LATE WINTER 2021

EXPRESS

ELMIRA CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

ALSO INSIDE

WE CAN DO VIRTUALLY ANYTHING

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

EXPRESS EQUITY

YOUTH COURT

Scholastic **Art Awards** 2021

GOLD KEY ART AWARD

ELMIRACITYSCHOOLS.COM

Congratulations to artists Emma Pack and Malik Grant of Elmira High School for earning awards at this year's Scholastic Art Awards. Emma received two silver keys and one gold key for her photography.

Emma's and Malik's work were on display with winning student artwork from around our region in the Arnot Art Museum from February 2nd - March 6th, 2021.

2021 Scholastic Art Awards Recipients – Elmira High School students

Malik Grant, *Who I am*
Honorable Mention - photography (cover photo)

Emma Pack, *Mother*
Gold Key - photography (above)

A Letter **from our Superintendent** | LATE WINTER 2021

Dear friends,

March 16, 2020 - the day everything changed. Nearly one year ago, our entire world was rocked and placed upside down with little understanding of what the following months would look like. Not even in my wildest dreams could I have predicted we'd be closing schools due to a global pandemic. Even in the most progressive and enlightened discussions, we couldn't have imagined moving to a completely virtual educational model overnight. Even now, staples of today's learning landscape -- masks, virtual lessons, social distancing, hybrid schedules -- seem surreal. My impression is steadfast, however -- our students and staff are resilient and our community is strong. I hope you'll join me in my feelings of pride for our city and students. With an attitude of fortitude, we will come out of this stronger.

In addition to working to remain 'COVID-compliant,' we have used our time as a district to not only react to the changing demands of the pandemic but to also reflect on our values and priorities. With deliberate planning, we have used the last several months strategically in response to the growing equity movements happening across the country. Like many other educational, nonprofit and commercial organizations, the Elmira City School District has advanced important discussions of equity in our schools and community. Our District has taken action on this important diversity work. We have engaged a variety of staff, students and community members for their input and participation. Throughout this newsletter, you'll find an article about this Express Equity Initiative. As you'll read, there is great energy, passion and momentum growing as we march ahead.

The 100th day of school was celebrated on Friday February 26, 2021 and it was hard to believe that we are over half way to the end of this academic year. From snow days, to virtual days, to changes in schedules for second semester, our families and students have remained engaged and ready to learn. We recognize the leaps and bounds needed in order for our students and community to propel quickly into these new learning models. We've collected important data and feedback to make timely decisions on format changes, etc. With true team work, we have come a long way and continue to make important strides.

Spring is just ahead and we look forward to seeing athletes back on the field and our extra-curricular activites beginning safely again soon. With advancements in vaccine distribution and the continuation of health protocols, we are beginning to see true progress. I look forward to the opportunity to update you further as more news and updates are released from the state.

As always, I wish to extend my gratitude and appreciation for our students who have been the true heroes throughout this unprecedented time. As I like to say, it is our youth who provide the greatest hope. If the resilience I've been witness to throughout this time is a predictor to what this group of youth is capable of accomplishing, then I can confidently say we have a very bright future ahead.

Let's Go Express!

Hillary J. Austin
Superintendent of Schools
Elmira City School District

EXPRESS EQUITY

During the summer of 2020, Diven second grade teacher Mrs. Stephanie Roby reached out to Superintendent Hillary Austin to talk further about her ideas and thoughts regarding systemic racism and implicit bias. Mrs. Roby (Stevie) asked important questions regarding the District's stance on the Black Lives Matters movement. This conversation occurred in the early summer months, right after the tragic George Floyd incident in Minneapolis, MN. From both Mrs. Robi's and Mrs. Austin's perspective, this was a very pivotal conversation that spawned important work in the District.

Since this early meeting with Superintendent Austin and Mrs. Roby, the District has embarked on a journey of learning, sharing, planning, and engaging in conversation with a growing group of people who have great passion towards impacting change and growth in our community for both our young people, our staff, and the families that we serve.

Elmira Express Initiative was created and is moving along with great participation, dialogue, and planning. What began as two people meeting has now grown to more than 25 participants. The interest from stakeholders both in our schools and in our community is incredible. We are working on developing plans for the best way to grow this group so that it allows for larger numbers of participants while also keeping the "small group feel" that allows for great conversation, engagement, and learning. We want to continue the forward momentum towards change. In addition to the "main" group of participants, we have also developed three breakout groups that will be working on separate goals. These break-out groups are developing opportunities to partner with city and county leadership so that we join forces on this topic, rather than working independently.

The breakout groups and their goals include:

1

HUMAN RESOURCES AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

From recruitment to mentoring, the Human Resources sector has a main role in the Express Equity Initiative. The District is identifying ways to diversify the workforce in a way that best represents our community. The work of this subcommittee is to develop strategies that will empower the District in creating a diverse culture and inclusive environment for all. We define an inclusive work environment as a place of respect that fosters opportunities for learning and growth.

2

CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

As a District, we recognize that equity and inclusion is key to learning. As the Express Equity initiative continues, the work of the Curriculum and Instructional subgroup is looking to improve all students' success through the inclusion of people with diverse backgrounds, ideas, and methods of teaching and learning. The goal is to create equitable opportunities for students and staff. By incorporating diversity into classrooms with appropriate training, students will gain the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary for participation in a diverse society.

3

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS/RELATIONSHIPS

By connecting with community members and organizations, the Express Equity Initiative can work to improve academic achievement among diverse student populations. This group recognizes that the strength of our society largely depends on our education system. We are working with community partners to build strategies to address barriers that may limit family engagement. We are pleased to see involvement from our local community leaders in government and law, clergy, philanthropic nonprofits, Board of Education and more. This committee champions supportive, positive relationships in our community in order to have a transformational impact on our Elmira families.

CULTIVATING CULTURES OF EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE

The Express Equity group has participated in a variety of diversity workshops with a focus on enhancing the capacity of educators. Hopeful outcomes include positive school environments that promote cultural responsiveness and inclusion to meet the needs of all learners. Workshop participants have engaged in a series of presentations, conversations, and activities designed to evoke individual and collective abilities to self-reflect, engage in productive conflict, and change policies/ practices.

Additionallly, the group is exploring ways to cultivate positive and productive organizational culture. While developing the mindset needed to enhance cultural responsiveness and inclusion, our District and School leaders are discussing complex topics in order to advance equity and excellence for all students. Workshop participants include District staff and community members, collaboratively working to improve equity and inclusion systems. In addition to enhancing personal skillsets, our group's goal is also to build working agreements and documents that will guide District and School implementations.

OUR FOCUS

- Definition of Culture. Definition of Equity. What is School Culture?
- Implicit Bias and the impact on schools and students.
- Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices
- Evaluating and Changing Board Policy and Procedures
- Evaluating Instructional Practices, Curriculum, Assessment
- Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Workforce
- Accountability Metrics
- Resource Allocation for Equity

The Express Equity group's mission is to design an Elmira educational system that aligns our practices in and out of school in ways that provide fairness and inclusion. The work of this group will continue with further discussion, professional development, and action as a way to support students, families, district staff and the community.

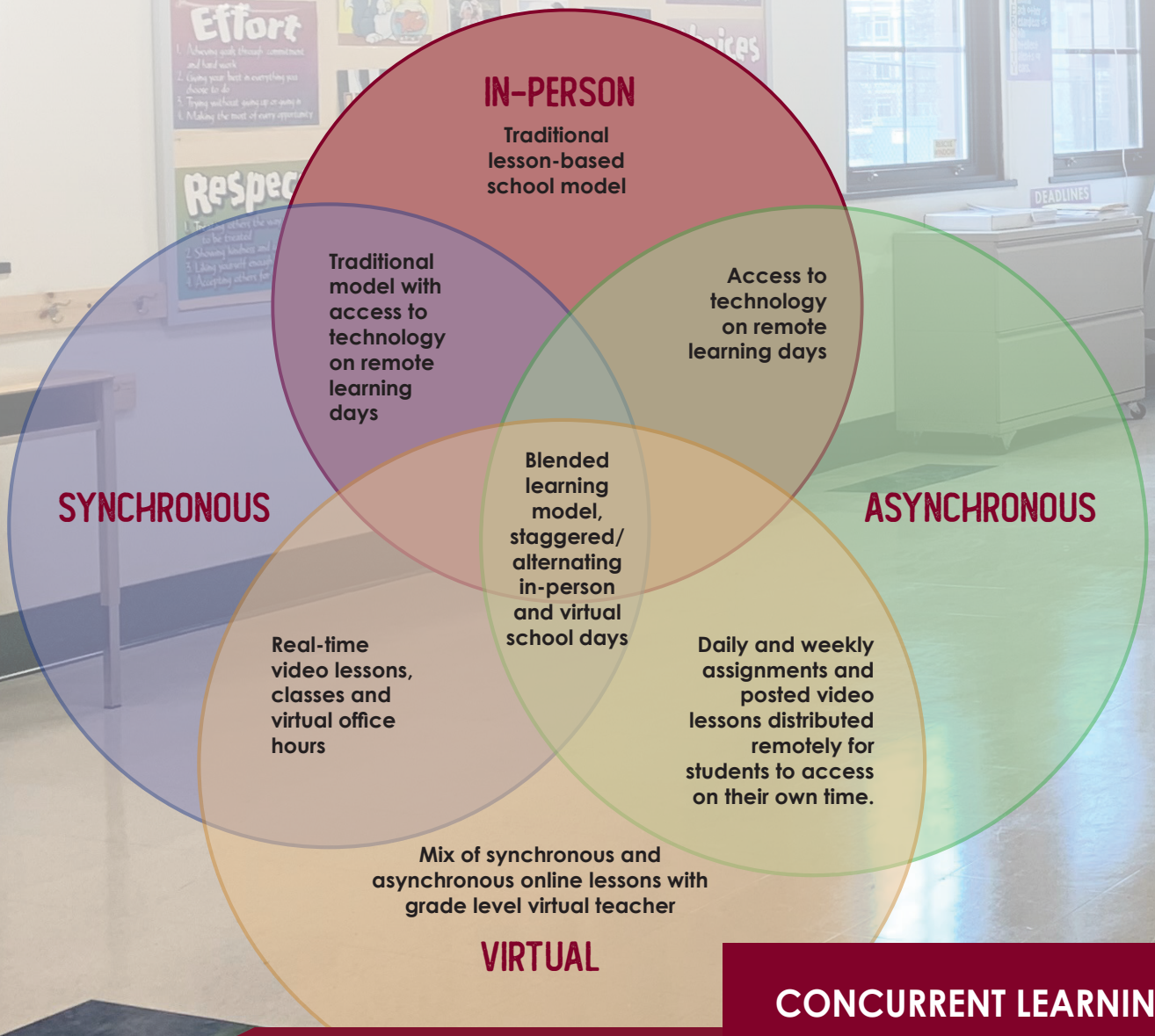
"Stevie Roby and I agreed to meet during the early weeks of summer and this began one of the most informative, emotional, and passionate endeavors that I have been a part of in my entire career."

~Hillary J. Austin
Superintendent of Schools
Elmira City School District

LEARNING MODELS, EXPLAINED

The pandemic upended much of what we consider traditional teaching and forced educators to triage learning via a variety of online strategies that stretch from handing out digital worksheets to holding class online at the same time every day. We learned a lot during spring of 2020. Since fall, our schools have adopted new learning models for students learning in a hybrid model and a 100% virtual model in order to continue high levels of instruction during the pandemic. As a District, we have reassinged traditional classroom teachers to become 100% virtual teachers as a way to develop strong connections, increase engagement and be consistent with online instructional delivery. One teacher per grade level and per building has been assigned to the all Virtual cohort. Our remaining classroom teachers are delivering instruction to both in-person and virtual students daily, sometimes at the same time. Students are engaged in concurrent learning, asynchronous learning and hybrid models of learning.

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT MODELS OF LEARNING?



CONCURRENT LEARNING

In a concurrent classroom model, classroom teachers are teaching in-person students and virtual students at the same time. Using a variety of tech tools and strategies, teachers are working to keep online students feeling like they are part of the class community even though they are not sharing a physical space.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IS GROWING WITH CONCURRENT LEARNING

"WE CAN DO VIRTUALLY ANYTHING!"

EDUCATION IN A VIRTUAL WORLD

Mr. Sarno is a fourth grade teacher at Parley-Coburn Elementary School. He's been assigned as a virtual teacher this year and since September, he's taught the 100% virtual students. He occupies about an 8' x 8' space inside a classroom fit for around 24 students in a typical year. His entire 'classroom' fits on his 20" computer screen. Although the spacial difference is obvious upon entering his classroom, the energy and engagement happening on screen is impressive.

"Collaboration with my virtual teacher counterparts and engagement with students is key to making this digital classroom effective. We use a variety of engagement tools to keep the interests of our students. From math raps on YouTube to digital games like Flipgrid, we are bringing a high level of energy to Zooms to keep kids coming back," says Mr. Sarno.

ENGAGEMENT IS THE #1 PRIORITY

Virtual teachers are using a variety of digital platforms, like Flipgrid, it is platform where you can pose questions to kids, make video's about class topics, and then kids can make videos to respond, and you can do it as a class discussion, so you as the teacher approve kids videos, and then everyone in the class can then view, see responses to questions, etc.

CONQUERING THE TECH FRONTIER

Fourth grade VIRTUAL teacher, Mr. Sarno, of Coburn Elementary School, demonstrates the use of two pieces of digital technology he uses daily with his virtual students. The MOBY Learner and Stylus allows teachers like Mr. Sarno to write content over the screen. Like a smart board in the traditional classroom, MOBY software is a learning tool that provides teachers the ability to write on the 'board' (in virtual school, this means the screen) in order to teach lessons to students.

Mr. Sarno is also demonstrating a document camera with his class. The camera allows students at home to see what Mr. Sarno is reading or writing on his desk. From reading books aloud to demonstrating writing and math diagrams, the camera is allowing real-time lesson mirroring as if students were in the classroom.

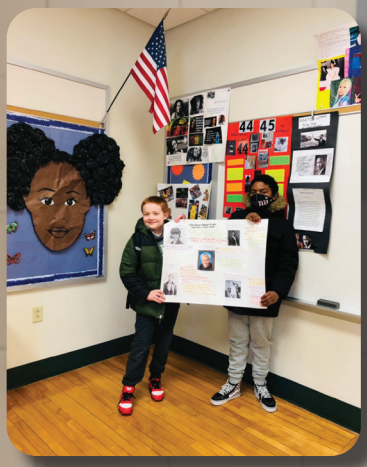
Mrs. Wirth, a first grade hybrid teacher at Pine City Elementary School, uses her white board and iPad to teach concurrently. With this tech set-up, she's able to engage both her online students and her in-person students in the classroom at the same time.

This model allows for the entire class to learn lessons together and also do their in-class work at the same time. Working concurrently allows students to do their in-lesson work with the classroom teacher rather than watching recordings at a later time. This second semester model has significantly increased student engagement - a priority for parents, teachers and the District.

CELEBRATING BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Throughout the month of February, schools and classrooms in Elmira celebrated Black History Month. Displays of art and historical literature were on display in our schools and libraries. In particular, home-to-school collaborations this year helped connect students to Black heritage.

In our four primary elementary school buildings, joint curriculum was created for all of our pre-k, kindergarten, first and second graders could learn together. Thanks to our Diven Elementary team, students focused on new Black History topics every day for 15 days in February. Topics explored included history of Africa, the first scholars, doctors, and engineers (African), supporting Black-owned businesses, contributing to Black and Brown organizations and charities, celebrating Black Heritage, enjoying R&B and Hip-Hop Black musicians, connecting local John W. Jones history to the Underground Railroad, visiting cultural diverse museums virtually, and finally recognizing the election of the first woman AND first black person to be elected the Vice President of the United States of America.



Our goal in teaching more about black history will help students see that black history is American history, and that without the contributions of black men and women, our world would look very different than it does today.

Mrs. Beecher, English Teacher of Elmira High School, is using a bulletin board display to organize her student's reading and writing lessons for Black History Month. The bulletin board was dedicated to Black History and students studied these writing prompts the full month of February. Students from Ms. Green's 6th grade classroom at Coburn Elementary displayed things their class has worked on during the month of February.

Lynnette Kerwan teaches kindergarten at Diven Elementary School and incorporates Black History Month into her curriculum each year. Students recently completed the Core Knowledge Language Art Unit 6, Native Americans, along with learning about Dr. Martin Luther King and his "I Have A Dream" speech. Also incorporating indigenous cultural references to the American Indian dream catcher tradition, students learned about cultures while exploring their own imaginative ideas.

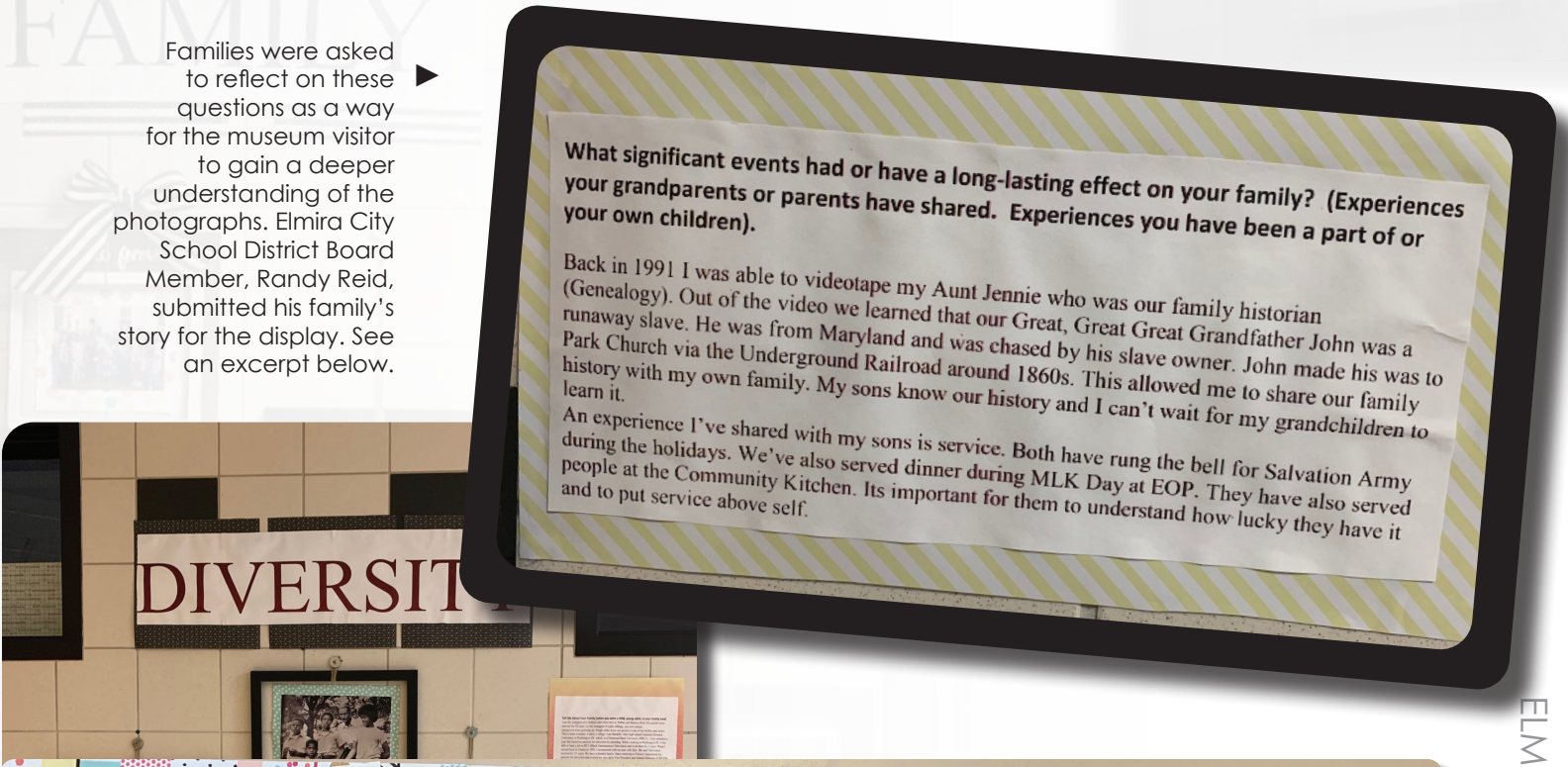
THE BLACK FAMILY: REPRESENTATION, IDENTITY, DIVERSITY

Across the District, we are celebrating this year's 2021 Black History Month theme of **THE BLACK FAMILY: REPRESENTATION, IDENTITY, DIVERSITY.** At our Broadway 9th Grade Academy, students, staff and community members are digging deeper to learn more, discover cultural impacts and follow movements through to the present day. To do this, a "Living Museum" has been installed in the hallways of Broadway Academy. Black families of the Broadway Academy community and Elmira at-large were asked to submit photographs, stories and memories to display in the exhibition.

The exhibition incorporates photographs from participating families and their stories. Families submited historical photos as well as pictures from today. This installation is being used as a way for classroom teachers to connect their curriculum with local stories and serves as a 'field trip' opportunity for students to visit during the school day.

What do the photos mean to you? What do they identify? Represent? What traditions, celebrations and activities represent your family? What significant events had or have a long-lasting effect on your family?

Families were asked to reflect on these questions as a way for the museum visitor to gain a deeper understanding of the photographs. Elmira City School District Board Member, Randy Reid, submitted his family's story for the display. See an excerpt below.



MARCH MOTIVATION

FROM THE SCHOOL COUNSELING TEAM AT ERNIE DAVIS ACADEMY

Daily attendance is critical to the success of every student. We know the struggle is real for our middle school students especially throughout the pandemic. In partnership with the Ernie Davis Academy counseling team, our EDA teachers are focusing on a few strategies to help improve student engagement:

- Focusing on student interests and strengths
- Introducing and encouraging different types of learning styles
- Recognizing and celebrating individual achievements

Attention Parents! Are you familiar with APEX? APEX is an after-school program both virtually and in person to support the positive academic and social growth of students. Please contact your student's counselor at EDA if you are interested in signing up.

AFTER-SCHOOL ARCADE IS DYNAMIC!

Our ARCADE students (an after-school enrichment program sponsored in part by our Community Schools initiative) spent time in February making valentines for the Chemung County Nursing Facility. Our ARCADE staff are always finding new ways to engage the students while making meaningful connections with the community.

This "Pop-Up" enrichment activity with Dynamic Ceramics was the perfect way to give back to nursing home residence who are missing visits from their loved ones. Students had their choice to pick from 7 different ceramic pieces. They turned out sweet!

HOW TO WATCH EXPRESS SPORTS?

LIVE STREAM!

YOU HAVE TWO OPTIONS TO WATCH LIVE EXPRESS CONTESTS:

www.nfhsnetwork.com
All games streamed at EHS or EDA turf field
Subscription is $10.99 per month
Clear picture, scoreboard showing

Zoom Link for some live events
Mainly modified or games not on NFHS Network
http://ideas.gstboces.org/elmira/sports1
http://ideas.gstboces.org/elmira/sports2
Free Link, Picture quality not as high
Scoreboard shown occasionally

CHARTING THE COURSE

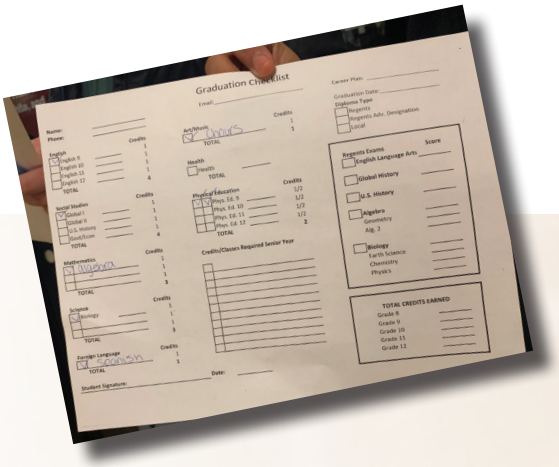
As we approach spring well into second semester, our 9th graders are looking ahead to their future high school trajectory. Even as early as 100 days into 9th grade, our Broadway Academy and Elmira High School staff are collaborating on transition planning for 9th graders making the jump from their 9th grade academy to Elmira High School next year.

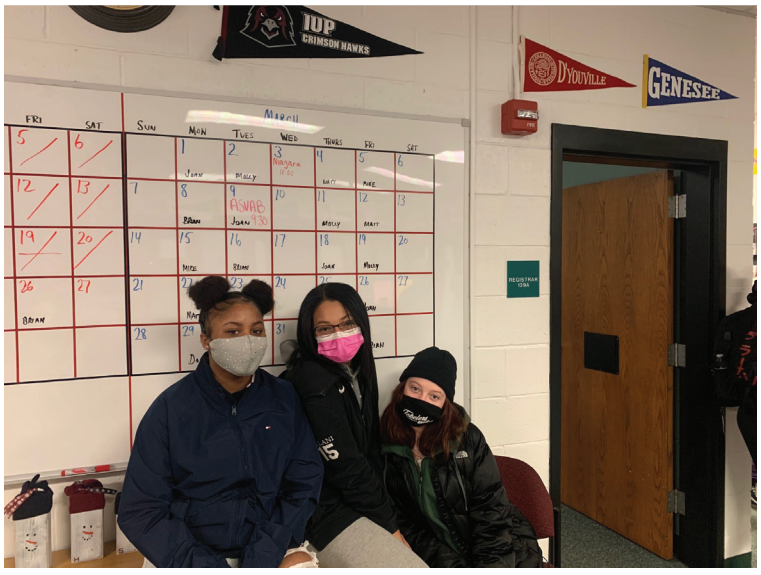
"We are working now to ensure our students have a solid foundation in the next pathway to their graduation. Through collaboration with Elmira High School, we planned several days for our 9th graders of Broadway Academy to visit the high school to take small tours and become familiar with key support staff," said Mrs. Carrie Rollins, Principal of Broadway Academy.

"Part of the reconfiguration and realignment of 9th grade to be in a building of its own was to ensure a smooth transition to Elmira High School with focused attention on building schedules and course selections based on graduation requirements. We want to see all students graduate and succeed," continued Mrs. Rollins.

"During the visit, 9th grade students met their 10th grade school counselor who has been assigned to them for next year. Also while visiting EHS, students completed their course requests during small group visits in the counseling office. Students participated in building and classroom tours, listened to a presentation with principals, learned about athletics and all after-school activities, and most importantly, completed their graduation checklist," said Mr. Chris Reger, Principal of Elmira High School.

"Later this spring, parents of 9th grade students will be invited to a Parent Academy event with principals and support staff. We look forward to building as much momentum and engagement as possible," said Mr. Reger.





Ninth grade students visited the guidance office during their visit to Elmira High School to complete their course request form for their 10th grade.

A Pathway to Graduation

Graduation checklists and course request forms were completed with counselors during an Elmira High School tour with current ninth grade students.

Transition planning is happening across the District to ensure a smooth path for students who are entering new buildings next year.

Conversation Hearts of Kindness

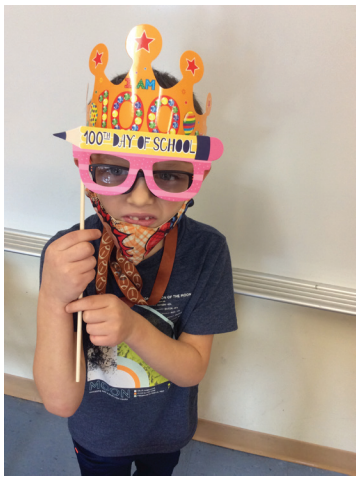
Our intermediate students across the District joined thousands of school students across the country by participating in The Great Kindness Challenge for a week in January. The goal of the week was to promote and encourage a culture of kindness. To showcase our unity, all Hendy students and staff to set a goal of three purposeful actions:

- One act of kindness at home
- One kind act at school or related to school
- One kind act for the good of our greater community or world

A Kindness Tree was installed for display inside the school. Students and staff chose a paper heart, wrote their kindness act and placed it was placed on the tree. It was a 'sweet' tree! At Broadway Elementary, Beecher Elementary and Coburn Elementary, public displays of kindness were also on view throughout the hallways!

100 Days of School at Riverside Elementary

In late February, students from across the District (both hybrid and virtual) celebrated the 100th day of school. Traditionally recognized as a milestone day, this year in particular seems a bit more celebratory considering the perseverance our students and staff have shown in the face of pandemic-related adversity. We are pleased to showcase these sweet first grade smiles for the 100th day celebration at Riverside! 100 Days of School and 80 to go!

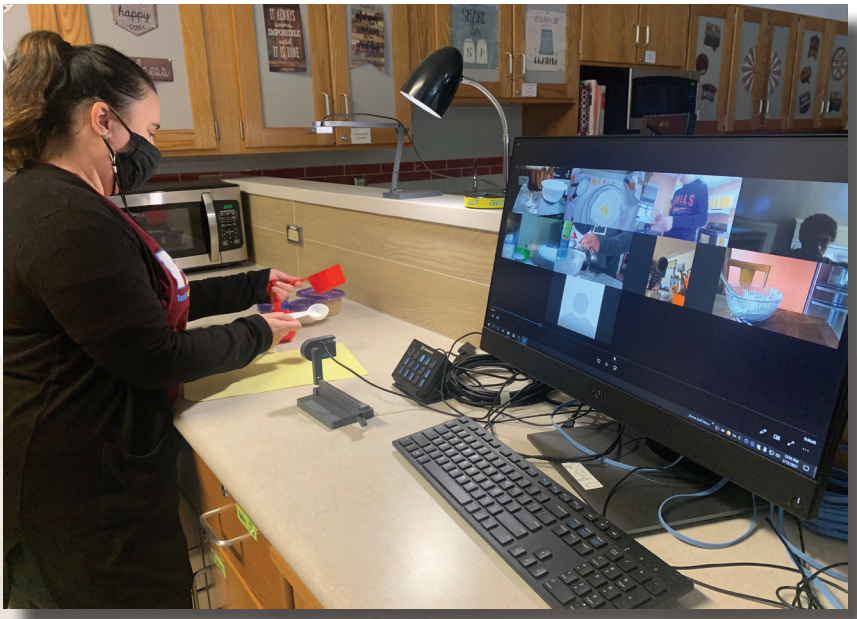


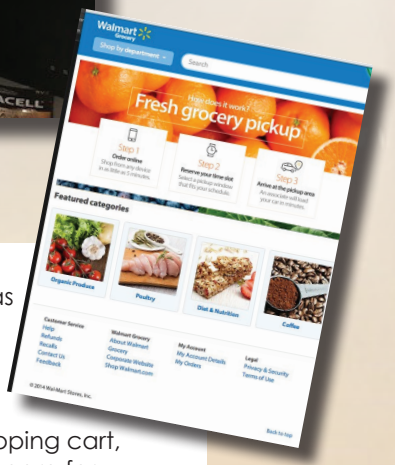
Pandemic Positive: Learning to Cook at Home

While many of us are spending time during the pandemic quarantine revisiting old recipes in the kitchen, our Elmira High School *Family and Consumer Science* students are discovering how to cook for the first time. In a regular school year, our elective students would be whipping up the basics in the kitchen simulation stations in the classroom. This room has a handful of full scale kitchens for students to learn everything from safety to budgeting and nutrition. In COVID-world, our students turn to their actual home kitchens and Zoom into their classroom teacher, Mrs. Smith.

"I often feel like I'm producing a cooking show. I have all the technology necessary to put on a full scale cooking demonstration for my first time cooks at home. We have modified the curriculum for safety reasons. For example, we aren't doing any oven cooking and strictly sticking to microwave-only recipies," says teacher, Mrs. Smith.

Second semester is dedicated to Food and Nutrition curriculum. Upper classmen learn about measuring, budgeting and the culinary craft of cutting and planning. Carefully assembled by Mrs. Smith, grocery bags with the proper ingredients were delivered to each student's home just before the live class. Mrs. Smith first starts with a lesson to include reading the recipes, understanding costs and shopping lists. They make the recipe together, using measuring cups and more. They even made play dough to practice their cutting techniques.





The culminating project for this course was a "Food Truck" project. Students had to imagine they were beginning a Food Truck business. They developed menus, pricing, shopping lists and more. Using real-life tools like the Wal-Mart online shopping cart, students gained a real feel for how to prepare for meal time.

HUNGER HEROES

Since the pandemic closed schools in March of 2020, our Food Services department has passed out thousands of FREE meals during the Pandemic Meal Pick-up Program.

Every week for the last 11 months, our Food Services staff have prepared and passed out meals to students and families of the Elmira City School District. After reporting for a 4:30 a.m. shift, staff prepare meals and are ready for distribution by 7 a.m. These dark cold winter mornings aren't ideal but providing students with what they need is worth every minute. We are so grateful for our Food Services staff! We are Express Strong!

'21 YOUTH COURT

Youth Court, Students Making a Difference

We are proud to announce that 17 of our Elmira students are now sworn-in members of the Youth Court system of Elmira!

The Elmira Youth Court is an alternative to the criminal justice system designed for young people who have committed a crime or an offense.

The goal of the Youth Court is to "intervene in early anti-social, delinquent and criminal behavior, and to reduce the incidence and prevent the escalation of such behavior.

The Youth Court is a diversion program that gives first-time offenders a chance to avoid entering the criminal justice system or Family Court.

Ernie Davis Academy

Alexandra Andrews, 7th Grade
Jackson Cavalier, 7th Grade
Madelyn Cavalier, 7th Grade
Payton Johnson, 7th Grade
Maren Novotny, 7th Grade
Nathan Rose, 7th Grade
Elizabeth McNett, 8th Grade
Luke Palmer, 8th Grade
Ellie Clearwater, 8th Grade

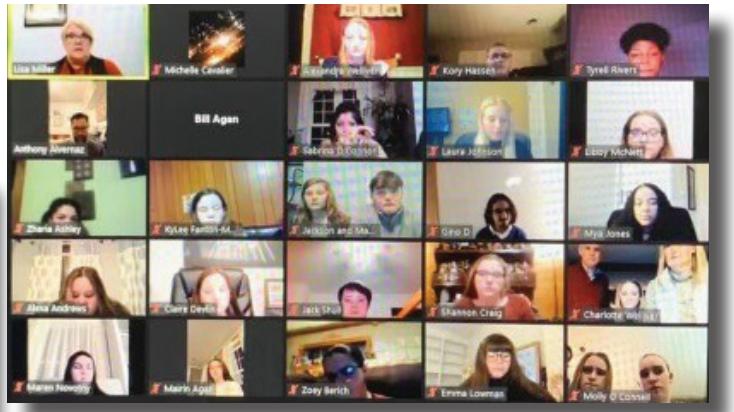
Family, School, Community: Together We Succeed!

Broadway Academy

Tyrell Rivers, 9th Grade
Jack Shull, 9th Grade

Elmira High School

Edwin Bennett, 10th Grade
Brianna Chandler, 10th Grade
Zoey Berich, 11th Grade
Kory Hassen, 11th Grade
Serenity Hobart, 11th Grade
Mya Jones, 11th Grade



OUR PEOPLE

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

Hillary J. Austin
Elmira City School District

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CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR WINTER GRADUATES!

At Elmira High School, we honored 41 graduates as they walked across the stage and received their diplomas at a COVID-friendly Winter Graduation Ceremony. Many proud family members came to honor their children.

#GOEXPRESS

Welcome the Class of 2035!

Pre-k & Kindergarten Registration

The Elmira City School District is pleased to offer Pre-Kindergarten to children residing in the Elmira City School District. The child must be 4 years old on or before December 1st and it is highly recommended they be toilet trained. Please note, the child cannot ride the bus until they turn 4 years old. Therefore you will be responsible for transporting until the child turns 4.

elmiracityschools.com/student_services/registration

SCHOOL **TAXES**

Taxes can be paid in two installments. The second installment is due by March 31, 2021.

PAY YOUR TAX BILL **ONLINE**

Pay your tax bill online using your Visa, Mastercard, American Express, or Discover card. A convenience fee of 2.65% for credit card payments and $1.50 per e-check transaction will be collected by the online payment provider, not by the Elmira City School District.

Payments can also be mailed to School Tax Collector, P.O. Box 5504, Binghamton, NY 13902-5504.

elmiracityschools.com/taxes

#GOEXPRESS

ICYMI You Tell Us

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

ELMIRA CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT ...

Once upon a time...

Celebrating traditions! We are so pleased to see this display just inside Elmira High School as a way to pay homage to the longstanding Erie Bell tradition in Elmira!

February 26, 2021 at 11:39 a.m.

We're listening. Please connect with us on social media and share your positive stories about the Elmira City School District. Use #GoExpress when posting!

@ECSD_Schools on Twitter, or Elmira City School District on Facebook.

STAY CONNECTED

JOIN OUR TEAM

Looking for your next opportunity? Consider joining our team to make a difference.

LEARN MORE:

elmiracityschools.com/employment

CAREERS

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ELMIRA CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

FAMILY, SCHOOL, COMMUNITY: TOGETHER WE SUCCEED