



Cobra Monthly



November 2017

Principal's Message

Dear Albany Middle School Families,

Please enjoy our new monthly newsletter to keep you up to date about what's happening at AMS!

A major focus of our work at AMS continues to be equity, which means looking at all aspects of our school environment and experience to create a place where every student achieves at high levels. Following the belief that we first must examine our own experiences and biases, and also learn through the experiences of others, our staff has been examining equity and culturally-responsive teaching. We started the year with "No Place for Hate" training by the Anti-Defamation League and we will carry on this work with monthly workshops.

In the academic realm, our teachers are working collaboratively around essential standards, common formative assessments, intervention, and extension. This work allows us to ensure that all students will learn the key standards of the grade level department while also engaging in the same core materials. We will continue to move forward with this work as a school community.

We also strive to engage our students in their schooling experience through programs and clubs. Our Safe School Ambassadors program trains students to respond when they witness mistreatment in ways that are safe for them and effective with peers. The Diversity Gay Straight Alliance (DGSA) is a group of students who supports our diverse

student population and our students' gender and sexual identities in particular. Peers Educating Albany's Kids (PEAK) is a group of 8th graders trained to go into 6th grade classrooms to provide lessons on topics like managing stress and peer pressure. This year, a group of 7th and 8th graders are being trained to be peer educators around tobacco use and e-cigarettes. We also have about 15 different clubs, ranging from Anime to Sound Crew to Science Bowl that students can join that meet mostly during lunch.

We have had a wonderful start to the 2017-18 school year. Between our hard-working staff and our engaged parent community, we are fortunate to have a wonderful partnership supporting AMS students.

Wishing you and your family a positive and strong year,

Deborah Brill, Principal

Club Corner: Cobra Connectors

Are you looking for new friends? Tired of the same old lunch routine? Every Friday, Cobra Connectors wear yellow wristbands to show the world they are open to new friends to spend lunch with. These friendly students are happy to hang out with ANYONE who is looking for a connection. Look for someone with a yellow bracelet and say hello!

Mr. Mohan (counselor) and Mr. Peters (P.E.) brought this concept to AMS this year to help students integrate into our AMS community. Check out this [video](#) for a closer look.



AMS Spotlight: School Counselors

Thanks to School Care and district funding, we have three full time counselors this year! Using a grade level model where counselors loop with students for their three years at AMS, our counseling team will be able to better support students as they will develop a deeper understanding of their students' needs. Kelly Britton is starting with 6th grade, Annie Lauriks (Monday – Thursday) and Karen Friesen (Friday) are with 7th grade, and Brandon Mohan is with 8th grade.

It's our goal within counseling that each student feels welcomed and safe. We serve as a resource for all students to help them navigate the social, emotional and academic challenges middle school can present.

Talking about feelings can be hard and sometimes students worry about teasing, gossip, or judgement for seeking help from a counselor. But there's no reason for the stigma! Would you make fun of someone for going to the doctor to treat a broken arm? Of course not! We should feel encouraged to ask for the help we need, and your student should feel welcome to use our support and resources. Most people seek help in coping with things that come up in everyday life: grades, friends, and family. Counseling can be helpful in addressing these, and other, life challenges!

Counselors also run groups (anger management and families in change for example), provide parent education, plan school activities, and support teachers.

-Annie, Brandon, Karen and Kelly

Restorative Practices @ AMS

Restorative practices are a set of tools that help foster a community built on healthy relationships. Rooted in the ethics of community, love and healing, when harm is caused, these practices address the needs of both the person(s) causing and receiving harm by asking:

1. Who was harmed?
2. What are the needs/responsibilities of all?
3. How is harm addressed and repaired?

Working to repair harm can heal relationships between individuals and within a community as it builds empathy and understanding. It requires that the person who caused the harm take responsibility for their actions. The use of restorative practices presupposes that behavior is changed through education, not punishment or exclusion.

AMS is in its 4th year of using restorative practices. The Restorative Justice committee worked during the 15-16 school year to craft a vision for restorative practices at AMS and craft a new behavior matrix (available [here](#)). This committee, combined with three years of staff trainings, has laid the groundwork for our staff to use restorative practices to respond to student behaviors. Throughout the year, we'll work to engage our parent and guardian community about how restorative practices are in use at AMS.

-David Hauptert
Vice Principal

