

# A SLICE OF TOAST

Newsletter for Thomas O'Brien Academy of Science and Technology: A Community School

April 2021

## A note from Principal Sophia A. Newell ...

Happy spring, TOAST families!

During March, all students took the NWEA assessments, tests that measure student progress throughout the school year. In April, students in grades 3-5 will continue to prepare for New York State tests in English Language Arts (April 21) and math (May 5), with grade 4 preparing for the state science test (June 8). English as a New Language students are preparing for the New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (April 19-June 9).

Teachers will provide students with test prep exercises leading up to the first day of testing. Please note that students must attend in-person on the date of each exam

to take the exam. Parents or guardians of any distance learners who want to take the exams in person should call school by April 14 and let us know.

Remember, "WE GOT THIS."

On another note, student attendance has always been a priority at TOAST. This month, we are hosting a school-wide attendance challenge! The goal of this challenge is to improve attendance and academic success. Students in the class with the highest attendance rate will win a prize and participate in a celebration. Attendance is important, but we also want our students to remain safe. Please make sure your child passes the daily health screener each day.

## SAVE THE DATES!

### APRIL

- 5-9 Spring Recess, no school
- 21 NYS English language arts test, grades 3-8 (see principal's message)
- 29 Virtual Family Literacy Night, 6 p.m. (see p. 3)

### MAY

- 5 NYS math test, grades 3-8 (see above)
- 18 School budget vote and Board of Ed elections
- 31 Memorial Day, no school

## SCHOOL GARDENING

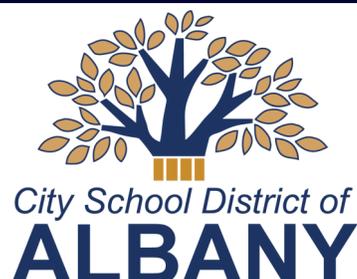


*Spring is finally here, and prekindergarten students planted radish and carrot seeds in the school garden on March 31 with help from Caitlyn Denny and our community partners at The Radix Ecological Sustainability Center.*

## Check out our virtual family engagement series!

Since January, we have been hosting a monthly virtual family engagement series via Google Meet. Presentations on the following topics have occurred: Social emotional learning (SEL), literacy, technology and test preparation. No worries if you missed one - you can access recordings of the sessions at the link below. A survey in the SEL section is available to help us determine the topic of our upcoming SEL session. This link will be continuously updated as we add more content.

<https://tinyurl.com/TOASTfamily>



# STAFF PROFILE

## Meet second-grade teacher Maria Sokaris

Get to know our TOAST staff better! Each month an employee will answer eight questions. See the responses below from second-grader teacher Maria Sokaris, who has taught at TOAST since 1994.

1. **What is your favorite food?** A Greek dish — homemade stuffed peppers. My mom makes the best food and really anything she makes is yummy.
2. **What is your favorite season?** Summertime.
3. **What is your favorite quote?** “Everything you don’t know is something you can learn.”
4. **What was your favorite subject in school?** Math.
5. **Who has been the biggest influence in your life?** My mom and dad have always encouraged my brother and me to be the best we could be. They knew education would open opportunities for us to be successful. They showed us with support and hard work anything is possible.
6. **What are you most proud of?** I’m most proud of my own children at home and all the students I’ve had over the years. They always try their best with a smile on their face.
7. **What teacher had the greatest impact on you and why?** I liked all my teachers at School #16. They helped me when I needed them, from learning to speak English in kindergarten to reading in first grade and truly loving books in fourth grade. My sixth grade teacher, Mr. York, is the one that inspired me to enjoy math. They were all wonderful and I have a lot to be thankful for when it comes to them
8. **What do you like most about working at TOAST?** I like TOAST because of all the wonderful students and staff. The students are eager to learn and enjoy school. The teachers here are helpful and they support each other. I’ve been here for 26 years and I wouldn’t change it.



*In-person students in Kayla Williams’ fourth grade work hard at work in the world of mathematics, using equations and variables to solve multi-step word problems. After a group lesson, students worked collaboratively on problems before reconvening to present the various strategies they used to solve them.*

# STEAMing along at TOAST

Please read about these famous women who have made history in STEAM and try some of these experiments!

**Constellations with Williamina Fleming and Anna Jump Cannon.** These women were both instrumental in developing the classification system that is still used to catalog stars today! Make your own constellations or create mini versions of constellations to display at home. To do this, attach paper covering one end of a cardboard tube (empty toilet paper roll). Then poke holes in the paper that mirror the stars in a known constellation. Shine a flashlight through the open end and point it at a wall! You now have an indoor planetarium!

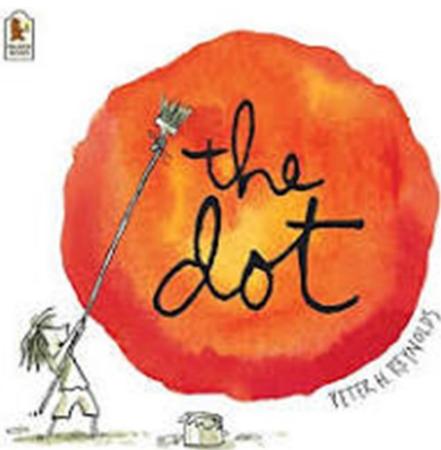
**Hidden Figures Mary Jackson, Katherine Johnson and Dorothy Vaughn.** These women helped the U.S. win the space race. Read about them in these books you can get at the library: "Hidden Figures, A True Story," "Mary Jackson: The Human Computer," "Computer Decoder: Dorothy Vaughn" and "Counting on Katherine Johnson." Using cardboard, index cards, tape and a cup, create a space lander that can successfully absorb shock. Use marshmallows, raisins or popsicle sticks as "astronauts" and place them in the cup. Then drop the lander from different heights to see if it and the astronaut land safely.

**Coding with Grace Hopper.** Grace Hopper was a Navy admiral and one of the first computer programmers. She even invented something called a link editor that combines object files inside of a program. Learn about Grace Hopper by reading the book "Grace Hopper: Queen of Computer Code." Try out coding in [scratch.mit.edu/](http://scratch.mit.edu/) or [code.org](http://code.org).

**Window greenhouses with Marie Clark Taylor.** Marie Clark Taylor studied the influence of light on plant growth. She was the first African-American woman to earn a Ph.D. in botany from Fordham University in 1941 and the first woman of any race to earn a Ph.D. science in the United States. Create mini-greenhouses that you can hang in a window! "Plant" a seed by putting it with a moist cotton ball into a baggie and tape it to a window with a decorated greenhouse frame that you draw on a piece of paper with markers or crayons. Over the next several days, you will be able to observe the plants growing. Complete the activity with materials provided from the navy blue bag that was sent home.

**Bridges with Emily Roebling.** Emily Warren Roebling is known as the first female field engineer who guided the completion of the Brooklyn Bridge. In 1883, Emily became the first person to cross the Brooklyn Bridge. Test your engineering skills by constructing a bridge using straws, popsicle sticks, tape, paper and coins. You can also read about Emily Warren Roebling by signing out this book from your neighborhood library: "Secret Engineer: How Emily Roebling Built the Brooklyn Bridge" by Rachel Dougherty.

## Sign up now for April Family Literacy Night



Please join us for a fun virtual Family Literacy Night on April 29 at 6 p.m.

We will be listening to "the dot" by Peter H. Reynolds and making dot sculptures.

Books and materials are free and will be provided to each family. Space is limited to the first 15 families.

Sign up by April 9 by emailing reading teacher Paula Binder at [pbinder@albany.k12.ny.us](mailto:pbinder@albany.k12.ny.us).

## Taking a test?



# SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING

## Preventing youth suicide: Tips for parents and educators

Suicide is preventable. Youth who are contemplating suicide typically give warning signs. Never take these warning signs lightly or promise to keep them secret.

### Risk factors

- Feelings of hopelessness and isolation
- Feelings of being a burden to someone
- Non-suicidal self-injury such as cutting
- Mental illness, especially severe depression/anxiety, PTSD, ADHD
- History of suicidal thinking/behavior
- Prior suicide among peers or family members
- Interpersonal conflict, family stress/dysfunction
- Environmental risks, including having a gun at home

### Warning signs

- Suicidal threats in the form of direct (“I want to die”) and indirect (I wish I could go to sleep and not wake up”) statements
- Making final arrangements (giving away prized possessions)
- Preoccupation with death
- Changes in behavior, appearance, thoughts, and/or feelings
- Suicide notes and plans (including online postings)

### What to do if a child shows warning signs of suicide

- Remain calm, non-judgmental and listen
- Ask directly, “Are you thinking about suicide?”
- Focus on your concern for their well-being
- Don’t be accusatory
- Reassure them that there is help
- Provide constant supervision; do not leave youth alone
- Remove means for self-harm, especially guns

### Reminders for parents

- School mental health team members are responsible for conducting suicide risk assessment, warning/informing parents, providing recommendations and referrals to community services, and often providing follow up support at school.
- Take threats seriously. Follow-through is important, even after the child calms down or informs parents “They didn’t mean it.”
- Maintain communication with school. Your communication will be crucial to ensuring that school is the safest place possible for your child.

If you or someone you know is suicidal, get help immediately via 911, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 (TALK) or the Crisis Text Line (text “Home” to 741741).

## Phys Ed Students of the Month



**Jadan Carruthers**



**Daniel Thein**

*Each month, teachers Alicia Arasim and Pete Porcelli choose students who exhibit positive attitude and are role models during phys ed class. April’s students are third-grader Jadan Carruther and fourth grader Daniel Thein. Congratulations to them!*

Building opens: 8 a.m.  
In-classroom breakfast starts: 8 a.m.  
Classes for all students begin: 8 a.m.  
Bus students dismissed: 1:30 p.m.  
Walkers dismissed: 1:45 p.m.

OUR SCHOOL DAY

## WHO’S WHO at TOAST

**Ms. Newell**, principal  
**Mrs. Stalker**, assistant principal  
**Mrs. Campbell-Beazer**, office manager  
**Mr. Hoffman**, psychologist  
**Mrs. France**, social worker  
**Mrs. Jordan-Tello**, nurse  
**Ms. Townsend**, community school coordinator

Need to reach us? Call us at (518) 475-6875.