

Capital Education

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Science of Reading: Teaching what works

English can be a difficult language to learn, and learning to read it can be more complicated still.

For young learners, it can be a challenge sorting a hard “th” from a soft one. Or learning all the ways that different combinations of letters change the sounds of individual letters – such as “ch,” “wh” or “oy.”

That’s why the City School District of Albany opted in 2016 to bring back a systematic approach to phonics as part of teaching reading in the early childhood grades (prekindergarten through grade 2). The district was ahead of the curve in that important instructional decision; the State Education Department this fall has emphasized the need for all schools to explicitly teach phonics.

“Without explicit phonics instruction, students were not able to decode (read) and encode (spell) words accurately,” said Elizabeth Morphy, the district’s elementary humanities instructional supervisor.

“We were relying on them to memorize words, which is not a realistic strategy for reading and spelling.”

The difference is in the data

Since the district embraced explicit phonics instruction – the “science of reading” – the percentage of students in grades 3-8 achieving proficiency on the annual state ELA exam has increased by nearly 50% – from 19% in 2017, to 28% last school year.

The district’s annual internal growth data, via NWEA testing (formerly the Northwest Evaluation Association), also shows strong progress. For NWEA growth data, the 50th percentile represents a year’s growth for a year’s instruction. As the scores increase, gaps are being closed.

Last spring, students in grades K-5 achieved an NWEA growth score in the 57th percentile in reading, up from 52% in 2019, the last NWEA end-of-year assessment before the pandemic. The spring 2023 results included scores in the 60th growth percentile or higher in grades K-2, the first time the district has reached the 60th growth percentile in NWEA reading assessments.

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STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Elijah Temple: Comeback kid with clippers

It’s important to have options in life, because you never know what lies ahead. That’s a lesson Albany High School senior Elijah Temple has taken to heart over the past year, helping him become a state champion in something he never would have imagined.

Temple has been a standout student-athlete throughout high school, competing at the varsity level in both football and track since ninth grade. A knee injury early in his junior year took those passions away, requiring him to reassess while he rehabilitated.

That’s when he started to turn a boyhood interest into a serious pursuit.

With guidance from teacher Jonathan Wafer in the school’s popular Barbering program, Temple became Albany High’s first champion at the statewide SkillsUSA competition in Syracuse last April. He earned a trip to the national competition held in Atlanta last June.

“Barbering really came into play when I had no sports to play,” Temple said. “God showed me I had something else to do in my life, and I was able to turn a minor setback into a major comeback.”

Temple first became interested in barbering in his youth, watching an uncle at work. He helped out around the shop, asked questions and observed.

“I fell in love with that,” he said.

But a state championship?

“I just didn’t know I had it in me,” he said.

Wafer did, and Temple credits him for building his skills as a barber, businessman and communicator.

“Elijah is a very bright young man and a quick learner,” said Wafer, who owns his own shop, TrulImages, where Temple also works in his free time. “His skills as a barber are far beyond his years. He amazes me daily with the level of detail he shows at such a young age.”

Wafer and Temple both credit last June’s national competition as a learning experience. Temple is focused on repeating his first-place performance at next spring’s SkillsUSA state competition, which promotes excellence

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FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

An education in all things Albany

They say you never stop learning, and I know that's certainly true for me.

I've been your superintendent for almost six months, and I've truly enjoyed learning about the people I serve in the City School District of Albany, and about the city I now call home.

Here are some of the good things I've learned:

- The school district and the city are incredibly rich in diversity. This is a gift and an asset that benefits all of us. I celebrate the fact that I live among and work with people who are not carbon copies of myself.
- There's a lot of great teaching and learning happening in every one of our schools, without exception.
- The newly renovated Albany High School is spectacular, and when the rebuild is complete in 2025, it will be one of the most technologically advanced high schools in the Northeast.
- Our programs for refugee and immigrant students and families are unparalleled and inspiring.

I also have learned that we have work to do.

While we continue to improve in many areas post-pandemic, we remain focused on improving student outcomes across the board.

This includes our work to remove barriers to student attendance, make sure our schools are safe for students and staff, and do a better job of supporting each other as we do our most important job: educating students.

Although frustrating, our challenges are not unique.

Before I came to Albany, I was a superintendent in a suburban school district and a small-city school district for a combined 14 years. I assure you that those districts faced many of the problems that we experience. So do school districts across New York, according to my fellow superintendents.

I am a huge jazz fan (bear with me, there is a connection). In jazz, performers constantly check in with each other, and the best ones get their great sound from feedback they get by watching and listening to each other and working together.

It's also a great strategy for running a successful school district, business or any other organization that serves people.

Since I started in June, I've met with students, staff and families. I've also met with elected officials



including the mayor, police chief, county executive, Common Council members, and our state Assembly and Senate representatives. I've also met with community and church leaders.

I'm also looking forward to more listening and learning sessions with our faculty and staff members in every building and hope to learn more about what we believe we are doing well, and what we believe we must improve.

My door is open, and I am listening, watching and learning. That is how I operate. And I pledge to work with all of you to celebrate our successes, confront the issues we face honestly and forthrightly, and iron out our differences respectfully, with our kids at the forefront of all we do.

As I have mentioned before, those of you that have visited me at Academy Park may have noticed a drum set in my office. This was my first drum set as an elementary student, and it serves as a reminder of the doors education can open.

Music was the cornerstone of my public school experience, motivating me to find the success I knew I was capable of, both personally and professionally.

It was music for me, just as it's culinary or calculus or athletics or the arts for other students. In our school district, we offer incredible opportunities in all those disciplines and much more.

I am committed to seeing that these opportunities are accessible and available to all our students, and to working together to make it happen.

Sincerely,

Joseph Hochreiter
Superintendent

VOICES

Q: Who is your hero, and why?



“ My hero is my football coach, Rashad. I picked him because he helps me get better at football, and my dream is to go to the NFL. Rashad has been my coach for three years, so I've learned a lot from him. He is honest and hardworking. This makes me give 100% at every practice and every game! This is why coach Rashad is my hero. ”

— **Kaylon Diaz**

Albany School of Humanities (ASH)
Fourth Grade



“ My mom is my hero because she is always there for me. She solves my problems, she gives me soup when I'm sick and she makes me feel better when I'm sick. My mom gets my school items for each new school year and helps me with my homework when I need help. On my birthday, she gives me presents. I love my hero, my mom, so much. ”

— **Cadence Lewis**

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



“ When people ask me who my hero is I sit there and think. I don't have the response people usually have. I believe that I am my own hero. I am so grateful for my mindset and how I handle the obstacles that come my way. I am everything I could ask for in a person. ”

— **Gabriela Palacios**

Albany High School
Senior



“ My hero is Kobe Bryant because he was very motivational, and that pushes me. From him I know to not give up and to work hard so I can achieve my goals and look to my future. This lesson can help me be successful in my life. ”

— **Nathaniel Smith**

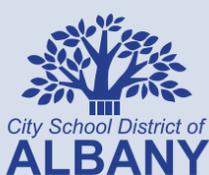
North Albany Middle School
Eighth Grade



“ My hero is my dad because he takes care of me by providing me with things I need and want. He got me my own room, so I'm grateful for that. He knows how to keep me safe. We have a good bond and we are really close. I love that we just have a great father and daughter relationship. ”

— **A'Yada Williams**

Roots Academy at West Hill
Fifth Grade



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ABOUT US

AN OVERVIEW OF THE CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT OF ALBANY

8,750
STUDENTS



1,800
EMPLOYEES

18 SCHOOLS

12 ELEMENTARY, 3 MIDDLE, 1 HIGH &
2 ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS

UNLIMITED OPPORTUNITIES

FUNDED BY A BUDGET WITH AN AVERAGE TAX-LEVY
INCREASE OF ONLY 0.9% OVER THE LAST DECADE



UNIVERSAL PRE-K

865 seats for 3-year-old and 4-year-old prekindergarten programs at locations across the city



ATHLETICS

We offer 13 female sports on 30 teams and 12 male sports on 31 teams for students in grades 7-12



CTE PATHWAYS

Automotive, Barbering, Business, Construction, Cosmetology, Culinary, Health Science, Human Services, Nutrition and Pre-Engineering



ART & MUSIC

Students can begin playing instruments in third grade, with a wide variety of fine and performing arts opportunities available



COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

Eight of our buildings provide additional support and services to families during and beyond the regular school day



EQUITY IN EDUCATION

We are committed to assuring equitable opportunities for all of our students, as outlined in our Equity in Education Policy



FLAGSHIP HIGH SCHOOL

By 2025-26, Albany High will be one of the Northeast's premiere campuses, with 250,000 ft² of new space and complete renovation



ADVANCED ACADEMICS

Accelerated middle school courses and 20 AP classes, 17 IB classes and 23 University in the High School classes at the secondary level



SUPPORT SERVICES

Offering social-emotional learning and support is one of our highest priorities, both in and out of the classroom



82% GRADUATION RATE

Albany High School's highest rate since the state started measuring graduation under its current methodology in 2005



(Above left) Schools throughout our district recognized and celebrated the parents, guardians, family members and friends who play a special role in the lives of our students in conjunction with the national “Dads’ Day” observance, which we have expanded over recent years to include an adult from each family who plays a significant role in the success of our students. Pictured here are Montessori Magnet School first-grader **Audrey Wilson** and mom **Sarah Harrington**.

(Above) Giffen Memorial Elementary School fourth-graders **Sanayia VanSein**, left, and **Makhii Ellis** found plenty to smile about when getting settled in on the first day of school Sept. 7.

(At left) Albany High School ninth-grader **Chandler Lipscomb** put the scientific method into action Oct. 6, working collaboratively to test and observe the rates at which different liquids dissolved AlkaSeltzer tablets.



(At left) We love our community partners! During Sheridan Preparatory Academy’s Back to School Blast on Sept. 28, fifth-grader **Dayson Jonas** enjoyed a tour of a fire truck and learned about a career as a firefighter thanks to the Albany Fire Department.

(Below left) The annual pre-K tradition of Calabaza Day at the Dual Language Program celebrates the seasonal fun of calabazas – pumpkins – along with feelings, family and science. Pictured here is **Ida Hundt** and her mom **Michelle Lee** posing with their masterpiece!

(Below) Albany International Center first-grader **Kaihan Ali** shows off his handmade flag of Panama on Oct. 13 at the Hispanic Heritage Parade. All students from the AIC and Dual Language programs participated – some in traditional clothing, some carrying flags and all having a great time!





(Above) Oct. 4 was national Walk and Roll to School Day, and New Scotland Elementary School fifth-grader **Thisbe Cecka-Clarke** and dad **Rich Clarke** took advantage of the beautiful morning with a roll to school. The national effort emphasizes the importance of having safe routes to school and the health benefits of being active.



(Above right) Delaware Community School kindergartner **My'Lonni Coleman** was hard at work Oct. 20 practicing how to write the letter D and identify the sounds it makes, along with reviewing CVC (consonant-vowel-consonant) words.

(At right) District teachers are utilizing a new education program called Illustrative Math this year. The problem-based curriculum encourages more hands-on and collaborative learning. **Hailey Becker** and **Gunner McCauliffe**, fourth-graders at Pine Hills Elementary School, worked together on a partner game following a lesson in factors and multiples Oct. 5.



(At left) Arbor Hill Elementary School is celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2023-24 and kicked off a year of commemorative events with a Family Field Day on Sept. 15. Students, staff and the community enjoyed a variety of outdoor activities and the inflatable slide was a big hit, as you can tell from fourth-grader **Avianna Kern's** excitement!



(Below left) Tony Clement Center for Education junior **Keysean Devon Ward** and Community School Site Coordinator **Monica Santiago** shared a hug on Sept. 19 at the school's annual block party, where students, families, staff and community partners gathered for food, music and fun.

(Below) The only thing that brings greater satisfaction than teaching kids to enjoy getting their hands dirty in the garden is passing that passion on to students who walked the same halls you did! Vegetable Project volunteer **Marjani Brown**, a 2013 graduate of Stephen and Harriet Myers Middle School and 2017 graduate of Albany High School, loves giving her time to educate students like **Ginny Levy**, **Rekha Banerjee** and **Madison Smith** (from left to right) about local invasive species during Myers' Grade 6 Transition Camp at the start of this school year.



Students show gains on state 3-8 exams

City School District of Albany students in grades 3-8 made strong gains in math and also demonstrated progress in ELA on last spring's statewide exams.

In math, the percentage of district students achieving proficiency (Levels 3-4) increased to 26% as compared to 18% on the spring 2022 state exams.

In ELA, the percentage of students achieving proficiency increased to 28%, up 1 percentage point. That also represents an increase of nearly 50% – 9 percentage points – since 2017.

Overall, the percentage of students achieving proficiency in both subjects increased in 11 of 12 testing areas.

Math highlights

Thirteen elementary and middle schools achieved gains of at least 10 percentage points in one or more grade level. Some of these highlights include:

- ASH grade 3: +35
- ASH grade 4: +34
- ASH grade 5: +20
- Arbor Hill grade 5: +26
- Eagle Point grade 4: +24
- Eagle Point grade 5: +18
- Giffen grade 3: +13
- Hackett grade 7: +16
- New Scotland grade 4: +14
- North Albany grade 6: +13
- Pine Hills grade 5: +15
- Roots Academy grade 5: +13

- Sheridan Prep grade 4: +19
- TOAST grade 4: +14
- TOAST grade 5: +26

At Montessori Magnet School, 80% of students in grade 5 achieved proficiency in math, an increase of 12 percentage points over 2022. It is the first time a district school has achieved 80% proficiency at any grade level in either math or ELA since at least 2013.

In 2022, Montessori's fourth-graders achieved 74% proficiency in math, among the highest proficiency rates for any fourth-graders in the Capital Region.

ELA highlights

Seven schools achieved gains of at least 10 percentage points in one or more grade level. These include:

- ASH grade 3: +34
- ASH grade 4: +17
- Eagle Point grade 5: +18
- Giffen grade 3: +10
- New Scotland grade 3: +17
- North Albany grade 6: +10
- Sheridan Prep grade 5: +10
- TOAST grade 4: +10

The State Education Department is scheduled to release its full statewide report of last spring's 3-8 results in early December. Full results for all schools will be available at that time.

Wintry weather reminders



When bad weather hits, New York school districts have the option to hold either a distance learning day or a traditional snow day.

For the 2023-24 school year, the City School District of Albany will consider distance learning days only after first using all three snow days. We will continue to evaluate these decisions on a case-by-case basis, including whether a two-hour delay may be an option.

The simplest way for families to find out about weather-related decisions is to sign up to receive a text message through our SchoolMessenger communication system. Just text "Y" or "yes" to 67587. Families also will receive

a SchoolMessenger email if weather causes the district to close, delay or shift to distance learning.

The district also shares information about weather-related changes at albany.schools.org and on Facebook (@albany.schools), X (formerly Twitter, @albany.schools) and Instagram (@albany.schools).

You also can find information on the *Times Union* website and the following radio and TV stations: CBS6 Albany (Ch. 6), Spectrum (Ch. 9), WTEN (Ch. 10), WNYT (Ch. 13), WROW-AM 590, WGY-AM 810, WFLY-FM 92.3, WYJB-FM 95.5, WTRY-FM 98.3, WRVE-FM 99.5, WPYX-FM 106.5 and WGNA-FM 107.7.

Temple (continued from page 1)

in career and technical education, and earning another shot at nationals.

"Elijah is a great kid," Wafer said. "With all the fame and success he is experiencing, he is still keeping a level head."

Temple's knee is strong again this year, and it has showed in his performances on the football field.

A quarterback and defensive back, Temple accounted for five touchdowns in Albany High's Homecoming win over Mohonasen on Sept. 30 – three running, one passing and one on an interception return – leading the Falcons to their first Homecoming win since 2019 (he also was crowned Homecoming king at the school's dance later that evening!).

He is thrilled to have football back in his life – a sport he has played since he was 6 years old. A varsity player since early in his ninth-grade season and a

team captain since his sophomore year, Temple credits his father and coach Mike Ware with believing in him and his skills.

In track, Temple was the Suburban Council 400-meter hurdles champion as a sophomore and advanced to the state meet. He's looking forward to both the indoor and outdoor seasons later this school year.

And then it's off to college, where he hopes to continue keeping his options open: Football for sheer love of the game and bonding with his teammates, track for the satisfaction of the individual personal challenge, and barbering, well, just because it's "the best."

"You can pick up those clippers and you'll always have a skill for the rest of your life," Temple said.



A visit from Jerry Craft

Our middle school students and families had a chance to meet award-winning graphic novelist Jerry Craft during his trip to Albany in October!

Craft is a *New York Times* bestselling author of *New Kid*, *Class Act* and *School Trip*, and the first graphic novelist to win both the prestigious Newbery Medal and Coretta Scott King Author Award.

His novels are part of our sixth-grade ELA curriculum.

Themes prevalent in Craft's work include identity, friendship, microaggressions and prejudice, all of which were discussed in his presentations, in which he discussed his personal and professional experiences.

Reading (continued from page 1)

Back to the future

For decades, educators debated how to best teach reading.

Some advocated for an emphasis on recognizing and understanding whole words. Others pushed for instruction in letter sounds and words – phonics – arguing that students need detailed instruction on the building blocks of reading.

Research came down on the side of phonics.

In fact, teaching phonics is one of the five pillars of reading instruction, teaching students the connection between letters they see and speech sounds.

Equally important pillars are phonological awareness (understanding that words are made up of individual sounds), fluency (the ability to read words automatically, accurately and with little effort), vocabulary (knowing what words mean and how to use them) and comprehension (understanding the words you read).

Every day, students across the district in grades K-2 have 30 minutes of small group instruction that is focused on phonics skills.

"You really want those skills solid in K-2 so they can start reading to learn and understand in grades 3-5," Morphy said. This focus on "the science of reading ensures students are explicitly taught the strategies they need to be literate by the end of second grade."

Next generation phonics curriculum

In 2016, the district adopted a reading program called "Wonders" and began to train teachers explicitly in phonics instruction.

Since then, the district has fine-tuned the phonics program to fully align with the science of reading and this year rolled out Heggerty's Bridge to Reading, a new phonics program, and resources to support phonics instruction.

Three weeks into school, 87% of kindergarteners scored proficient on tests that measure ability to break

words into individual sounds – a direct correlation to what the new program is teaching.

Maria Zarro teaches kindergarten at Eagle Point Elementary School. Her classroom piloted the Heggerty program last year, and she has seen tremendous growth in her students' reading skills as a result.

"Students are no longer relying on picture clues or guessing words," she said. "They are relying on their letter sound knowledge and the skills they are taught during small skills groups to read and write words."

"They are more confident readers and have demonstrated an improvement in spelling."

Across the hall, veteran teacher Debbie Rutnik is teaching the new phonics curriculum to her kindergarteners for the first time this school year.

"It is my belief that phonics have always been taught, but Heggerty provides systematic, explicit direct instruction in a way that we have never embraced," Rutnik said. "I love it!"

Teaching reading is not as easy as A-B-C

Humans don't learn to read the same way they learn to speak.

We are biologically primed to produce language and have done so for thousands of years, across cultures. However, humans need to be taught to read, and the science of reading looks at how to most effectively include explicit phonics instruction in that process.

"Long gone are the days of a letter a week," Zarro said. "We teach the letters and sounds faster, and then spiral back. We map words that we once called 'sight words,' which gives students the opportunity to look closely at regular and irregular parts of words."

"I have no doubt that many students can memorize a pile of words, and we do want to teach for fluency. However, taking the time to really dig deeper into word parts will help students as they develop into more mature readers and writers."

AWARDS & ACHIEVEMENTS

Marching Falcons invited to France

The City School District of Albany Marching Falcons once again have been invited to France to help commemorate an important anniversary of the D-Day invasion of World War II.

Under marching band director **Bryan Cady**, the Marching Falcons are scheduled to be one of only two bands from around the world to perform on Omaha Beach in Normandy next June 6. The performance will be part of France's events marking the 80th anniversary of the historic battle that changed the course of World War II in Europe.

The Marching Falcons also participated in the 75th anniversary D-Day events in 2019. They are scheduled for additional performances in France as part of this trip.

If you would like to help support the trip, donations can be made through the Albany Fund for Education at albanyfundforeducation.org.

Seniors among tops nationwide

Congratulations to Albany High School seniors **Julio Davis**, **Luke Gibson** and **Jo Wunderlich**, who have been named Commended Students in the 2023-24 National Merit Scholarship Program!

The seniors entered the National Merit Scholarship Program competition when they took the preliminary SAT (PSAT) qualifying test last October. Their scores place them in the top 3% nationwide of over 1.5 million who took the test. Great job, scholars!

Cross country superlatives

Congratulations to Albany High School sophomore **Annabelle DiStefano**, who became only the second member of the girls' cross country team to win a Suburban Council meet since the Falcons joined the league in 2015.

DiStefano won both of Albany High's home meets during the fall season at Capital Hills Golf Course – Sept. 12 against Ballston Spa and Niskayuna, and Oct. 3 against Averill Park and Schenectady. She joined 2017 graduate **Eileen Bequette** as the only members of the girls' cross country team to win Suburban Council meets.

In her first season running cross country, DiStefano also came in first in the Broadalbin-Perth Invitational on Sept. 16.

Musicians tapped for regional fest

Bravo! Eight Albany High School virtuosos represented their school Nov. 18 at the Area All-State Music Festival of the New York State School Music Association.

Area All-State concerts feature outstanding music students from high schools throughout the Capital Region performing in band, chorus, jazz band and orchestra. Students are selected based on scores at NYSSMA auditions last spring.

Students performing at the Area All-

State Concert, held at Proctors Theatre in Schenectady:

- **Veronica Allen**, senior, mixed choir
- **Myles Bearden**, junior, symphonic band
- **Hannah Bopp**, senior, flute
- **Declan Chirlin**, junior, mixed choir
- **Julio Davis**, senior, mixed choir
- **Ya'ir Sasson**, junior, mixed choir
- **Andre Speller**, senior, symphonic band
- **Iris Whalen**, junior, mixed choir

Congratulations to all of them, and shout-outs to band teacher **John Halvorsen** and choir teacher **Brendan Hoffman** for inspiring their students to excellence!

Hall of Fame 2023

The City School District of Albany Hall of Fame inducted eight new members during a ceremony held at Albany High School this fall. The members of the Class of 2023 are:

- **Paul Collins-Hackett**
- **Daquetta Jones**
- **Tom McGurn**
- **Yvar Mikhashoff** (Ronald MacKay)
- **Dr. Alexander Aiello Paley**
- **Miriam Koblenz Scott**
- **Dr. Melvin Silverstein** (see pg. 8 to read more)
- **Hon. Margaret T. Walsh**

Visit albanyschools.org/hof to read more about all of this year's talented inductees. Nominations for the Class of 2024 are open through April 1. You can use the online nomination form in our Hall of Fame section to recommend candidates.

Albany High inducts 92 in National Honor Society

Albany High School inducted 92 academic high-flyers into its Arista Chapter of National Honor Society on Nov. 8.

The students, all seniors, were eligible for National Honor Society because each has maintained an overall academic average of 89.5 or higher. For a full list of inductees, visit albanyschools.org/nhs.

National Honor Society was founded in 1921 to help create a better-rounded student who would be willing to put their talents to work serving others in society. Albany High's Arista Chapter was formed in 1957 and admitted 15 students in its first group of inductees.

District teachers recognized

Three City School District of Albany teachers received commendations as outstanding Hispanic educators from the New York Capital Region Hispanic Chamber of Commerce in October. They are **Debra Calvo McNicholas** of Thomas O'Brien Academy of Science and Technology (TOAST), and Dual Language Program teachers **Djemila Stevens** and **Zeovadis Tavarez-Polanco**.

The organization also recognized longtime district teacher **Ana Banda-Wemple** as a 2023 Outstanding Hispanic Educator. Banda-Wemple retired from the Dual Language Program in June following a 30-year career in the district.



Commended Students **Luke Gibson**, **Julio Davis** & **Jo Wunderlich**



Cross country star **Annabelle DiStefano**



Andre Speller, one of eight NYSSMA virtuosos



Hall of Fame Class of 2023 recipients and family

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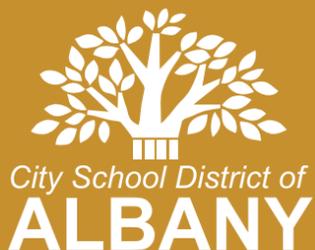
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in this newsletter and more at:

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OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

OUR VISION

The City School District of Albany will be a district of excellence with caring relationships and engaging learning experiences that provide equitable opportunities for all students to reach their potential.

OUR MISSION

The mission of the City School District of Albany is to work in partnership with our diverse community to engage every learner in a robust educational program designed to provide the knowledge and skills necessary for success.

OUR GOALS

Increase student achievement; Enhance the delivery of quality instruction; Build our leadership capacity and increase accountability; Empower families; Partner with our diverse community

LEADING THE WAY:

Markia Danzy

Health Science Coordinator
Albany High School



Early in her career, Markia Danzy's professional trajectory involved providing nursing care to people of all ages in a variety of settings, from critical care nurse to school nurse at New Scotland Elementary!

Today, she trains the health care workforce of the future in the Health Science pathway that's a part of Albany High School's Career and Technical Education (CTE) programming.

Students who successfully complete the three-year Health Science pathway are prepared to take the state licensing exam to become certified nursing assistants when they graduate from Albany High.

Q: How does the Health Science pathway train students for college or career?

It provides students with a strong foundation in topics such as infection control, anatomy and physiology, diseases and disorders, and medical terminology – all of which are required for every facet of medical science that they may pursue in their future. Upon completion, our students are able to sit for state Prometrics testing that makes them eligible for certification and employment.

Q: Why are CTE classes like yours important for both students and the industry?

The health care industry projects a great need for entry-level medical providers and medical providers in general. CTE serves as a vital part in solving the staffing challenges we are facing in all industries. We are providing opportunities for our students through direct exposure in their field of interest, and the students get real-world, hands-on experience in workplace opportunities with our community partners.

Q: How has Albany High's Health Science program grown?

We have tripled the number of graduating seniors who complete the program! In 2024, we expect that 23 will graduate.

Q: Tell us one of your proudest moments as an educator.

My proudest accomplishments happen annually when our Health Science graduates return to Albany High to encourage and give direct insight on their college experience to our sophomores, juniors and seniors.



ALUMNI ACHIEVEMENT

Dr. Melvin Silverstein '58

There is no greater accomplishment than saving human lives. And that is exactly what Dr. Melvin Silverstein, F.A.C.S., set out to do upon graduation from Albany High School in 1958.

Before attending Johns Hopkins University and Albany Medical College, and establishing himself as a world-renowned expert in breast cancer and breast surgical science, Dr. Silverstein was a product of four Albany public schools: the former School 8 (which was on Madison Avenue in the South End), the former School 16 (now Pine Hills Elementary School), William S. Hackett Middle School (then a junior high) and Albany High.

"I received a solid education and I learned how to study," Dr. Silverstein said of his academic journey through the City School District of Albany.

He noted a fondness for all the science and math classes he took at Albany High, and also recalls English teacher Louise Gunn. Gunn's creative writing class, a challenging science and math program, plus his participation in Debate Club indicates that the rigorous curriculum and diverse extracurricular offerings for which Albany High is known today also were a source of pride in previous generations.

Dr. Silverstein advises all Albany High students to take advantage of everything the school offers, just as he did 65 years ago.

"Shoot for the top, it does not matter how many times you swing at the ball and miss," he said. "You have to swing or you will never hit it."

During the 1980s, Dr. Silverstein developed a specialty in a then-little-known breast cancer called ductal carcinoma in situ (DCIS). His most notable achievement is the development of a revolutionary treatment that combined oncologic breast surgery with plastic surgical techniques.

Dr. Silverstein started the first fellowship devoted to the oncoplastic breast procedure and has since trained 63 surgeons. They are following in the medical pioneer's footsteps, bettering the lives of, and improving outcomes for, women affected by the deadly disease.

"They are scattered all over the U.S.," he said of his proteges. "They are my greatest legacy."

The past is still important to Dr. Silverstein, too.

In 2000, he and nine other Albany High graduates, four of whom also are physicians, started the tradition of an annual trip to Phoenix. They call themselves "The Albany Boyz;" all have followed the big dreams that started back in their hometown.

"If you have a job that you love, you will never work a day in your life," he said. "And I have a job that I love."