



# Binghamton City School District

Christopher Columbus School

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Dear Binghamton Families,

As we embark on the second half of our academic year, I would like to welcome our students, faculty, and staff to the new year. 2020 certainly was a year full of remarkable challenges, and 2021 will surely present challenges of its own, but I believe there is also plenty of hope, promise, and opportunity ahead.

The ongoing pandemic continues to impact our community. Our own school community is mourning the tremendous loss of Franklin Elementary teacher Traci Simrell, a talented and dedicated early childhood educator. Other members of our district have also lost loved ones to this terrible virus, and our hearts go out to them. The heartache and hardship brought on by this pandemic have affected the social and emotional well-being of adults and children alike. Please continue to prioritize taking care of yourself and those around you. Resources from New York State's Office of Mental Health can be found [here](#).

While there has been so much tragedy that cannot be undone, there is also hope on the horizon, thanks to the new COVID-19 vaccine. Some district employees (such as school nurses, occupational and physical therapists, and those involved in the district's COVID-19 testing program) have already received vaccinations as part of the 1A priority group. Education professionals are included in the 1B vaccine priority group. This is a great step toward winning the war against COVID-19. While supply is an issue, and distribution will take time, I look forward to everyone that chooses to receive the vaccine having the opportunity and access to do so. Please visit the [state site](#) frequently for updates on the vaccine's availability in our area.

Parents and educators are facing the challenge of speaking with our children about the deeply disturbing events that took place at the United States Capitol on Jan. 6. I'd like to share some [guidance](#) for addressing this topic with children, as it is a difficult but an extremely important discussion to have. We know how to disagree and have discourse in a way that promotes curiosity and conversation, as opposed to anger and disruption. The breach of the Capitol was an attack on our nation's democracy and a solemn reminder of the division that currently exists in our country. Before our nation can be whole, racism and injustice must end. However, I believe it's important to focus on the final result of that day – the fact that, despite the turmoil that took place, lawmakers still accomplished what they came there to do by certifying the electoral vote count. This is an indicator of the strength of the democracy on which our nation was founded, and I believe it sends an important message of how much can be accomplished when we are united.

Educators play an important role in the knowledge and development of young people, and we have a responsibility to help ensure that Binghamton schools are a place for all. We have been and will remain committed to making our schools equitable and inclusive environments. This has been a top priority for our Board of Education, and especially the district's Equity and Diversity task force. We must continue this work with energy and determination to ensure that our classrooms are places where every student, parent/guardian, and employee feels welcomed, represented, valued, and safe. From parents to students, to our faculty and staff, I hope you will all join us in making this vision a reality.

With Patriot Pride,

Dr. Tonia Thompson  
Superintendent of Schools

***Educating, empowering and challenging all students to become productive, global citizens through innovative approaches to learning.***