in the district's academic reorganization under Superintendent Marguerite Vanden Wyngaard, Ph.D.

Dr. Ten Dyke, who started in her new role Aug. 21, will be responsible for ensuring that programs and priorities remain focused on raising achievement for all students, eliminating the achievement gap and creating a support structure for principals and teachers. She comes to Albany from the Newburgh (N.Y.) school district, where she served as director of secondary interdisciplinary curriculum and instruction. Dr. Ten Dyke earned her doctorate in Cultural Anthropology at the Graduate School, City University of New York. She has been a college faculty member, high school teacher, and building and district administrator over a career of nearly 25 years.

Q: What do you see as your primary role in this new academic leadership position for the district?
A: My primary role is to be a highly involved, compassionate leader of rigorous teaching and learning for every student in the City School District of Albany. As chief learning officer I have oversight of programs for students ranging in age from 4 to 21! This is a tremendous responsibility, and one that I embrace with both enthusiasm and humility.

Q: What is the first item on your agenda as we look to the new school year?
A: The first item on my agenda is to do my own learning in Albany. As a new member of both the school district and the Superintendent’s Cabinet, I plan to get to know our families, children, staff and leaders. In addition, I want to make sure that the Albany community has opportunities to get to know me.

Q: What experiences do you bring to the job that you believe will help the district succeed in its mission?
A: I have worked for almost 25 years with highly diverse student populations in urban districts. I am very strong in the use of data to inform instruction and goal setting. The most important experience I bring to the position is a clear understanding of the power of high expectations for all. There is nothing more rewarding than witnessing the breakthroughs that occur when educators and families expect nothing less than excellence – and provide their students with the means to succeed.

Q: It’s the start of a new school year. Do you have any “school year’s resolutions?” In other words, what goals have you set for yourself in 2013-14?
A: There are priority concerns in Albany such as the low high school graduation rate, low levels of proficiency on required state assessments, and significant achievement gaps. I plan to work with my team to learn exactly when learners begin to fall behind, and why. Then we will collaborate on program improvements and interventions to keep our students on track for long-term success in college and career. I am very excited about joining Dr. Vanden Wyngaard and the entire district staff in our work to become the best urban school district in America by 2020. I can’t wait to get started!

Alumni achievement
Ellakisha Williamson O’Kelley ’93

Ellakisha Williamson O’Kelley knows a thing or two about clearing hurdles – one’s on the track and one’s that life tosses at you.

The 1993 Albany High School alumna – to be inducted into the City School District of Albany Hall of Fame this October – graduated with many track and field records, including two that still stand (400-meter hurdles and pentathlon).

Her first experience in track was as an Albany High freshman sprinter. Competing in the hurdles was a fluke that happened sophomore year.

“I was goofing around at practice and I jumped over a hurdle. And coach Leung was, like, you’re going to do that. And it went from there,” O’Kelley said.

She finished high school as a top competitor in the state with plans to attend Seton Hall University on a full track scholarship. Then she got pregnant.

The scholarship vaporized and she focused on being a good parent. But she still wanted to run and go to college.

“I told myself, ‘I will not be a statistic. I will finish,’” she said.

She earned an Educational Opportunity Program scholarship to the State University of New York at Albany, where she started in 1995.

She carried a full course load, cared for her daughter and shattered virtually every UAlbany women’s record in sprinting and hurdling. In 1998 she transferred to the University of South Carolina with a scholarship. There, she became a six-time All American (twice in the 100-meter hurdles, once as a member of the 4 x 100 relay team and three times as a member of the 4 x 400 relay team).

In 2000, she competed in the 100-meter hurdles at the United States Olympic trials. Her fourth-place finish made her an alternate to the Sydney Olympics. She also got a bachelor’s degree in criminology that year, after being inducted into Alpha Phi Sigma Honor Society.

For the next three years O’Kelley continued to compete for the United States around the world, taking a break to get married, have a son and get a master’s degree in business administration. She started training again in 2004, and in 2008 was an Olympic trials semifinalist.

Then she blew out her knee.

“It was so hard. It was forced retirement at the height of my career,” O’Kelley said.

In 2009 she became head coach for men’s and women’s cross country and track and field at Fort Valley State University in Georgia. Under her guidance, the school produced 27 NCAA qualifiers, 19 track and field All-Americans and 34 Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Conference individual champions.

O’Kelley said the full-circle experience of competing and coaching piqued her interest in the legal side of professional sports.

So much so that she’s now in her second year of law school at Atlanta’s John Marshall Law School.

“I envisioned having a huge company that helps professional athletes sustain themselves off the track, off the field, off the court,” she said.

In other words, helping other athletes clear their own hurdles.