

the ACADEMY

# VOICE™

Our Stories. Our Lives. Our Voice.



2nd Edition  
Spring 2021

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CLASS OF 2020

**99% Graduation Rate**

NYSED Gives The Academy a Glowing Report on its Graduation Rate



**The Academy Alumni Excel**

Kimani Panthier, Brianna Braxton & Sheilly Martinez

**The High School Marching Band & More**



SCAN ME

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Welcome to the second issue of The Academy Voice, the official magazine of the Academy Charter School. We are proud to present another issue which is designed for alumni, parents, faculty, staff and friends of the Academy Charter School. Our objective is to produce a lively, informative publication that stimulates pride and interest in the Academy.

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**VOICE**™

Spring 2021, 2nd Edition  
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Our mission is to create world class competitive scholars who will **LEARN** today, **LEAD** tomorrow, and **SERVE** in the future.

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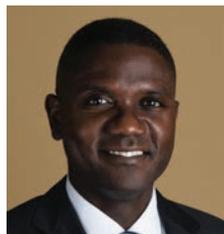
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Elementary School: **Hempstead**



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High School: **Hempstead**



Elementary/High School: **Uniondale**

# CHAIRMAN GREETING

## Robert T. Stewart

Dear Academy Families:

It is with immense pride that I declare to you that despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, The Academy has not wavered from its academic standards or its sense of duty toward our scholars and staff alike. We are here. We are functioning. Our scholars have been making great strides. This is in large part because of the efforts of our devoted senior leadership team under the leadership of CEO, Bishop Barrington Goldson. We also want to recognize our teachers and the entire staff for their sacrifice during this uncertain time.

As your Board chair and a proud parent of an Academy scholar, I can attest to the great job our community has done in impacting and supporting our kids through the pandemic. Discipline, resilience, and dedication coupled with effort, are some of the key ingredients that foster success. That is the spirit that we try to instill in each scholar.

The Board of Trustees pledges to continually support the efforts of the school leaders, the teaching staff, and our precious scholars, who will forever be the heart and soul of The Academy. Our scholars are encouraged to Learn Today, Lead Tomorrow, and Serve in the Future.

*Sincerely,*  
Robert T. Stewart  
Chairman of the Board of Trustees



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We are Resilient! We are World Class! We are Academy Strong!



On January 14, 2021, while New York was in the midst of one of the worst pandemics that the country has ever experienced, New York State Education Department released the state school report card data for high school graduation rates. That report was extremely favorable for The Academy Charter School, as it indicated that the school exceeded the graduation rates of many other New York Schools. It was particularly meaningful because 2020 marked the inaugural class of graduating seniors from The Academy. The graduation rate was of even greater significance due to the sustained excellence by the scholars in the midst of the life altering effects of the coronavirus pandemic.

The report revealed that the school has a 99%, four-year graduation rate in its inaugural year. That same report also showed that those figures exceeded the New York State average by 14%, the Nassau County average by 6%, Hempstead UFSD average by 21% and the NYC average by 20%. He further stated that, 41% of our graduating scholars received a Regent's Diploma with Advanced Designation, also exceeding the NYS and NYC averages as well as those of some surrounding school districts serving similar populations.

When asked as to what he would attribute this enviable graduation rate, he stated that there were several factors that contributed to that end. "It took a level of vision to understand what the end result was going to be: The vision from the Board, the vision from our founder, the leadership, and in no small part, the vision of the parents." He reiterated that the shared vision led members of staff from various areas - teaching, counseling, or running an after-school program, to achieve the result.

“

It took a level of vision to understand what the end result was going to be.

- *Principal Holloway*

“We tried our very best to make every decision align to the vision and the mission of the school. Having that vision helped us to navigate those times when we were scratching our heads trying to figure out what in the world we were going to do next; how are we going to support those scholars; but buying into that vision has helped us to be successful. There’s an end result that we are looking for, and that’s really to change a generation; to really impact a generation of scholars, and just holding on to that vision and connectedness, I believe has really helped us to be successful these last four years.” He emphasized that no one person can take full credit for the success since everyone played a key role in it. Everyone played a role regardless of how big that role was. This is a win, not just for the high school; I believe for The Academy, because it is the product. This is the culmination of the work that a lot of people have put in.”

Principal Holloway also noted that in terms of teaching methodology playing a role in the success, he referenced mathematics, his area of specialization. “In Common Core math they call it the standards of mathematical practice. One of the standards is to make sense of problems and persevere in solving them, and I think that’s what our staff has always done. They’ve made sense of what’s going on and persevered in trying to solve them, and whether that’s trying something differently, whether it’s utilizing another technique, participating in a professional development session to learn how to support the different scholars, the team did what they needed to do to accommodate.” Mr. Holloway stressed that another contributing factor toward the success, was teachers working together to do what they needed to do in the best interest of the scholars, so much so, that during the first year he and the teachers held regular staff meetings to discuss how to support different scholars, especially those who were struggling. They examined how a struggling scholar was doing in other classes. If that scholar was doing well in another class, they tried to identify why, and took from that experience to be of assistance to that scholar.

Mr. Holloway also spoke of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, a theory that he and the staff have come to understand and embrace. He expounded on the importance of awareness of meeting the intellectual and basic physiological needs of scholars, such as: having nutritious meals, emotional support, needing extra help in math, etc. Another rarely addressed area in many schools, is personal advocacy. “One of the things we did and encouraged our scholars to do is advocate; to have those conversations, whether it’s with teachers, or with administrators, or with anybody so that they do not stand

by when they really need to put another step forward or when they really need support.”

As to the future of those scholars who have persevered during the pandemic, Mr. Holloway concedes that while the conditions of the pandemic have not made things easy, he sees light at the end of the tunnel. “99% is a hard act to follow, but I do think that these conditions have created opportunity. Whenever there’s a crisis there’s also opportunity.” He emphasized that the challenges might have created big adjustments for teachers, families, and scholars, but it also provides an opportunity for them to demonstrate their grit and tenacity. “One of the things that is a common theme in some of our conversations with scholars and families is that despite the circumstances, what we do at The Academy; what we try to teach, is to endure.”

Like many other educators, Principal Holloway has shared concerns about the difficulties that scholars have encountered during the pandemic, however he believes that acknowledging the situation is one aspect, but all parties must navigate it and move forward. “The big focus has to be motivation,” he said. He recognizes that the pandemic crisis and the ensuing changes with scholars having to adjust to online classes, has been trying. However, the theme at the Academy is for scholars and teachers alike to learn to adjust to challenges and make lemonade out of lemons. It is a lesson that encourages flexibility and courage to face the unexpected. “Some of the intangible lessons that this environment has taught us really will be the thing that lasts. If scholars can get through this season, that we’re in, then they really can get through anything.”



<https://apple.co/3kCzFXF>



# Kimani PANTHIER

By Hazelin Williams

What outcome can we expect when a determined young man sets out with the intention of challenging himself to be the best he could possibly be? Simply put, the result is guaranteed to be success, especially if the young man in question is the tenacious Kimani Panthier. This remarkable scholar began his studies at the Academy at an early age, one of the first scholars to grace the school. Later, he zealously tackled his high school studies, with the intention of one day becoming the class valedictorian. His hard work paid off when he earned the privileged title of valedictorian of The Academy's senior graduating class of 2020. It bore a special significance since it also marked the very first senior graduating class of the school. As Kimani explained, upon entering high school, he was determined to take the most rigorous classes. While those classes were not for the faint of heart, he applied himself to them and came out at the top of his classes every semester. His focus and dedication to his studies later made it possible for him to obtain acceptance at Harvard University.

Now that he is a scholar at that renowned institution, he credits The Academy for playing a critical role in grooming him for post-secondary education. He stated that since the school significantly prepared him, he has adjusted well to his studies at Harvard. Kimani also indicated that the transition from high school to college has been made easier, both because of the preparation at The Academy and by flexible Harvard professors who understand the pressures of the virtual setting, and have used techniques that promote interaction and collaboration via Zoom. "While the pandemic has changed the dynamics of higher education, the faculty of Harvard has designed the undergraduate courses specifically for online instruction."

As for current challenges as well as aspirations for the future, he explained that while attending The Academy Charter School - Hempstead, he began to feel drawn to leadership and public service. For one, he was the high school Student Body President, for two years. That role gave him the opportunity to conduct meetings, poll students, plan events and attend Board meetings. He also found time to interact with elected officials on town and county levels when he was a volunteer. On one such occasion, he was granted the privilege of being Trustee of the Village of Hempstead for a day. He also volunteered with New York State Assemblywoman Taylor Darling's office during her 2018 election campaign, served as a Policy Research Intern for Nassau County Legislator, Josh Lafazan, met with Congresswoman, Kathleen Rice, Congressman Tom Suozzi, and former Congressman Steve Israel.



“ I envision myself on Capitol Hill

Kimani currently attends Harvard University and is pursuing a degree in Political Science and Government.

Kimani, stated that his interactions with those elected officials, transformed his life, “creating an awareness of the arduous yet abundantly rewarding nature of politics.” Having had that exposure, Kimani has expressed that he will someday run for public office, either on the local, state, or national level. “I envision myself on Capitol Hill, creating legislation and representing underserved populations. My passion is to effect meaningful change that would reduce the prevalent economic and racial disparities that persist in education, housing, employment, healthcare, and income.”

While all of this may sound like a lofty undertaking, Kimani is even more confident that he can make a difference through his activism. “I take pride in using my voice to advocate for disenfranchised and marginalized groups in society. I have developed an immense passion to serve others. Witnessing the painstaking grip of poverty in my community has prompted me to become an active member and an agent of change.” These are not empty words from Kimani. He has already begun to live up to his words by spending time in his community, serving Thanksgiving meals to the needy, distributing back to school supplies, organizing monthly nursing home visits, along with other community outreach. It becomes obvious that this brilliant young man has spent much of his time observing and analyzing his community and the world at large. He is also a man of action. He actually “walks the walk.”

“I believe young people can serve their communities. Society has inculcated us to believe that change must occur in some grandiose manner, however, change is gradual. As Martin Luther King stated, “the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” Kimani emphasizes that it is imperative for young people

to understand the importance of being service-minded. “The seemingly miniscule efforts of young volunteers, whether it be volunteering at a local food pantry, tutoring elementary school children, or registering people to vote, young people hold immense power that when activated, can lead to incremental and lasting change.”

As for his heroes, he credits his hard-working, faith-based parents who have guided him, then former United States President Barack Obama. “Seeing a black man holding one of the most prominent positions of authority in the world was life-changing for me. I discovered President Obama endured many hardships as a child. Despite those challenges, he persevered, receiving degrees from Columbia University, and Harvard Law School. After reading his reflective memoir, *A Promised Land*, I am inspired by his commitment, to activism and justice. His ascension to the White House by building a racially diverse coalition of supporters and spreading a message of hope, inspires me to fight for equity and a propitious vision of America where we live up to our nation’s ideals of liberty and justice for all.”

Kimani recommends that young people who are unsure as to what they want to do with their lives, should follow their passion. “Find what drives you, discover what keeps you up at night and go for it!” He further suggests, “many times, young people are reluctant to follow their passions because we think we are unable to accomplish our goals because of our age. I would like to debunk that unfounded myth, because young people are not the leaders of tomorrow: We are the leaders of today. I want to encourage my peers to think radically, creatively, and innovatively. Engage in meaningful work which will perpetuate beyond you and impact future generations.”



Do not stress about planning out the rest of your life right now.

# Brianna BRAXTON

By Hazelin Williams

In the Spring of 2020, Brianna Braxton was among the first group of seniors to graduate from The Academy, Charter School - Hempstead, making her mark as the class Salutatorian. That notable achievement is the culmination of hard work, discipline, and a determination to accomplish great things. While this young lady appears reserved and unassuming, she is a powerhouse; brilliant, well-grounded in family values and very socially conscious. When asked if she had set out with the intention of being either the valedictorian or class salutatorian, she made it clear that while it was not her implicit goal to become the Salutatorian, she always intended to do the best that she could possibly do in school. That mindset is what pushed her to engage in her studies and to ultimately excel at The Academy.

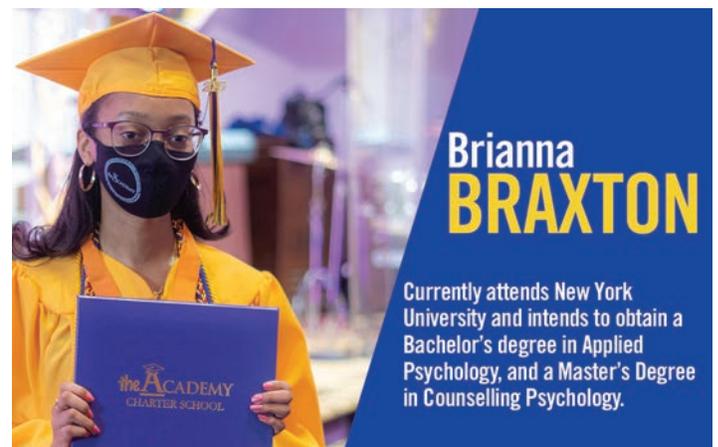
Brianna also credits her parents for being her heroes; the individuals who have been the strongest influences on her life. She emphasized that they have always encouraged her to do her absolute best and to follow her passions. "My parents work hard every day to provide the best for my siblings and myself, and seeing that, pushes me to keep the same work ethic," she said. It is that example of exerting effort to succeed, that induced her to maintain a stellar scholastic standing at The Academy, even as she participated in the Black Student Union, Camp Girl, and APUG (Applied Psychology Undergraduate.)

As for how she has coped with college work during the recent pandemic, she stated that it has not been easy. While she acknowledged that the pandemic has presented some challenges, one must marvel at how calm and confident she remains even though she is confronting some obstacles. "The adjustment to college definitely was not easy, but it was not anything I could not handle. The adjustment is all a matter of your ability to manage your time well, to stay organized, and to stay focused," Brianna stated. She also indicated that The Academy prepared her well for college. She feels that the standards for the quality of work and the workload given in classes at The Academy are not that different from what is expected at the college

level. As a result of that, her adjustment to college life has been made easier.

We asked Brianna what she envisions for her future. She indicated that she intends to obtain a Bachelor's degree in Applied Psychology, and a Master's Degree in Counseling Psychology from New York University, then embark on a career as a licensed mental health counselor. In addition to expressing her dreams, she also offered advice to youngsters who desire to make their communities and the world better. "Even with limited capacity, there is a lot one can do to better his or her community and the world. Attending online charity events, volunteering at places like food banks, and just spreading information about important subjects on social media, are simple steps you can take to better your community during this time."

What advice or encouragement would she offer to young people who are not sure as to what they want to do with their lives: "Do not stress about planning out the rest of your life right now. There are many students in college who do not know what career path they want to follow." She further stated, "you have more time than you think to figure out who you are and who you want to be. In college you have the space to take different courses and discover your different interests before you have to declare your major. Knowing exactly what you want to do is great, but not knowing is okay as well."



## Brianna BRAXTON

Currently attends New York University and intends to obtain a Bachelor's degree in Applied Psychology, and a Master's Degree in Counselling Psychology.

“ Always challenge yourself; always do things that you love.

# Sheilly MARTINEZ

By Hazelin Williams



The adage, “never judge a book by its cover,” is very appropriate in describing Sheilly Martinez. During her relatively few years in this world, she has already made strides that many would take years to accomplish. For one, she took on the intimidating task of teaching English to groups of Spanish speaking immigrants in Long Island, and she did it all without any fuss or fanfare.

To facilitate such an ambitious undertaking, she first researched, then created placement examinations to determine their level of proficiency. She stated that she wanted to create an environment in which Spanish speakers would feel comfortable. “From there I was able to create lesson plans for each level, and I can say it was amazing getting to know them and their reasons for trying to learn English and coming to America.”

Now that she is a freshman at Long Island’s Stony Brook University, we asked Sheilly how she has adjusted from high school to college during the pandemic. “Being first gen, it was pretty hard navigating the courses, getting used to being online and having to teach myself the majority of the course work.” Not surprisingly, this young lady still found a way to cope with change. “I made my own agenda where I kept track of the work. I got to know some people from my classes, and I was even able to make new friends, despite being online.” As for whether her training at The Academy has helped her to adjust to college studies, she indicated a resounding yes! “Having been challenged in high school, has shaped me into the person that I am today. Neither my writing skills nor my love for history and math would exist without the teachers constantly pushing me to do more and learn more.”

Her suggestion to young people on how they can make a difference in their communities and this country, is that they should find something that they are passionate about and genuinely wish to change. “If you have a passion for climate change, start petitions, organize peaceful protests; let your local government officials hear your voices. If you are passionate about helping marginalized groups, then spread awareness and help uplift their voices.”

As for some of her other passions, Sheilly indicated that in her spare time, she likes to read books, one of which is *Almond*, by Sohn Won-Pyung. She also likes to create art, whether it is with acrylic paint or clay. In addition to that, she loves to meet different people and that love also leads her to volunteer in various parts of Long Island.

Upon completion of her college education, Sheilly plans to pursue a career as a lawyer, but she may embark on a political career. She expressed the desire to give back to her community; perhaps create her own version of a non-profit that operates world-wide. “Always challenge yourself; always do things that you love. It’s okay to not know. We have our whole lives to figure that out. Find your own path, whether it is going to college or deciding to take a break. Get to know yourself and then, from there, grow as you please.”



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the **ACADEMY**  
CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

# Marching Band

By Ms. Stejha Meekins

[www.AcademyCharterSchool.org/MarchingBand.html](http://www.AcademyCharterSchool.org/MarchingBand.html)



The Academy Charter High School is not only dedicated to the academic achievement of our scholars, but the exploration of their artistic abilities and gifts. Through involvement in our rigorous Visual & Performing Arts program, scholars are afforded the opportunity to sharpen their creative skills in Theater, Dance, Visual Arts, and Music! Last year, 50 of our Academy scholars (ranging in grades 9-12) became members of the first ever Academy Charter High School Marching Band! The Academy Marching Panthers, an extension of the swiftly expanding Instrumental Music Program at the Hempstead High School, offered dedicated training in Wind Instruments, Percussion Ensemble, and Dance instruction. After performing for the High School Building Opening Ceremony in October, the Academy Marching Panthers began receiving numerous requests to perform for the school, throughout the Village of Hempstead, and the greater Long Island community. Over the next 4 months, scholars were able to share their talents at the Martin Luther King Jr. Ecumenical Service (Baldwin, NY), the Village of Hempstead Black History Month Event (Hempstead, NY), and The Academy Charter High School Annual Pep Rally & Basketball Halftime Shows.

Prior to school closures in March (brought on by the inception of the pandemic), the Marching Panthers were still slated to participate in the Hempstead Memorial Day Parade, be featured in a promotional advertisement for The Academy Charter School on the Steve Harvey Morning Show, and perform for their biggest venue yet, The Long Island Nets Pre-Game Basketball Show! On March 25, 2020, scholars were scheduled to perform the Pre-Game show for the prestigious sports organization, solidifying an ongoing partnership with the corporation that would allow for frequent performance opportunities at seasonal basketball games. Though the year's latter events were unable to transpire, the Academy Marching Panthers were still invited to contribute a final performance for the Academy Charter High School Inaugural Graduation Ceremony on June 20, 2020!

This year, the Academy Marching Panthers received interest from an additional 50 high school scholars! However, due to the current uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic, the marching season was postponed. When we resume, we plan to pick up exactly where we left off, but with an even greater fire and desire to work! Last year was an absolute testament of the POWER of unity and shared vision. We are dedicated to continuing our efforts with the expansion of the High School Marching Band and offering artistic-enhancing experiences to our world class, competitive scholars who learn today, lead tomorrow, and serve in the future.



# FAMILY & COMMUNITY

Our Family and Community Resource section is dedicated to showcasing the Academy's community engagement along with providing helpful resources and tips to strengthen individuals and families. We will continually add more to each section in each issue.



## Donates to The Academy Charter School at Grand Reopening of its Hempstead Supermarket

Local supermarket, Stop & Shop at 132 Fulton Avenue, recently reached out to The Academy Charter School - Hempstead and donated \$2,500 to the school, for the benefit of select Academy families who were identified as being in need. Those funds were awarded to The Academy for making a difference in the community. This action marks what is expected to be an ongoing partnership as both Stop & Shop and The Academy Charter School continue to demonstrate awareness of some of the needs that exist in the Hempstead community.



## Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. Donates "Blessing Bags" To The Academy

Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc., Iota Theta Zeta Chapter, selected The Academy Charter School to be the recipient of their generosity for their Global Day of Service. Sorority sisters, Dr. Zodelia Williams, Sharmaine Bisnauth, Trudi McKenley and Alicia Tutt, came bearing "Blessing Bags" that included hand sanitizers, facial masks, and wet wipes, along with other hygiene items that are in demand during the current pandemic. The Academy extends sincere appreciation for the consideration that Zeta Phi Beta Sorority has extended to our scholars and our school community.

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Long Island Crisis Center: (516) 679-1111  
N.Y.S. Coronavirus Hotline: (888) 364-3065  
Nassau County Coronavirus Hotline: (516) 227-9570  
National Domestic Violence Hotline: (800) 799- (SAFE) 7233  
National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: (800) 273- (TALK) 8255  
National Helpline: (800) 662-HELP (4357)  
National Runaway Hotline: (800) 786-2929  
Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault: (516) 542-0404  
National Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Treatment Finder: (800) 662-4357 <http://www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov>  
National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI): <http://www.crisistextline.org> Text NAMI - 741741  
National Eating Disorder Association (NEDA) Helpline: (800) 931-2237  
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Central American Refugee Center: (516) 489-8330  
Baby Safe Haven: 1 (877) 796-HOPE (4673)  
National Center for Missing or Exploited Children: (800) 843-5678  
The Safe Center of LI (for survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault) (516) 542-0404



M  
“

Education must enable one to sift and weigh evidence, to discern the true from the false, the real from the unreal, and the facts from the fiction. The function of education, therefore, is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically.”

- Martin Luther King Jr.

Watch our  
**BLACK HISTORY MONTH  
CELEBRATION**

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## SUMMER 2021



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ART DIRECTOR: DAVID M. WALLACE

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