

## Community can help Albany students succeed

First published: Thursday, November 9, 2006

Kate Gurnett's commentary (Oct. 19) on the visit to Albany's high-needs neighborhoods by representatives of the Council for Unity gave a sadly accurate description of the challenges facing our community as a whole and, particularly, the needs of many children in Albany's public schools.

Many of our neighborhoods are in disrepair, plagued by drugs, gangs, poverty and absentee landlords. These are challenging conditions for adults. For children, they present a daunting challenge to overcome without an incredible amount of assistance, coordinated by social service agencies, churches and committed educators.

For these children to succeed in school, they need early childhood education opportunities, quality pre-kindergarten programs and after-school care that advances what they learn in school. Some wonderful steps have been taken by community volunteers, like the purchase of a dental van for Albany's elementary school students. Clearly, more needs to be done so that all students walking into our public schools start their educations with an equal, solid base.

Albany's educators will continue to work hard every day to help our students succeed. Albany's schools welcome every child from every background because that is the heart and soul of public education. The success of these children depends on our entire community's effort to help them in every phase of their lives.

We need to support the work of organizations such as the Council for Unity. They provide students born into poverty with a real alternative to the dead end street of gang violence. Broad support for their efforts and other solutions to the despair in some of our neighborhoods will bring us a better city, stronger schools and, most importantly, a brighter future for many of Albany's children.

**WILLIAM RITCHIE**

President

Albany Public Schools Teacher Association

Albany

billalb@aol.com