Binghamton City School District

Fall 2021

#BPatriotProud

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I’m grateful to lead a district with brilliant students, incredible families, and passionate educators

Superintendent
Tonia Thompson

Dear Binghamton Families,

It’s hard to believe that we’re already here in late fall, engaged with the holiday season. I’m hopeful that the transition to daily in-person learning has been a smooth one for your student. While there have been obstacles to overcome and adjustments to navigate, I know that incredible things are happening within our schools every day, and I’m excited to share some of the highlights with you in this issue of BToday.

This September, a Patriot Pride award was presented to a very deserving Binghamton High School junior. Here, you will learn how Aaron Blaasch leapt into action to save the life of a community member over this summer. Aaron is a wonderful example of the character and courage possessed by our incredible students.

Over the past several months, the Binghamton City School District has made fantastic progress in positioning our sports programs for success. In this issue of BToday, you will be introduced to our new athletic director Jeremiah Johnson. Already, he has brought incredible energy and rejuvenation to our programs, and we are very excited for what the future holds for Patriot Athletics.

You will meet the district’s newest administrators, including Carla Scott, our Lead Administrator for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). Our commitment to cultural responsiveness remains strong, as we further our journey toward cultivating an academic environment where every student feels embraced, respected, and included.

Gratitude was our district-wide November Character Trait of the Month. I’m grateful to lead a district with brilliant students, incredible families, and passionate educators, and I’m grateful for the unique contributions all of you bring to our amazing school community. I eagerly look forward to all our students will accomplish throughout the remainder of the school year!

With Patriot Pride,

Superintendent of Schools
Dr. Tonia Thompson

Board of Education
Brian Whalen, president
Steve Seepersaud, vice president
Timothy Ames
Korin L. Kirk
Pamela Kollar
Ashley Montalvo
Dr. Albert Penna

Writing-Editing-Layout-Design
Broome-Tioga BOCES

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At our September Board of Education meeting, BHS junior Aaron Blaasch was honored with a Patriot Pride Award for his heroic actions this summer, saving the life of a member of our community. Blaasch was mowing a lawn nearby when he witnessed a woman collapse in her yard. He performed CPR until paramedics arrived to transport her to a local hospital. The woman survived, thanks to his quick action. We could not be prouder to call this young man a Patriot.

BCSD Celebrates Board of Education

The Binghamton City School District honored its Board of Education with an annual breakfast on Oct. 19, in observance of National School Board Recognition Week. School board members are elected representatives, who volunteer their time with the ultimate goal of supporting the district and increasing student achievement.

School board members and administrators gathered at Benjamin Franklin Elementary School, where the group had breakfast and enjoyed student musical performances. The children performed vocal and percussion selections that they recently learned during Hispanic Heritage Month. Franklin student ambassadors presented board members with handmade gifts of student artwork. BCSD Superintendent Dr. Tonia Thompson closed the celebration with words of gratitude.

“Weing a school board member is a major commitment, and the importance of this role cannot be overstated. All year round, our board members give their time and expertise to ensuring that Binghamton students have the best possible educational experience,” Thompson said. “Their care and advisement help guide our work as we strive to educate, empower, and challenge every child in our district.”

Our board members bring a wonderfully diverse set of talents and experiences to the district. Some of our board members are parents, others are alumni, and some have even worked in our district. Regardless of their connection to our schools, all of them are passionate and dedicated to our district’s students and schools.

We extend our deepest thanks and appreciation to our BCSD board members:

President - Brian Whalen
Vice President - Steve Seepersaud
Timothy Ames
Korin Kirk
Pamela Kollar
Ashley Montalvo
Dr. Albert Penna
Binghamton names new Administrators

Richelle Acquisto
*Thomas Jefferson Principal*

It’s Richelle Acquisto’s first year in her new role as Principal at Thomas Jefferson Elementary School, but she’s no stranger to our district. She began here as an elementary school teacher, spending nine years at Jefferson and one year at Calvin Coolidge. After that, she embarked on her journey in administration, becoming an Assistant Principal at Theodore Roosevelt Elementary and West Middle School. She has now returned to her roots by rejoining her TJ family. In her words, “It felt like coming home!”

Acquisto knew this position was the right opportunity for her because both the students and staff are “top of the line, hardworking and passionate.” In the last few months, she has hit the ground running, and continues to build on the great foundation that was already in place. This school year, Acquisto looks forward to getting into classes, seeing the kids actively participating in in-person learning, and watching the teachers engage with the students. Welcome home, Principal Acquisto.

Jeremiah Johnson
*Director of Athletics and Student Engagement*

There’s a new leader at the helm of Patriot Athletics. The Binghamton City School District is proud to introduce Jeremiah Johnson as our new Director of Athletics and Student Engagement.

Johnson spent the past five years in Binghamton teaching physical education at Benjamin Franklin Elementary and coaching multiple athletic teams. He served as Binghamton High School’s head baseball coach, and assistant varsity football coach. Now, he’s thrilled to make BCSD sports his full-time focus.

Johnson said one of his top priorities as athletic director will be helping to rebuild local youth sports programs and reconnecting them with BCSD school sports. His goal is to increase student participation in athletics and get kids excited about sports.

“I think if you reach kids young, they can learn the fundamentals that they’ll need to be successful at the modified, JV and varsity levels,” Johnson said. “Participation starts young. If you can get third, fourth and fifth graders excited about sports, and they have a good experience at the youth level, you can retain those kids to play at the higher levels in middle and high school.”

Johnson said he’s looking forward to this new challenge. “We have some rebuilding to do within our programs, but I think that the foundation is there,” Johnson said. “I want to give our community something they can be proud of. I just want our students to have the best possible experience and opportunities they can have.”
Dr. Gerardo Lewis
East Middle School
Assistant Principal

Dr. Gerardo Lewis is our new East Middle School assistant principal, primarily working with sixth graders. Lewis is from a family of educators, and most recently taught high school social studies in the Union-Endicott Central School District. He said Binghamton’s focus on restorative practices, cultural responsiveness and social-emotional learning drew him to the district.

Lewis calls middle school a “time of change” for students, mentally, physically, and emotionally, as they gradually grow from a child to a teenager. He looks forward to building relationships and supporting them during a pivotal transitional time in their lives. We’re thrilled to have him on board.

Carla Scott
Lead Administrator
for Diversity, Equity
and Inclusion

Carla Scott is the Lead Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Administrator with BOCES Professional Learning and Innovation Center. Scott has spent two decades supporting and improving families and communities in Broome County. In her previous role as the Community School Coordinator and now in her current role, she works diligently to elevate the voices of students and families while supporting administrators and staff in meeting the changing needs of our community. Her efforts continually focus on addressing policies and practices that perpetuate institutional and systemic oppression and racism. She is committed to creating an environment that embraces diversity, strives for equity, and prioritizes inclusion.

Scott earned her Bachelor of Science in Human Development and her Master of Social Work from Binghamton University. As a certified School District Leader, Scott primarily supports the Binghamton City School District in leading their DEI efforts.

Mary Gere-Penna
Department Chair
of Guidance

Mary Gere-Penna was named the new Binghamton City School District Department Chair of Guidance. Gere-Penna went to college at SUNY Geneseo, Buffalo State College, Binghamton University and the College of Saint Rose. She previously taught adult education and business within the Binghamton City School District, was a GED/TASC teacher, business teacher and assistant principal at Union-Endicott High School and Director of Business and Finance at Geneva City School District.

Gere-Penna is very familiar with BCSD as a former employee and a parent in the district.

“She said she loves the energy of the high school and all the extracurricular activities and traditions that a high school offers.

“The greatest satisfaction is supporting the evolution of students from ninth grade to graduation,” she said.

“I am excited to join a talented team of counselors and support staff. I am looking forward to elevating the support the department already provides to students and families.”

“Was interested in becoming the Department Chair of Guidance because I have always had a passion for college and career planning and supporting students’ goals,” she said.
School was out for summer, but the learning continued for teachers across the Binghamton City School District. A rich variety of professional development opportunities were offered to both new employees (we added nearly 60 new members to our instructional team this summer.) and veteran teachers. Our summer professional development offerings were specifically tailored to reflect the district’s three major commitments for the upcoming school year.

The first is to continue to build the capacity, collaboration, and consistency across buildings with Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). PLCs are learning communities where it is standard practice to ask the question, “How do we know?” It is a process where educators are actively engaged in rethinking the teaching and learning that takes place in their classrooms, walking away with an improved approach.

The second district commitment is to extend and enhance culturally and linguistically responsive (CLR) teaching and learning throughout the district. CLR is the practice of validating and affirming the home cultures and home languages of all of our students for the purpose of building upon those cultures to bridge students to success in the culture of school and mainstream society. In the BCSD, we believe that all administrators, teachers, and staff need to meet the students where they are to help get them to where they need to be.

Finally, the third district commitment is to implement Response to Intervention with fidelity across all buildings and deliver targeted interventions to students most impacted by the loss of learning time. Response to Intervention (RTI) is a form of process accountability. It provides an opportunity for practitioners to explain what we are doing when we are doing it. People tend to think deeper when engaged in a process. The aim of this process is to discover a better solution to a student’s lack of progress, whether it is evident from a positive outcome or careful evaluation of a negative one.

We had 141 different professional learning opportunities this summer between Monday, June 28, and Friday, Sept. 3. Overall, we had 1,678 participants in those opportunities.

We also had more than 200 students across our five summer enrichment sites – K-5 students at Mann, Franklin, and MacArthur, and 6-8 students at East and West. Finally, we had more than 100 BHS students participate in fully remote credit recovery with teachers this summer. We look forward to continuing working toward implementing these commitments in our classrooms this school year, as we work to help every student achieve the best possible academic outcome.
She lightheartedly calls herself “the gray-haired witch”, but anyone who’s ever met Joyce DeRitis knows that calling her a witch couldn’t be farther from the truth.

The sweet, nurturing school nurse is a staple of the Binghamton City School District. Joyce turned 90 in September and is celebrating 55 years of service to Binghamton schools. Not only has she been caring for students and faculty since she was hired in 1966, but Joyce is a BCSD alumnna. She graduated from Binghamton Central High School in 1949.

“When I was graduating, I was talking with my counselor, and I said, I don’t know if I want to be a teacher, or whether I want to be a nurse,” DeRitis said. “And he said to me, you know, you can be both.”

So, DeRitis became exactly that. She first pursued nursing, graduating from the Charles S. Wilson Memorial Hospital of Nursing in 1952, and later went on to SUNY Cortland to become a school nurse teacher. Her first assignment as a BCSD school nurse meant splitting her time between four schools: Washington School, Lincoln School, St. Thomas, and St. Patrick’s. She became the district’s head school nurse in 1983.

“She enjoyed taking care of the kids when they were sick or hurt, and she loved teaching them whenever she got the chance.”

“I loved getting into the classroom. I’d go in and talk about a lot of things,” DeRitis said. “For example, I’d go into a classroom to do head inspections, and talk to the children about lice. The teachers were just wonderful.”

Today, her assignment is at 98 Oak St., where she offers support to other school nurses, works closely with the personnel office, and frequently makes phone calls to check in on faculty members who may be out of work due to injury or illness. DeRitis said that coming into work every day keeps her young. Apart from raising her two sons, Mark and Bruce, with her late husband Armand, DeRitis said that her remarkable tenure in Binghamton schools has been the highlight of her life.

“I’ve been so happy here, and I enjoy what I’m doing. Since I lost my husband, this was my salvation,” DeRitis said. “This district has just been fantastic to me. Anything I’ve needed, they’ve considered. They’ve been very open minded. I’ve been very, very fortunate.”

When she wasn’t working or raising her family, which now includes grandchildren and great grandchildren, DeRitis was an active member of the Binghamton community. She was heavily involved with the Red Cross, Mothers & Babies Perinatal Network, and served on many community committees throughout her career.

We are so grateful for the incredible dedication and care she’s shown to our school community over the years.
Proud of our Patriots
Walking the halls of Binghamton High School, it’s not unusual to see a smattering of red and white football jerseys on game day. But on Oct. 8, it wasn’t just athletes wearing the Patriot jerseys. As a way to show gratitude to those who have made a difference, each player chose a teacher or staff member to wear their jersey for the day.

Student athlete Jacob Bothwell chose to give his jersey to Megan Ketchum, a ninth-grade English teacher who he first came to know when she was teaching at West Middle.

“I was so touched to have students that I have had since middle school take time out of their days to mark how close we have become,” Ketchum said. “I love seeing how my students have grown, and I am so thankful to have known them for the last six years. Wearing their jerseys and the cheer letter jacket has been one of the highlights of my teaching career so far!”

Assistant Football Coach Vaughn Labor said that the relationship between students and teachers is so important.

“To the students, teachers are a guide and a role model, which many students don’t have in their personal life,” Labor said. “The teachers are just a few of the amazing teachers at BHS who work with their students to form relationships and build them up, not just because they want them to succeed academically, but because they truly care.”

The jersey presentation was followed by the homecoming football game. In the stands were the selected teachers, who got to cheer on their students while donning their jerseys. At halftime, the teachers were called onto the field to be honored by their student. As each teacher was met by their student, they received a bouquet of flowers as a gift of gratitude.
The Binghamton City School District was proud to unveil the new Benjamin Franklin Elementary School Food Pantry over the summer. A ribbon cutting was held at Franklin on Thursday, July 22. The food pantry will be stocked by the Food Bank of the Southern Tier, and open to the community for two hours prior to school dismissal on Tuesdays and Thursdays throughout the school year, with modified hours in the summer.

The food pantry, which features an individual entrance separate from the school building, is the result of an idea of school social worker Jessica Waffle. Waffle saw a great need for such a resource in our community and approached Principal Kyle Skinner about the idea.

The new food pantry is part of the Traci CARES (Community Adult Resource Education Services) center. The Traci CARES center, named for late Franklin Pre-K teacher Traci Simrell, will be a venue for parent meetings, college and job fairs, community engagement nights and any event that serves our students and families. The center will also offer computers and internet access for families to work on resumes, applying for jobs, and pursue online education programs. The Traci CARES center is also equipped with a kitchen area and laundry utilities.

“It started with a closet upstairs with some nonperishable foods, and we’ve gone way beyond nonperishable foods at this point,” Skinner said. “We have fully stocked fridge and freezers. But in addition to that, we’re really excited to have a community space, a place where our families can really gather.”
Students from the Binghamton City School District participated in the annual Engineering Day Event at Broome-Tioga BOCES.

On Tuesday, Nov. 9, and Wednesday, Nov. 10, students in grades 3 – 8 came together to compete with students from 17 local school districts. The students worked in teams to create the best functional Rube Goldberg-like machine using only a set of everyday materials provided for the project. The teams were given approximately two hours to design and assemble the machine. They are given no advanced knowledge of the materials to be used until they begin the competition. This hands-on project requires students to use not only their academic skills, through science and math, but also interpersonal skills such as time management and teamwork.

Judges for the event came from local businesses, Raymond Corporation, Lockheed-Martin and BAE Systems.

Congratulations to all of our students who participated:

Maliyah Harpin
Magda Nevarez
Adrian Williams
Zion Honnick
Antonia Gardner
Elijah Johnson
Devonte Santiago
Hayden Remplet
Cameron Dickerson
Durriyyah Forbes
Rowen Williams
Felix Wolf-Meyer
Adam Zindelhaddid
Alecia White

Ayhan Doski
Tai’Sun Bell
Laela Brown
Mary Kellam
William Vo
Sekou Wachuku
Dominick Makosiy
Husna Sheik
Abdulbaari Sheik
Santino Potenzia
La-Keith Harris
Myliah Soukhaphonh
Addison Mars
On Nov. 19 and 20 students from the Binghamton High School Rod Serling School of Fine Arts presented Clue at the Helen Foley Theatre. The play, based on the iconic 1985 Paramount movie which was inspired by the classic Hasbro board game, is a hilarious farce-meets-murder mystery.

Binghamton Fine Arts Chair and Director, Ariana Koniuto said that working with the students this year has been wonderful.

“We have a terrific group of kids that have so much passion for theatre,” she said. “I think that being limited in our ability to produce theatre last year due to the pandemic has only re-energized everyone. They are energetic, work hard, and have really created a great community of students.”

This year there were so many talented students that the department opted to do a Freshman Showcase, which took place on Saturday afternoon for freshmen who performed and parents of the cast. Despite the macabre topic of murder Koniuto said the play is hilarious.

“This play is a comedy,” she said. “It is ridiculous which has made it a lot of fun- and a great reentry into rehearsals and performances.”
Binghamton
Homecoming
Now more than ever, it’s important to stay in contact with your child’s school.

• Download the BCSD app

• Visit www.binghamtonschools.org often

• Call your building to be sure your contact information is up to date