

A SLICE OF TOAST

Newsletter for Thomas O'Brien Academy of Science and Technology: A Community School January 2021

A note from Principal Sophia A. Newell ...

During the month of December and in partnership with Playhouse Stage Company, our TOAST staff and students watched *Polkadots: The Cool Kids Musical*.

This musical was inspired by the story of courageous Ruby Bridges and is a celebration of differences, equity and friendship.

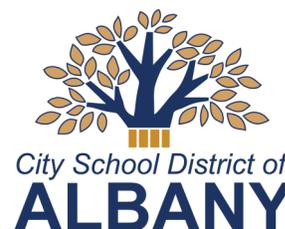
Watching this play as a school provided opportunities for our students to discuss their feelings and to celebrate their differences.

I am proud of TOAST students for sharing their meaningful and personal experiences while supporting and helping their classmates. It is my hope that these discussions continue throughout the school year.

Starting this month, we will be introducing our virtual family engagement series. Current topics include technology, social-emotional learning and literacy.

Our first session will be held on Jan. 20. All sessions will occur via Google Meet, and we will provide more information in the coming days. At the conclusion of each session, a survey will be sent to families to find out which topics you would like to learn more about.

Your voice and opinion are important to me as we partner together to build the academic foundation and foster the social emotional growth of all students here at TOAST.



SAVE THE DATES!

JANUARY

- 14 PTA meeting, 5:30 p.m.
- 15 Hat Day
- 18 Martin Luther King Jr. Day, no school
- 20 Virtual Family Engagement Series, 6-7 p.m.
Topic: Social-emotional learning
- 26 Virtual Family Engagement Series, 6-7 p.m.
Topic: Literacy
- 28 Virtual Family Engagement Series, 6-7 p.m.
Topic: Technology

SEEN AROUND TOAST

We have plenty of spirit!



TOAST held "spirit" days in the short week that led up to Holiday Recess. On Dec. 21, we had "Polka Dot Day." Dec. 22 was "Sports Team Day" and we wore our favorite sports team gear. And Dec. 23 was "School Spirit Day," when students were encouraged to dress in TOAST colors — blue and yellow.

STAFF PROFILE

Meet Assistant Principal Katie Stalker

Get to know our TOAST staff better! Each month an employee will answer eight questions. See the responses below from Assistant Principal Katie Stalker, who joined the school district in 2017. She is TOAST's first assistant principal.

1. **What is your favorite food?** It is hard to narrow it down but I do love a good thin crust pizza with lots of cheese.
2. **What is your favorite season?** I love summer, autumn and winter. I don't care too much for spring because it's too muddy.
3. **What is your favorite quote?** "If your mind can conceive it and your heart can believe it, then your hands can achieve it." (I always thought the author was anonymous, but it is similar to a Muhammed Ali quote so maybe someone changed the words around?)
4. **What was your favorite subject in school?** History
5. **Who has been the biggest influence in your life?** That's a tough one. I would say that it's a combination of my mom, my dad and my grandmother.
6. **What are you most proud of?** My education. "Education is the one thing no one can take from you." B.B. King
7. **What teacher had the greatest impact on you and why?** I have been fortunate to have many great teachers throughout my life. Mr. Schaefer was a professor I had in one of my teaching methods courses in college. He taught me how to make science come alive for students. We didn't just read about science and answer questions about things we read in a book, we actually learned how to be scientists and help our students see themselves as scientists. My favorite experience in his class was dissecting owl pellets.
8. **What do you like most about working at TOAST?** I love working with all of the people at TOAST; adults and children. I am so grateful to be on life's journey with our TOAST family.

MAKING MUSIC WITH COMPUTER SCIENCE

Dec. 7-11 was Computer Science Education Week across the country, but every week is Computer Science Education Week if you're a student in Deb Whipple's classes!

As a special treat on Dec. 10, Whipple's fifth-graders used the programming language Scratch, Makey Makey invention kits and their Chromebooks to create instruments and compose and play music.

Students learned about circuits and insulators and experimented with a variety of conductors including wet sponges, bananas, oranges, Play Doh, coins and more.

By the end of their lesson, they had created a functioning instrument to play and composed music to play on it.

It was full-blown STEAM – science, technology, engineering, arts and math – in practice during Computer Science Education Week!



STEAMing along at TOAST

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, ENGINEERING, ARTS AND MATH = STEAM

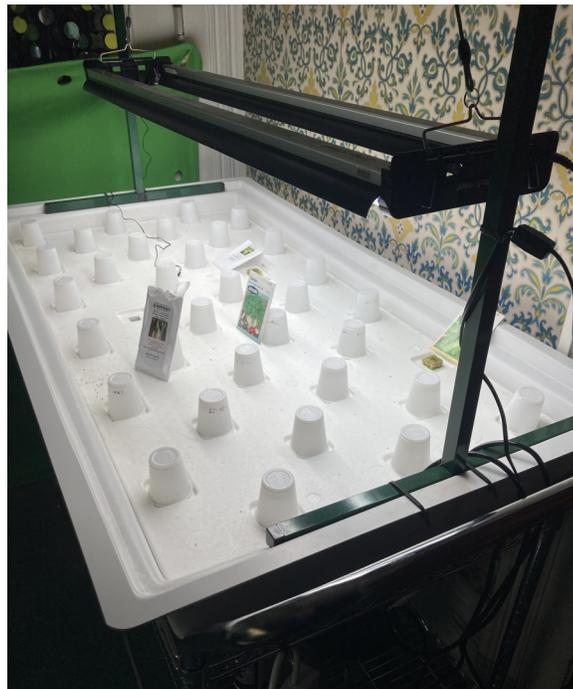
Science teacher Art Flynn is using a hydroponic garden to teach students about growing plants without using soil.

Thirty-six kinds of seeds - including Swiss chard, parsley, basil and lettuce - have been planted in the growing containers which get placed directly into the growing table.

The plants are submerged in water, allowing the roots of the plants to absorb nutrients from the water. Students are learning about planting, pruning, taking the water temperature and measuring the pH value.

A hydroponic garden is helpful because you don't need a backyard or large indoor space to use this type of garden and it allows you to garden year-round. As the world population increases, scientists and agricultural engineers are looking at hydroponics to help meet global food needs.

The picture at right shows the initial setup for seeds to grow in the hydroponic garden. The photos below show the plants growing!



COVID-19 TESTING AND CONSENT

The City School District of Albany will begin COVID-19 testing when in-person instruction resumes **on Monday, Jan. 11**.

The district plans to test 10% of all in-person students and employees on a random basis due to the surge of cases in the district and the Capital Region during the recent holiday break. Testing will be done using a non-invasive nasal swab and will include in-person individuals at all buildings, including district offices at Academy Park, Essex Street and Harriet Gibbons Student Services Center.

Parents and guardians can link to the consent form on our website at albanyschools.org/reopening/testing-consent and log in using their student's district Google credentials. A paper version of the consent also was sent home with in-person students before break; those opting to complete the paper version should return the completed form to school.

For more information, contact school nurse Jacqueline Jordan-Tello at (518) 475-6882.

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Helping children cope through tough times

COVID-19 reminds us that protecting our children against all of life's unexpected, unfair and/or painful events is not possible. Most people have a natural tendency to adapt and bounce back from adversity. However, parents and educators can help children face challenges successfully, whether it is stresses of everyday life, such as difficulties with homework, or more severe adversity, such as losing a loved one. The following are five ways to promote resiliency in our children.

Think positive! – Modeling positive attitudes and positive emotions is very important. Children need to hear parents and educators think out loud positively and model persistence until a goal is achieved. Using a “can do” problem-solving approach to problems teaches children a sense of power and promise.

Express love and gratitude! – Emotions such as love and gratitude increase resiliency. Praise should always occur much more often than criticism if you wish to develop a positive relationship with anyone. Positive emotions buffer children against depression and other negative reactions to adversity.

Express yourself! – Resilient people appropriately express all emotions, even negative ones. We can help children become more aware of their emotions and provide them with language to express themselves.

Get fit! – There is no way around it or short-cuts. Good physical health prepares the body and mind to be more resilient. Healthy eating habits, regular exercise and adequate sleep protects children against all types of stressors.

Foster competency! – Making sure children achieve academically is great protection against adversity. Children who achieve academic success and who develop individual talents, such as playing sports, drawing, creating things, playing musical instruments or playing games are more likely to feel competent and be able to deal with stress in a positive way. Social competency is also important. Having friends and staying connected to friends and loved ones can increase resiliency.

Resiliency can be built by understanding these important foundations. The more we practice these approaches, the more capable our children will be at enduring adversity in the future.

Phys Ed Students of the Month



Mila NaingSein



Maryella Johnson

Each month, teachers Alicia Arasim and Pete Porcelli choose students who exhibit positive attitude and are role models during phys ed class. January's students are first grader Mila NaingSein and second grader Maryella Johnson. 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, typist
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.