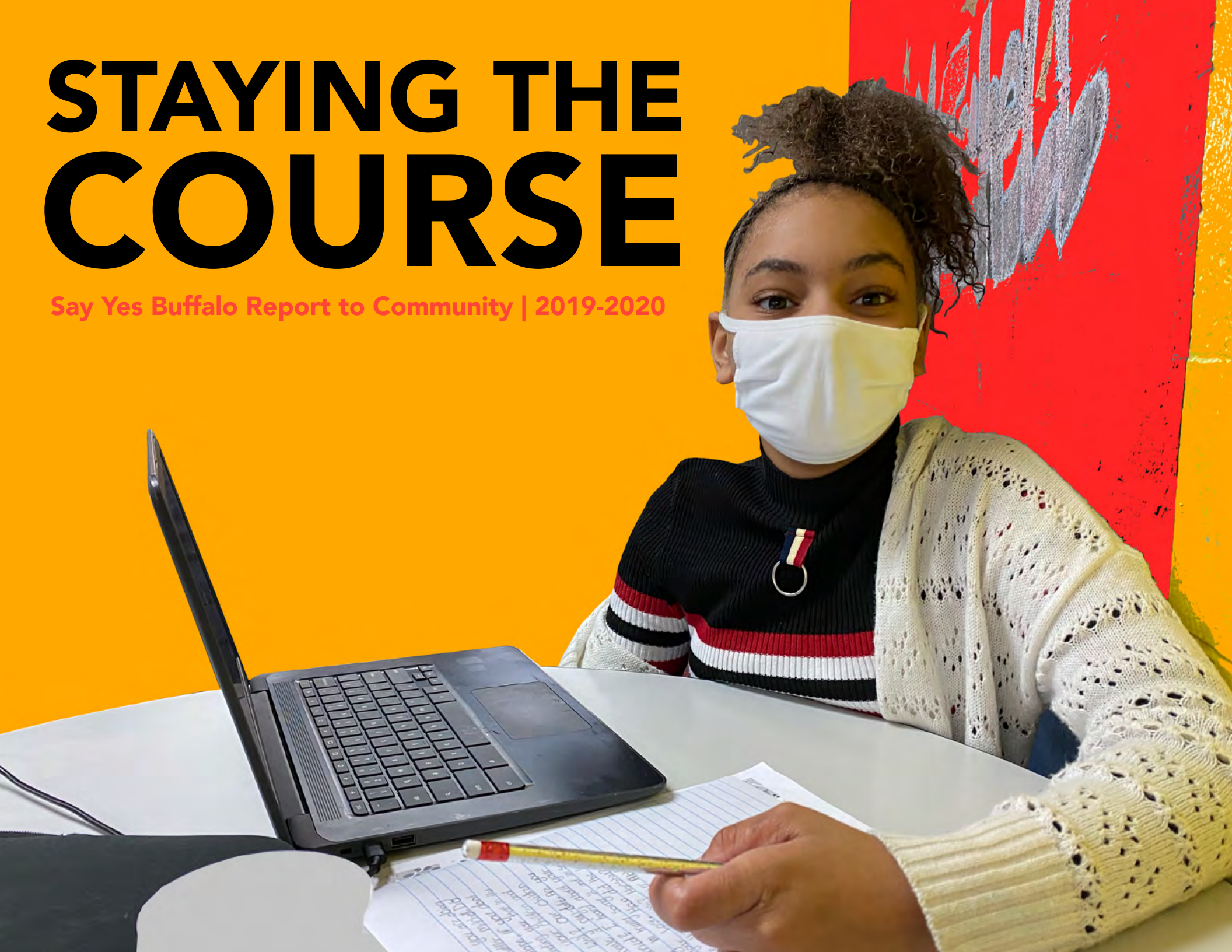


# STAYING THE COURSE

Say Yes Buffalo Report to Community | 2019-2020



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Welcome</b>	3
<b>Top 10 Highlights from 2019-2020</b>	6
<b>About Say Yes Buffalo</b>	10
PK-12 Supports and Services	11
College Level Supports and Services	13
<b>Impact Dashboard</b>	15
Racial Equity and Inclusion Dashboard	19
<b>Governance</b>	
Scholarship Board	20
Operating Committee	21
Community Leadership Council Co-Chairs	22
Endowment Campaign Committee	23
<b>Profiles</b>	
Donor Spotlight: John Camardo	24
Alumni Spotlight: Sydney Favors	26
Scholar Spotlight: Muhsinah Howlader	28
Donor Spotlight: John R. Oishei Foundation	30
Donor Spotlight: Morgan Williams-Bryant	32
Donor Spotlight: Samantha Nephew	34
<b>Program Funders</b>	36
<b>Donors to the Scholarship</b>	37
<b>Our Team</b>	45

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## #STAYTHECOURSE



Photo: Mark Mulville, Buffalo News

Siblings Sara and Ba shar Kattan graduated as the valedictorian and salutatorian at International Preparatory at Grover Cleveland High School. Refugees from Syria, the Kattans started at Canisius College this year with their sights on the medical field.

Sara called the pandemic “another obstacle that I am sure will pass like all the other terrible circumstances that we all experienced at one point.”

Sara said earning an education has always motivated her, and that coming to Buffalo finally allowed her to pursue that dream.

“Whenever I had a goal, there was hope.”

# FROM THE CHAIR OF THE SCHOLARSHIP BOARD

## Welcome to Say Yes Buffalo's 2019-2020 Report to the Community

**Dear Say Yes Buffalo Angel Donors, Investors and Partners:**

In the light of all the challenges the last year has brought, I could not be more proud to be a part of this organization and this movement that continues to fundamentally change the economic opportunities afforded to our greatest assets, the young people of our community.

It is because of your generosity and support that we continue to make progress toward our \$100 million endowment goal which will fund the Say Yes Buffalo scholarship, forever. Thank you to everyone who has contributed and will continue to contribute to this bold goal. Buffalo is unique as a city in that it has an endowment for a promise scholarship for an entire school district. We are all proud to be a part of this spectacular promise that lifts our entire community.

Thanks to the generous support of the Say Yes Buffalo Scholarship Fund, we have awarded \$15 million in scholarships to students since the first eligible graduating class in 2013, leveraging \$150 million in federal, state and institutional aid.

As our whole community is deeply diverse in

race, ethnicity, and religion, education access and opportunity as a racial equity strategy lies at the core of our mission; we have had over 1,500 Buffalo students achieve degrees and are now pursuing their careers. One of those former students, Sydney Favors, you can read about in this report!

In response to covid-19 and the technology challenges our students faced with the abrupt transition to virtual learning, we implemented the covid-19 Technology campaign this year which surpassed our \$100,000 goal to provide laptops for Say Yes scholars entering their first year of college. Thank you to everyone who supported this effort!

A few highlights from this past year that you can read more about in this report:

- **The Buffalo Public School 2020 high school graduation rate soared to 76 percent—a 27 point increase since 2012, the year prior to Say Yes Buffalo's launch!**
- **With funding and organization from partners in Erie County government and Buffalo Public Schools, we established 51 "Virtual Learning Support Center" sites that served 1,796 children with crucial in-person, virtual learning support during the pandemic's second wave, providing a safe**

**place for students to attend remote school and relief to parents who were continuing to work.**

- **The Buffalo College Success Network—funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation—has established on-campus mental health counseling, near peer programming and mentoring which have contributed to an increase in persistence at three out of the four partner colleges after just two years.**
- **Say Yes Buffalo achieved an important milestone as of July 1, 2020 and is now an independent entity committed to serving Buffalo students and families and fully governed by our local board.**

In closing, I'd like to honor the life of Judge Hugh Scott. Judge Scott was an integral part of our formation, a key supporter during our growth, and valued member of our Scholarship Board for many years. His incredible service and commitment to young people and education in this community will be greatly missed and never forgotten. As the chair of this board, I am humbled and honored to do this work and further his legacy.

Sincerely,



**Bill Joyce**  
Chair of the Say Yes Buffalo  
Board of Directors





## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

### Welcome to Say Yes Buffalo's 2019-2020 Report to the Community



#### Dear Say Yes Buffalo Team:

It has become commonplace to wish 2020 a good riddance. While I'd like to echo that sentiment and put the worst of this past year behind us, 2020 has been a crucial year for any organization that puts people, community, and economic growth at the heart of what they do. Say Yes Buffalo is certainly one such organization and we've been humbled by the various ways our staff and our community has met this once-in-a-lifetime challenge. No doubt the foundation of what has been built this past year will resonate for years in the future.

And what is that foundation? When we watched our young people suddenly lose that physical connection with school in the heart of the college application season, we helped. When we saw our graduating seniors lose out on graduation ceremonies and proms, we helped. When we saw so many of our families face food insecurity, housing insecurity, and childcare breakdowns, we helped. In the midst of a pandemic, a civil rights crisis, and

a turbulent political period like no other, we saw time and time again people stepping up and helping their neighbor.

To our frontline workers and supervisors at Say Yes Buffalo, who work with hundreds of vulnerable families in Buffalo Public Schools, we say thank you. These Family Support Specialists and Health Home Coordinators continued meeting with families throughout the year, ensuring they were safe and had access to food, medical appointments, devices and solutions for children to be successful in virtual school. We delivered food, personal protective equipment and supplies, even toys and games thanks to a campaign in conjunction with a local toy store, the Treehouse, to brighten a family's day. You all stepped up in ways, big and small, loud and quiet, that will be remembered.

To our Community Schools and Parent Center staff, who were hired and trained to run community center-like programming out of 21 Buffalo Public Schools, we say great job.

We held our first Virtual Saturday Academy on April 4, 2020, creating a series of virtual programs that offered academic enrichment, knowledge about vital community resources, exercise and fitness classes, arts and literary workshops, and cultural enrichment activities for all ages. Many Community Schools staff took to the streets last spring, volunteering to deliver thousands of meals from Buffalo Public Schools to families who signed up to receive them. Other staff organized multiple Virtual College Tour days, encouraging students to "Stay the Course" and continue on their way to the postsecondary opportunities at the heart of the Say Yes mission.

To our Breaking Barriers and Mentoring Program staff, we say thank you. How many lives were impacted with "Workout Wednesdays" and daily check-ins, how many more of our young people are more engaged in their education than they would have been, is hard to quantify, but we've been inspired by your efforts to bridge these gaps, to involve

our young people in community service and development projects, and to remind them that the community we want is the result of us all working smarter and harder at it, every day.

To our Extended Learning Time team, who scrambled to provide virtual summer camps and then establish an entirely new service in the Virtual Learning Support Centers, the entire community thanks you. Because of this program, made possible by funding from Erie County government (Live Well Erie CARES Act) and Buffalo Public Schools, nearly 1,800 kids and their families received this crucial, in-person support at 50 sites throughout Buffalo. Within weeks of the funding for this program being in place, we had sites in full operation with a robust health and safety plan to confront this pandemic.

And to our Internship & Career Pathways program, a huge thanks for keeping our students engaged and for pushing the equity needle for area employers. With the pandemic limiting or in many cases eliminating in-person internships, we still had 36 scholars complete internships with over 80 scholars in regular contact with Say Yes staff working on professional development.

It didn't end there, our important program support infrastructure in Communications, Finance, Human Resources, and Scholarships all went above and beyond for our community in ways public and private, small and large, that I will never forget. This is people-centered work, and our people put that focus where it needed to be and never blinked.

We hope to look back on this year not

as a time when we struggled, but as a time when our collective mission for our collective benefit was strengthened and tempered; a time when our resolve was turned into action and expanded; a time when the rubber met the road and we accelerated. Now, let's go 2021!

Sincerely,

David Rust



**David Rust**  
Executive Director of Say Yes Buffalo

## #STAYTHECOURSE



After sharing this post, we learned that Medaille College reached out to Antonio Gwynn, the recent Hutch Tech graduate featured in this post, and extended an acceptance and full scholarship, which Antonio accepted. Antonio said he wasn't planning on going to college, but jumped at the opportunity to study business.

# TOP 10 HIGHLIGHTS 2019-2020



## 1. High school graduation rate hits 76% milestone

Our collaborative effort with Buffalo Public Schools hit a milestone this year: 76% graduation rate, having climbed 27 points from 2012 when Say Yes Buffalo launched its gamechanging partnership. While there's still a lot of hard work in front of us to keep raising this number (the New York average is around 83%), Buffalo schools are going in the right direction. Behind the percentage points are thousands of young people who have increased access to postsecondary training and education.

## 2. Organization-wide response to COVID-19

Our mission is to remove barriers to educational attainment, workforce participation, and economic mobility for Buffalo students. Our programmatic growth since 2012 has been centered on meeting the needs of individual students and families to strengthen our mutual futures. The social and economic crisis created by the covid-19 pandemic has enabled us to pursue new paths that we've established and do our best to meet needs, family by family, student by student. It's been all hands on deck across departments: from our essential services like our school-based family support and Health Home coordination teams kicking into high gear, to Community Schools holding virtual Saturday academies, to spawning multiple, stopgap development campaigns for our students and families. This year, we've had to get back to our roots, as individual staff and as a united team, opening and reopening pathways for success for our community.



## 3. Say Yes Buffalo transitions to local governance

Last spring, Say Yes Buffalo achieved an important milestone established at our inception in 2011. Beginning July 1, 2020, our local board formally assumed governance for all Say Yes Buffalo programs, personnel, and operations from Say Yes to Education, Inc. The Say Yes Buffalo Scholarship Board, originally established to raise money for and manage scholarships, is now the Board of the Directors and the local legal entity with responsibility for all aspects of Say Yes Buffalo. Say Yes Buffalo Executive Director David Rust will now report directly to this Board. Both Say Yes Buffalo's program budget and scholarship budget will flow through this entity. Our work will remain strong as our organization transitions to independence and complete local operations.





## 4. Supporting students and families during covid-19

Almost as soon as the pandemic hit, staff transformed our largest conference room into a supply center for our Family Support Specialists to provide and deliver difficult-to-find cleaning supplies, food, personal care items, and family activity items like games and puzzles. We launched campaigns in conjunction with local small businesses Talking Leaves book store and the Treehouse toy store to supply families with games and toys to use at home as well as gift cards for books for graduating seniors. Several rooms of our offices remain filled with personal protective equipment, non-perishable food, and household items so we can continue to provide for our workers and families.

## 5. The establishment of Virtual Learning Support Centers

We launched 50 sites with funding from the Live Well Erie CARES Act Child Care grant, spread throughout the City of Buffalo. These centers offered students access to remote learning with internet, food, and supervision during the day. Using elements of our pre-existing summer camp infrastructure and with close partnership with Erie County, we launched the program within weeks in September. Opening most sites by mid-October for over 1,500 students, we served as a critical bridge to the classroom for some of our most vulnerable students



Say Yes Buffalo #StayTheCourse Campaign

117 views • Jun 8, 2020

5 10 SHARE SAVE ...

*Dr. Matthew Giordano, president of Villa Maria College*

## 6. #StayTheCourse

With so much uncertainty confronting our graduating seniors entering higher education, in May 2020 we began focusing on messaging to encourage them to stay the course and continue to pursue their goals. We worked closely inside the Buffalo College Success Network, a partnership between Say Yes Buffalo and five local colleges made possible by Gates Foundation funding, to craft a united push in media and social media. We aimed to incorporate the college readiness process, from financial aid documentation to application to registration. Over the summer, Say Yes staff undertook an initiative to attempt phone contacts to check in with our graduating seniors and scholars and offer support. The perseverance and resiliency of our young people facing these challenges head on inspired us to make the theme of our annual report "Stay the Course" in their honor.



## 7. The covid-19 Technology Campaign

Messaging is great, but action is even stronger. Knowing that we'd be entering a fall semester that would probably depend on some component of virtual classrooms, our Development team kicked into action. Spurred by large dollar donations from The Chapel and our IT partner TechNet as well support from the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo and the WNY Covid Impact Fund our community raised over \$100,000 that were used to supply our rising college freshman with laptops, to remove the technological barrier to a postsecondary education.

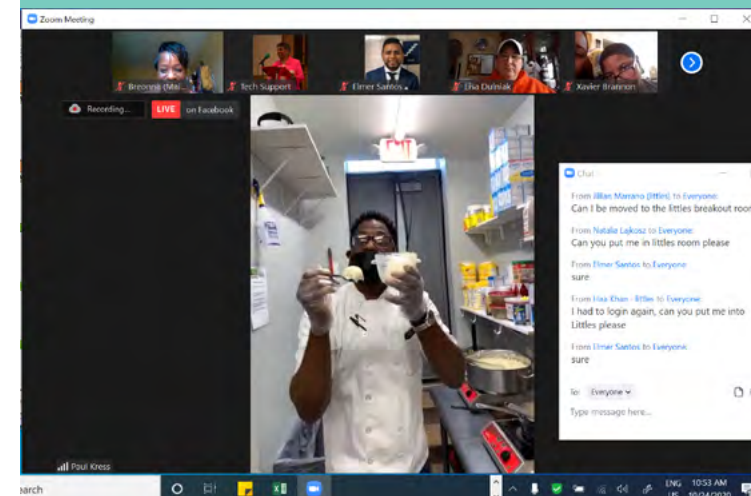


## 8. Virtual College Kickoff

The 2020 College Kickoff was presented to Buffalo's senior class with a spin! Due to covid-19, the daylong college transition bootcamp was switched to a virtual format. To keep things fun and exciting, the event was hosted by 93.7 WBLK radio personalities Adri V and DJ Spin. The senior class got to hear from current college students and learn about their unique experience of taking college classes in a new virtual world. The students were then able to connect with other students heading to the same campuses in breakout rooms led by the college admissions teams. For their participation in the two-part event, students were given a free laptop to help them start their first semester in college off right. More than 150 graduating seniors logged in to participate in the event!

## 9. Community Schools go virtual

In three years, the Community Schools team had grown its Saturday Academies into popular bi-weekly events across 19 buildings designated as "Community Schools" that drew over 50,000 visitors in 2018-2019. We were on pace to hit a similar, if not greater mark in 2019-2020 until the pandemic forced an adaption to create Virtual Saturday Academies. In these academies, the people-centered Community School Navigators have brought their skills into the virtual realm, offering families activity and crucial community information and support. Our first Virtual Saturday Academy was April 4, and in the ten events that carried through the end of the school year, our Facebook metrics measured 36,685 engagements and 49,073 total views. The Community Schools team also presented three separate virtual college tours that featured presentations from more than a dozen schools, and a summertime "Pop In" event for high school students.







### Inspire Change Organization of the Game: Breaking Barriers

Safety Micah Hyde presents the Inspire Change Organization of the Game award to Breaking Barriers. To learn more please visit: <https://www.breakingbarriersbuffalo.org/>

## 10. Boys & Men of Color Initiative receives boost from the Oishei Foundation

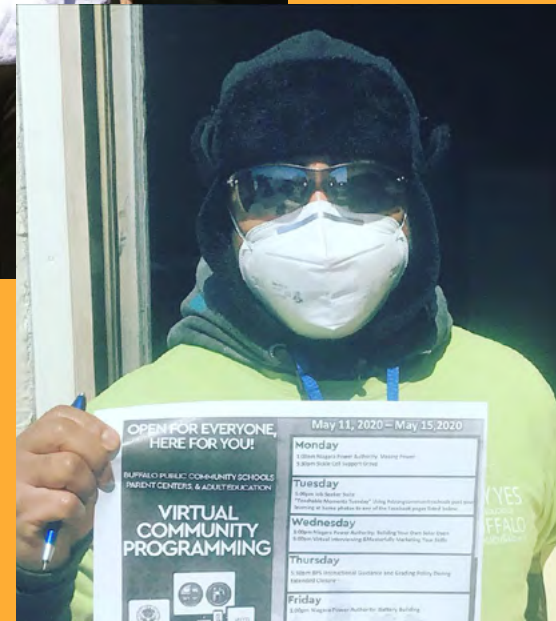
The John R. Oishei Foundation stepped up in a big way to support the work of Say Yes Buffalo's Boys and Men of Color Initiative. Since 2017, the Breaking Barriers Youth Leadership Council has worked with young men of color helping to nurture their positive growth and development as they mature into men. Together, the young men have a unified voice that advocates for racial equity, social justice and policy change. Through the program's short existence, so many young men remark on its importance in their day-to-day lives. Program leaders Tommy McClam and Daniel Robertson put an extra measure of care in ensuring participants feel a sense of brotherhood.

In the fall of 2020, The Oishei Foundation stepped in to support the program's continued existence for years to come. As remarked later in this report, Oishei Foundation leaders see the value and the benefit the work has on the young men of color who participate. We are grateful to the Oishei Foundation for their continued support!

Last fall, the Buffalo Bills also showed the program some love when safety Micah Hyde selected Breaking Barriers as an Inspire Change Organization. Recent South Park High School graduate and Breaking Barriers member Shawn Collins also landed an internship with the team last summer.

## #STAYTHECOURSE

After Saturday Academies and much of the programming Community School Navigators bring into school buildings was forced to change due to covid-19, staff kicked their work into a different gear, bringing events into the virtual realm and assisting Buffalo Public Schools to deliver thousands of meals.





## ABOUT SAY YES BUFFALO

*Mentorship program participants Wilbert Rogers, Jr. and Markel Dean with State Senator Tim Kennedy*

Say Yes Buffalo is a landmark partnership that brings together the Buffalo Public School District, parents, the Buffalo Teachers Federation, the Buffalo Association of Administrators and Supervisors, higher education, the City of Buffalo, Erie County, and a diverse group of Buffalo area corporate, non-profit, and philanthropic organizations to organize people, time, money and resources to provide holistic, year-round support to Buffalo Public School District students throughout their K-12 years and beyond. The mission of the Say Yes Buffalo partnership is to remove barriers to educational attainment, workforce participation and economic mobility for students in public and charter schools in Buffalo, NY.

Say Yes Buffalo partners facilitate comprehensive supports, including tuition scholarships to one of more than 170 colleges and universities

for those who meet residency, graduation and admission requirements. These supports are aligned with what research indicates is needed to enable every child in the program to achieve his or her potential and include:

- Summer programming
- College preparation supports
- College scholarships
- Health care
- Legal services
- Mental health care
- Mentoring
- Paid internships
- Social services and family supports



# PROGRAMS & SUPPORTS FOR BUFFALO PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS PK-12

The Say Yes Buffalo Partnership brings support services directly into school buildings, making them easier for student and families to access. The programs and services explained here are available to assist Buffalo Public School students reach their full academic potential and prepare them for high school graduation, college, and career. All of these programs have continued during covid-19, shifting wherever possible into virtual and online services.



## Social Services & Health Home Care Coordination

Say Yes Buffalo school-based staff, called Family Support Specialists (FSS), provide services to every school building. They are responsible for working with students struggling with attendance or behavior problems and their families to get back on track. FSS connect students and their families to physical health, mental health, after school, and basic needs programs. They also provide individual and group mentoring for the student and/or family and assist families with navigating school processes including registration, enrollment and parent-teacher conferences. Service is provided to students and families through two programs, school-based preventive services and Health Home care coordination.

## Mental Health Care

Mental health counseling is available to students within their school buildings, clinic sites, and during the pandemic, virtually through Telehealth. Participation in counseling can be self-identified or referred by teachers, parents and other school building administrators. Services are provided by licensed clinical mental health professionals and are billed to the student's health insurance, which includes Medicaid.

## In-School and Mobile Health Care

Some schools have in-school health clinics that provide students with basic health care, including physical screenings and immunizations. Mobile Health buses are parked at various school locations to provide primary and reproductive health care to students where in-school services are not available. Services are provided by licensed medical professionals and are billed to the student's health insurance (private insurance or Medicaid). Families who do not have health insurance will receive assistance obtaining it.

## Legal Advice

Free legal advice is available for all Buffalo Public School students and families on non-criminal legal matters. While in-person clinics have been suspended due to covid-19, legal matters are currently being facilitated over the phone and online.

## Summer Camp

Free Summer Camp is available for Buffalo Public School students in Pre-Kindergarten through 6th grade. These full- and half-day programs combine academics with fun enrichment activities and are located throughout the city at churches and community centers. In summer of 2020, Say Yes conducted this programming virtually.

## Early Childhood Development

Our program provides services, resources, and free supports to families, caregivers, and educators to support children, birth through 6 years of age. We provide free developmental screenings ("Ages & Stages Questionnaire") to monitor child development, education on developmental milestones, and activities to support healthy development. We also provide connections to community-based organizations for resources such as diapers, clothing, parenting classes, counseling, and free training to educators and community organizations around social-emotional development and supports.

## Strong Community Schools

A Community School brings together school and neighborhood resources to improve student learning and create stronger families and healthier families. It integrates academics, health and social services, youth and community development and community engagement. Twenty one schools have become a hub of information and resources to meet the needs of students, parents, and community members. In the past year, Community School staff has brought its popular programming into the virtual realm, offering enrichment activity and vital community information.

## Parent Centers

The Parent Centers are a part of the Strong Community Schools Strategy and are located at four Community High Schools (Bennett, East, Lafayette, and South Park). The Parent Centers provide families with education, resources, and programming that build parents knowledge, skills and networks for supporting and partnering in their child's education. To

achieve this goal a variety of activities, services, and learning sessions are offered daily and virtually in response to covid-19.

## Boys and Men of Color

The Say Yes Buffalo "Breaking Barriers" Youth Leadership Council is a program of the Greater Buffalo Racial Equity Roundtable's Boys and Men of Color Initiative that is aimed at accelerating positive outcomes for boys and young men of color across the cradle-to-career continuum. Participation is open to young men 12 to 24 years. Participants agree to a one-year commitment where they learn how to elevate their voice to advocate for social justice, racial equity and policy change in our community. For more information visit [breakingbarriersbuffalo.org](http://breakingbarriersbuffalo.org).

## College and Financial Aid Application Supports

Free services are available to students applying to college and for financial aid. Through the FAFSA Completion Project and the NYGear UP Program, students can get one-on-one help deciding what colleges to apply to, how to prepare a great application, and how to apply for financial aid. Services are available to every public high school building.





# PROGRAMS & SUPPORTS FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS

Once a Buffalo public or charter high school graduate enrolls at any SUNY/CUNY or Say Yes partner private college, they become a Say Yes Buffalo Scholar. As a Scholar, they are eligible for additional supports and services after they graduate from high school.

## College Kickoff for Incoming Freshmen

Each summer, Say Yes Buffalo hosts a free “College Kickoff” event to introduce students to college expectations and give them the tools to be successful. All graduating high school seniors are eligible to attend. This year’s event was held virtually in June 2020, and included technology giveaways so that students would be equipped for online classes.

## Internship & Career Pathways Program

Buffalo Public School graduates who have completed their first year of college are able to apply for paid internships throughout Western New York. Students receive support with coaching, workshops, and trainings on topics such as resumés, preparing cover letters, interviewing skills, and networking. These opportunities have been cultivated specifically to provide a direct pipeline from college to career after students earn their degree. More information is available at [SayYesToYourCareer.org](https://SayYesToYourCareer.org).

## Scholar Mentoring Program

Buffalo Public School graduates entering their freshman year at a Western New York college or university can apply to be matched with a mentor. The pair meets consistently for 18 months and the mentor guides the student through the transition to college.

## Summer Success Academies

Say Yes Buffalo scholars who attend Buffalo State College, SUNY Erie or Medaille College have the opportunity to enroll in free summer programs prior to the start of their freshman college year to help acclimate them to college life and routines. Students are eligible to be paid for participating through the City of Buffalo’s Mayor Summer Youth Employment program.



## SAY YES BUFFALO SCHOLARSHIP ELIGIBILITY

Say Yes Buffalo provides scholarships and grants to eligible graduates of Buffalo public and charter schools to all State University of New York (SUNY) and City University of New York (CUNY) and nearly 100 private colleges and universities. Eligible students who enroll at a Say Yes participating college can receive a scholarship to cover up to 100% of the cost of tuition after Federal, State and institutional aid have been applied.

## SAY YES BUFFALO SCHOLARSHIPS AND GRANTS ARE AVAILABLE TO STUDENTS WHO:

1. Reside in the city of Buffalo.
2. At minimum, complete grades 9-12, in consecutive years, at a public or charter school in the City of Buffalo or enroll in and complete the Buffalo Public School Adult Education College Career Institute.
3. Graduate from a public or charter school in Buffalo in June 2013 or after.
4. Enroll full-time at a Say Yes college within one year of high school graduation; and,
5. Apply for all federal and state financial aid programs available (FAFSA and TAP), including Selective Service as required by law.







*Breaking Barriers takes a hike in the Niagara Gorge.*

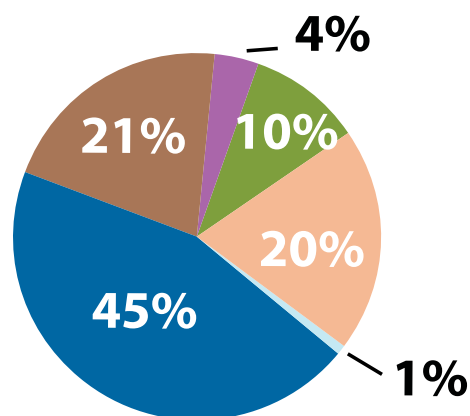
SAY YES BUFFALO

# IMPACT DASHBOARD

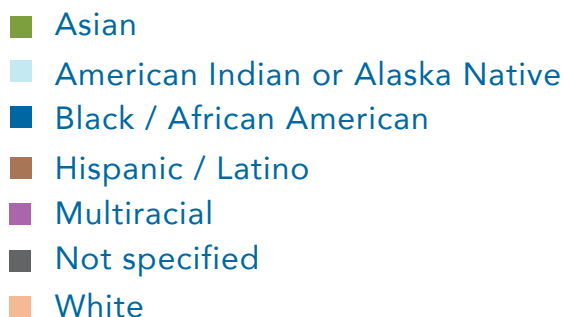
The Say Yes Buffalo Impact Dashboard is a collection of data points that the Say Yes Buffalo Partnership identified collaboratively to measure the impact of their work. Individual data points are updated annually as data becomes available at [SayYesBuffalo.org](https://SayYesBuffalo.org).

# SAY YES BUFFALO IMPACT DASHBOARD

## 2018-2019\* Buffalo Public School Student Demographics



2018-19 Buffalo Public Schools Enrollment



*\*2019-2020 data has not been released*

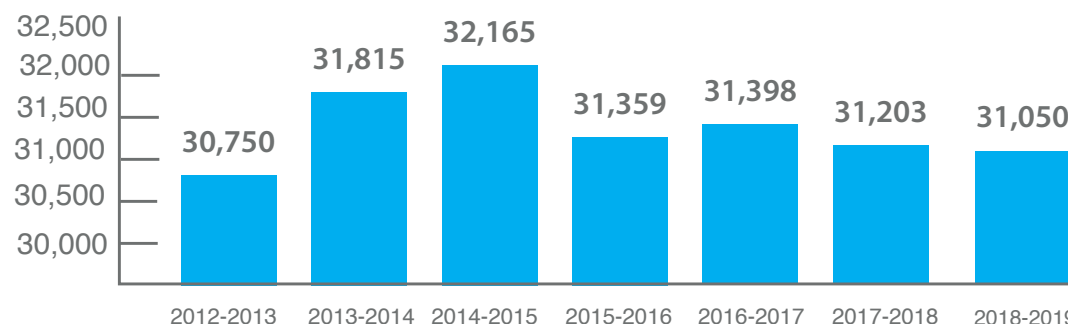
**83%** of students are economically disadvantaged

**18%** of students are English language learners or limited English proficient

**23%** of students have learning or physical disabilities

**2%** of students are homeless

## Buffalo Public District Enrollment



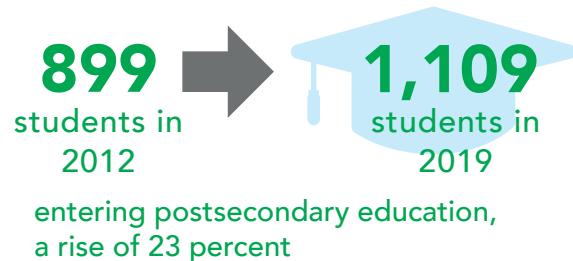


## Public School Graduation & College Matriculation Rates

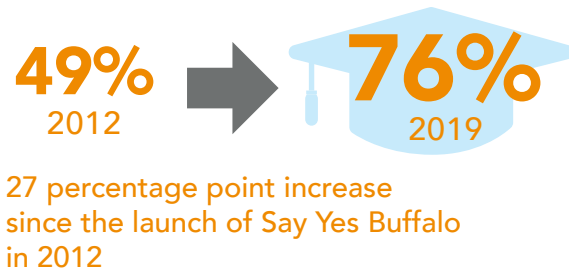
Nationally, since 2012, postsecondary enrollments have decreased overall by 2% and in New York State they have dropped by 10%. But in Buffalo, the overall number of students who enrolled in postsecondary education has increased 8%.



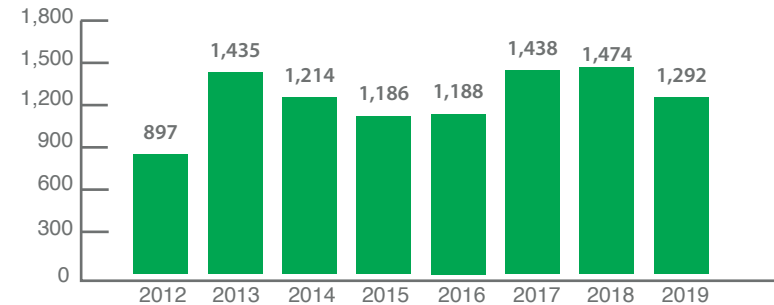
### Postsecondary Enrollment Rate



### High School Graduation Rate

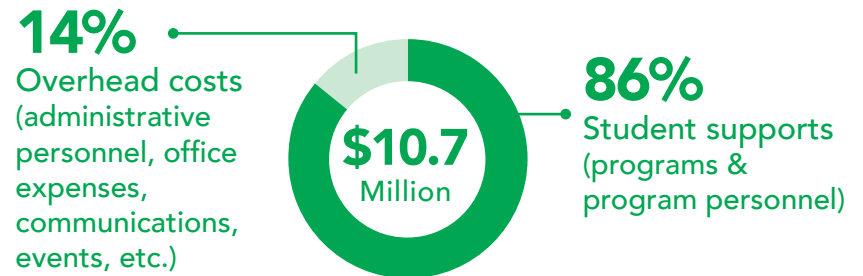


## FAFSA Completions



\*FAFSA completions differ due to class size.

## Operational Budget 2019-2020



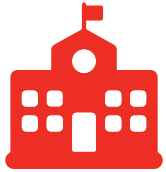
Say Yes programs and operations are funded through funding from public and private partners. A full list of program funders may be found on page 36.

# Program Outcomes

## 2019-2020

In addition to monitoring the outcomes stated in the Impact Dashboard, Say Yes is also committed to regular evaluation of the its supported programs. Below are outcomes of the 2019-2020 school year.

### Community Schools



**32,206** VISITS

to Saturday Academies by Buffalo Public School students and parents (before pandemic cancelled planned events)

### Summer Camp Program



**PRE-K THROUGH 6TH GRADE STUDENTS**

participated in free, four-week virtual summer camps

### Preventive Services Program



**3,004** FACE-TO-FACE contacts

**961** YOUTH served

**780** LINKAGES, including 51 for mental health

### Health Home Care Coordination Program

**201** YOUTH served

**97%** of YOUTH served total students enrolled were up to date on well visits, &

**99%** were up to date on immunizations

### Internships & Career Pathways Program

**36** STUDENT interns placed

**80+** STUDENTS received one-on-one support through internship application process

**20** STUDENTS completed the first cohort of the Career Preparation Certificate Program

### Mentoring Program

**93** SCHOLAR PARTICIPANTS

**95%** MATRICULATED to college

**80%** PERSISTED from year 1 to year 2 of college

(Compared to 65% and 71%, respectively, for all Say Yes Buffalo Scholars)

### Mental Health Clinics



**796** INDIVIDUALS served 2018-2019

### Legal Clinics



**146** FAMILY MEMBERS received help

**40** LOCAL ATTORNEYS volunteered services

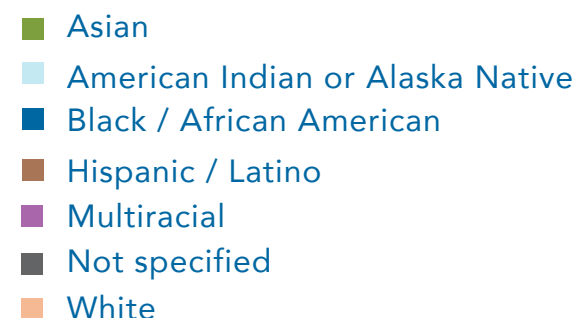
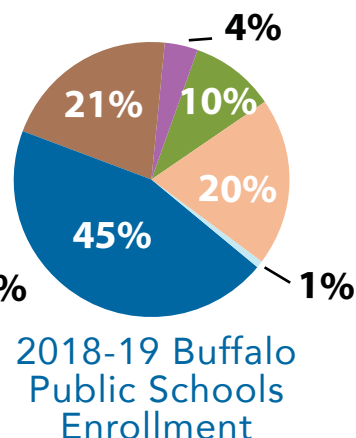
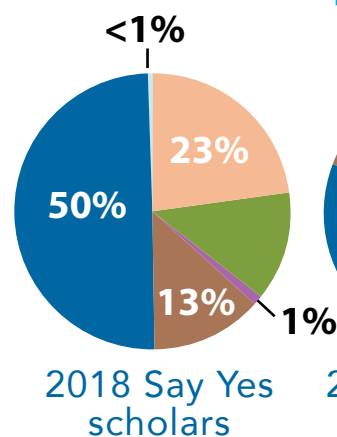


# Racial Equity + Inclusion Dashboard

Racial equity and inclusion are top of mind in all that we do, as an employer, service provider, purchaser, and partner. We've worked hard to create a workplace that models these tenets and have put staff (trained diversity & equity coaches), practices and policies (purchasing guidelines that prioritize women and minority owned businesses) in place to help us maintain and grow our capacity with respect to these principles. To hold us accountable, we provide this annual snapshot of our work with an equity lens.

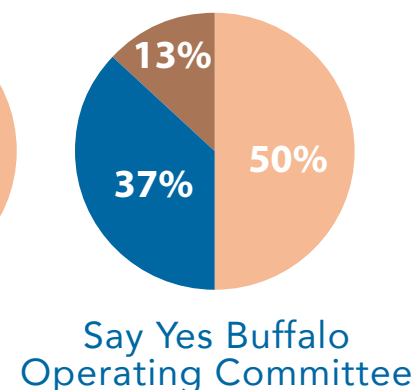
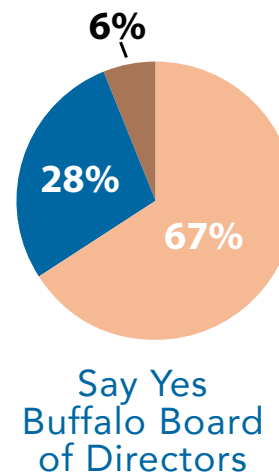
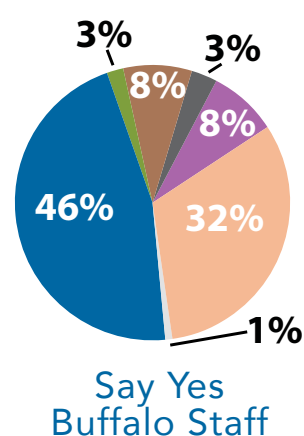
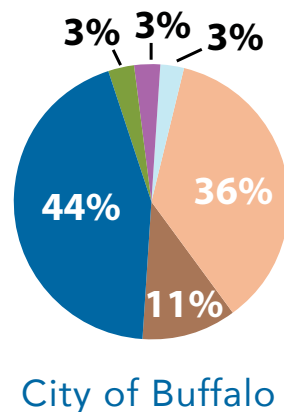
## Our Scholars

reflect the larger community



## Our Staff + Leadership

reflect the larger Buffalo community



"Equity will be achieved when we can all just wake up and live freely; be valued and respected; live free from structural impediments based off of perceived racial characteristics; and, have fair representation and opportunity."

-Collective Statement Developed by Say Yes Staff at 2019 Retreat

# BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2019-2020





The Say Yes Buffalo Board of Directors focuses on fundraising and policy related to the program's scholarships. This board is comprised of private individuals who are volunteering their time to raise the funds needed to provide the Say Yes Buffalo Scholarship in perpetuity. Scholarship Board members also determine eligibility and administrative guidelines and advocate on behalf of the program.

*The Hon. Hugh Scott passed away in February 2021.*



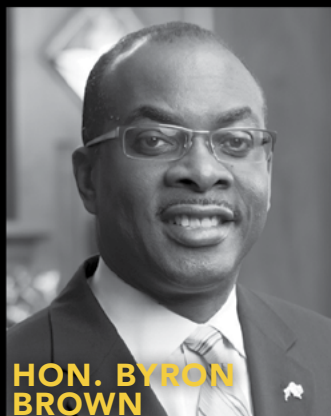
# OPERATING COMMITTEE MEMBERS 2019-2020

 <p><b>OTIS T. BARKER, SR.</b> Deputy Commissioner, City of Buffalo</p>	 <p><b>MARK BOYD</b> Chief of Staff, Office of Assemblywoman Crystal Peoples-Stokes</p>	 <p><b>HON. SHARON BELTON- COTTMAN</b> President, Buffalo Board of Education &amp; Representative, Ferry District</p>	 <p><b>CRYSTAL BOLING- BARTON</b> President, Buffalo Council of School Supervisors &amp; Administrators</p>	 <p><b>MARIE CANNON</b> Commissioner of Social Services, Erie County</p>	 <p><b>DR. KRINER CASH</b> Superintendent, Buffalo Public Schools</p>	 <p><b>DR. KATHERINE CONWAY- TURNER</b> President, Buffalo State College</p>
 <p><b>CLOTILDE PEREZ-BODE DEDECKER</b> President/CEO, Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo</p>	 <p><b>RACHEL FIX- DOMINGUEZ</b> Co-Chair of the Buffalo Parent-Teacher Organization</p>	 <p><b>DR. MATTHEW GIORDANO</b> President, Villa Maria College</p>	 <p><b>DR. ELLEN GRANT</b> Deputy Mayor, City of Buffalo</p>	 <p><b>PETRINA HILL- CHEATOM</b> Dean of Students, SUNY Erie</p>	 <p><b>MOLLY HIRSCHBECK</b> Communications Director, Office of Senator Tim Kennedy</p>	 <p><b>DR. WILL KERESZTES</b> Chief of Intergovernmental Affairs, Planning &amp; Community Engagement, Buffalo Public Schools</p>
 <p><b>DR. KENNETH M. MACUR</b> President, Medaille College</p>	 <p><b>BLYTHE T. MERRILL</b> Senior Vice President for Programs, The John R. Oishei Foundation</p>	 <p><b>DR. WENDY MISTRETTA</b> President, District Parent Coordinating Council</p>	 <p><b>DR. WILLIAM REUTER</b> Interim President, SUNY Erie</p>	 <p><b>PHIL RUMORE</b> President, Buffalo Teachers Federation</p>	 <p><b>EMMANUEL WRIGHT</b> Student Representative, Medaille College</p>	

The Say Yes Buffalo Operating Committee meets every three weeks to monitor progress and ensure stability of programs. This body is comprised of city officials, the County Commissioner of Social Services, parent leaders, the Board of Education, Superintendent, teachers' and administrators' union presidents, higher education officials and leaders from the region's two largest private foundations.

# COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP COUNCIL CO-CHAIRS 2019-2020

The 2019-2020 Community Leadership Council was Chaired by:



**HON. BYRON  
BROWN**

City of Buffalo



**DR. CATHERINE  
COLLINS**

New York State  
Board of Regents



**HON. TIMOTHY  
KENNEDY**

New York State Senate



**BILL  
JOYCE**

Say Yes Buffalo Board  
of Directors



**HON. CRYSTAL  
PEOPLE-STOKES**

New York State  
Assembly



**HON. SHARON  
BELTON-COTTMAN**

Buffalo Board of  
Education



**MARIA  
WHYTE**

Erie County

The Say Yes Buffalo Partnership gets much of its strength from the collaborative governance bodies that govern and guide its work. At the top of the structure is the Say Yes Buffalo Community Leadership Council, which is chaired by the Mayor, Deputy Erie County Executive, President of the Board of Education, the New York State Department of Education Regent, New York State Senator and New York State Assemblyperson for our region and the Say Yes Buffalo Board of Directors Chair. This body meets three times per year to tackle barriers to the work of Say Yes Buffalo, share updates on the partnership's overall progress and provide opportunities for public input and dialogue.



# Say Yes Forever Scholarship ENDOWMENT CAMPAIGN COMMITTEE 2019-2020



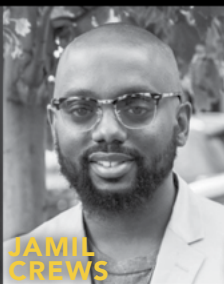
**LAUREN  
BAYNES**

43 North



**TRINA  
BURRUSS**

Northwest Bank



**JAMIL  
CREWS**

Say Yes Buffalo



**LEAH  
HALTON-POPE**

Office of Majority Leader  
Crystal Peoples-Stokes



**ALICE  
JACOBS**

Delaware North



**DR. JEANNETTE  
JURASEK**

Retired President,  
Medaille College



**DR. WENDY  
MISTRETTA**

Buffalo Public Schools  
District Parent Coordinating  
Council



**SHANNON  
PATCH**

Delaware North



**LINDA  
RAY**

LRay Consulting



**REV.  
RACHELLE  
ROBINSON**

Deep Wells Ministry



**NICK  
SINATRA**

Sinatra and Co.  
Real Estate



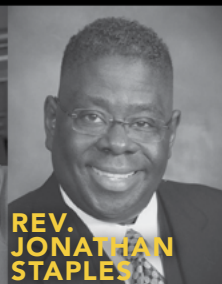
**COURTNEY  
SINATRA**

Key Bank



**TANYA  
STAPLES**

Say Yes Buffalo



**REV.  
JONATHAN  
STAPLES**

First Shiloh Baptist  
Church



**STEVE  
SWIFT**

BlueCross BlueShield of  
WNY



**NICOLE  
SWIFT**

Community Volunteer



**JERRY  
TURCOTTE**

Buffalo Parent-Teacher  
Organization



**TED  
WALSH**

Walsh Duffield Cos., Inc.



**MORGAN  
WILLIAMS-  
BRYANT**

Girl Scouts of WNY



**REV. VICKI  
ZUST**

St. Paul's Episcopal Church

The Say Yes Forever Scholarship Endowment Campaign Committee, chaired by Nick and Courtney Sinatra, focuses on fundraising for the Say Yes Buffalo Endowment Fund. The Say Yes Forever Campaign is a 5-year, \$100 million campaign that is seeded by a \$25 million anonymous challenge grant and will ensure the Say Yes Buffalo scholarship is funded in perpetuity. The committee is comprised of business, community, religious and parent leaders.

# DONOR SPOTLIGHT

## Pastor John Camardo

*The Chapel*



John Camardo is the executive pastor of The Chapel, a non-denominational congregation of churches located in Cheektowaga, Getzville, Lockport, and Niagara Falls. The Chapel's mission is to ensure every man, woman, and child has repeated opportunities to hear and experience the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Chapel accomplishes this mission through the mobilization of God's people and resources to meet the tangible needs of the community as an "extension of the love of Christ," explained Pastor Camardo.

He takes great pride in The Chapel's service to others and the many community partnerships it has established.

"Jesus taught us to love our neighbors, whoever they are," said Pastor Camardo.

"These relationships allow us to have meaningful conversations and better understand one another so that we might fulfill the calling to help our neighbors."

For years, The Chapel has partnered with many area churches and religious leaders like Pastor Jonathan Staples and First Lady Tanya Staples of First Shiloh Baptist Church. Pastor Camardo credits the Staples for helping to establish a partnership with Say Yes Buffalo and to opening his eyes to the growing needs of the community, especially from an educational standpoint. Through Tanya's work as the Senior Director of the Community Schools initiative, she has firsthand knowledge of the talent and opportunities available to assist Buffalo's scholars.

In late March, at the onset of the covid-19

pandemic, Pastor Camardo contacted the Staples and asked what The Chapel could do to help. "We recognized that we needed to act quickly and knew Say Yes was an organization that had preexisting relationships with the district, students and families and could point us in the right direction." The team at Say Yes shared the significant gap in technology, access to libraries, and other basic needs that were serving as a barrier to the continued education of hundreds of students.

Since churches were still deemed essential, The Chapel staff was still at work and able to put out a call to its congregation with the needs. The response was swift and resulted in a collaborative effort that included parishioners and church partners





*Above and below: The Chapel organizing its own response to the needs of its community and members.*

like First Shiloh Baptist Church, Watermark Wesleyan, 716 Ministries, Eight Days of Hope and others coming together to donate food and technology. Through The Chapel's "Kingdom Come" Foundation, it was also able to accept financial contributions that were added to its existing funds in order to make a significant gift to the Say Yes Buffalo Endowment Fund and the COVID-19 Technology campaign to fund the purchase of 200 laptops.

Pastor Camardo and his wife Donna are lifelong servants. They've lived in Western New York most of their lives with their four children. "Because of the way our community is divided geographically, it's difficult to get to know one another and our needs. My

own family and extended church family has learned firsthand that unless you have specific relationships, you are making assumptions. I encourage everyone to increase your network and make a conscious effort to build relationships that allow you to be a helper," said Pastor Camardo.

Pastor Camardo and The Chapel look forward to continued partnership with Say Yes Buffalo and the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo, among others, so that they can continue to serve their mission and in their words, "come alongside our neighbors to care for them."





# ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

## Sydney Favors

*SUNY Buffalo State*



Hutch-Tech graduate Sydney Favors has come full circle.

As an eighth-grader at North Park Academy, she remembers her curiosity in social studies being sparked by her teacher, Barbara Bogdan. “I always found that interesting to learn about what has happened and why things are the way they are now.” Today, Sydney is in her first year of teaching social studies to today’s eighth-graders in Buffalo Public Schools while trying to fill the large shoes of Ms. Bogdan in her memory.

Favors remembers hearing about the Say Yes Buffalo scholarship as a sophomore at Hutch Tech, but it really came home for her when she was applying for college and was weighing acceptances from Spelman College in Atlanta, and SUNY Buffalo State. In

the end, it came down to the tuition support provided by Say Yes and her mother’s advice to stay closer to home and attend Buff State. After kicking the tires on political science and a path towards law school, Favors settled in as a history major and path towards being someone else’s Ms. Bogdan.

After a month of teaching, Favors is trying to settle in and make connections with her students. “I’ve often thought it was easy to be a teacher, but there’s so much to it,” Favors said. “There’s data and how can I better support my students, I have to invest more time after school with my students. It’s multi-faceted.” And even more so challenging with classes being taught remotely.

“It’s very different,” Favors explained, “when I was a student teacher last year at

South Park, I liked doing interactive activities with kids for social studies, but with virtual learning, I haven’t been able to do, for example, the role-playing activities I would like to do. So now I’m trying to bring up that knowledge I got from college so I can foster different practices.”

Through the first month which Favors described as “stressful” and “draining,” she’s found support in her cohort of new teachers in the district who are going through the same experience and sharing in a group text and a strong family who “have been very instrumental and supportive. I have an anchor.”

And Favors will try to offer that anchor of support to her students and point them towards education and the Say Yes Buffalo

promise. "I just had a student tell me today she was going to drop out because Regents biology is hard. I know there is going to be points throughout the year where they want to quit, they want to give up and I know virtual learning isn't helping that, but if you want to reach that next level, you need to go to school, you need to elevate your life."

Sydney knows firsthand that Say Yes offers that upwards path. "Say Yes provided me with that platform to reach the next level in my life after college and thinking about what I wanted to do being involved with Say Yes, it made me want to be more deeply involved in education. I don't plan to be a teacher the rest of my life, maybe I could get involved in a program like Say Yes, or if Say Yes is still around five years from now, be associated with that. It's opened many doors and established connections for me, which I greatly appreciate.

"I think people need to recognize that Say Yes is doing a lot for the students that live here in Buffalo. It has improved the lives of so many of my classmates I went to high school with. Say Yes has helped create engineers, some of my classmates are doctors now, physician's assistants; students that wouldn't otherwise have had the opportunity to go to college without a program like this."

## #STAYTHECOURSE

.....

Our crew of around 40 school-based Family Support Specialists split across our preventive and Health Home found themselves in a brand new world in March 2020 as essential, frontline workers going into homes to bring at-risk families much needed support and assistance. Here, three team members share a day in the life of their in the early days of the pandemic.



*I spent the day doing welfare checks on my families, bringing essential supplies out, including water, paper towels, soap, toys, dish detergent, gloves, wipes, feminine products, and games for children.*

**Ta-Tanisha Palmer**



*I responded to an urgent need request from Buffalo Public Schools to deliver food to a family in need. I was in the field and more than willing to help! I was able to get to a school to get the food with only 20 minutes notice and met the family's need.*

**Abdi-Kani Aden**



*I spent the day making trips to students' homes to drop off school work. My school social worker and I then made a trip to Wegmans and picked up 500 donated paper bags so that staff could pack lunches and breakfast. I'll be checking in with families to make sure that have what they need.*

**Kissena Frazier**

# SCHOLAR SPOTLIGHT

## Muhsinah Howlader

*University at Buffalo*



Muhsinah Howlader knows where her strong work ethic comes from. Her parents immigrated to Queens, NY from Bangladesh in the 1990s. She lived there until 4th grade before arriving in Buffalo to attend the University School, a private, Islamic school on Genesee Street.

"I've always admired my parents. They're so disciplined, and I know I owe a lot of who I am, especially my perseverance, to them," said Howlader. Her dad is a businessman, and her mom works for the Census Bureau and as a driving instructor. "Immigrants often come to this country with credentials that don't always align with American systems, and they sacrifice everything to be here. It's a huge transition and requires determination. I'm proud of them," she added.

And Howlader is well on her way to realizing her goals. She graduated from City Honors School in 2019. She is currently studying at the University at Buffalo and plans to graduate in 2023 and stick around at UB to pursue a medical degree in her quest to become a neurosurgeon.

"During my freshman year of high school, I attended public school for the first time. I loved the experience and my time at City Honors because I had an opportunity to see so many diverse people. I was also able to explore different courses and jump start my studies at UB," said Howlader.

It was during high school that Howlader realized she wanted to pursue a career in surgery. During an internship at Roswell Park, she participated in a robotics surgery challenge. Through the program, she had an opportunity to work with a team of surgeons who allowed the interns to come into contact with the da Vinci Surgical System, an advanced robotic system that enables surgeons to provide minimally invasive procedures using the instruments as a guide.

"I absolutely loved this opportunity to witness the technology firsthand. A machine like this helps with healing time, the size of the surgical cuts and reduces the number of people involved in the surgery. The body is so cool and it even heals itself like a Band-Aid," laughed Howlader.



Later in her high school career, she started looking at colleges and hearing rumblings about Say Yes Buffalo. “I always knew about college but didn’t realize how big of an expense it was or how long you needed to be in school to complete a degree program,” Howlader shared. “I honestly didn’t know that people paid for other people to go to college. I thought it was very generous.”

Howlader is forever grateful to Say Yes for opening her eyes to the philanthropy that exists in Western New York, the tuition support, and the internship opportunities that she’s been provided.

Through the Say Yes Buffalo Internship and Career Pathways Program, Howlader was able to gain experience at Jericho Road Ministries, which provides healthcare services to underserved and marginalized communities in Buffalo and across the world. “Imagine my surprise when I learned that not only is Say Yes willing to help students with tuition, but also with opportunities like the work I was able to do at Jericho. Truly, the more I worked with [Internships and Career Pathways staff] Stephanie and Johanna, I was convinced that Say Yes is a valuable resource for disadvantaged kids. Everyone on the team and their many partner organizations work hard and genuinely want everyone to succeed. It’s a ‘lift as you climb’ kind of place,” added Howlader.

Howlader has been taking courses online during the covid-19 pandemic, and says that she’s learned self-discipline through the experience, but truly hopes everyone gets educated about this virus. She is looking forward to her own career in healthcare where she can be part of the team looking to provide the public with necessary information to live a healthy and prosperous life.

## #STAYTHECOURSE



Last summer, this mural was painted onto the north-facing facade of the current Say Yes Buffalo offices at 712 Main Street. In partnership with the building owners and the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, *Love Black* was designed and installed by former Say Yes Community Schools navigator and *Freedom Wall* artist Edreys Wajed and James “Yames” Moffitt. Say Yes Buffalo was proud to collaborate with the artists, the Albright-Knox, and Clover Management to deliver this simple yet powerful message to Buffalo youth at this time.

# DONOR SPOTLIGHT

## The John R. Oishei Foundation



*Blythe Merrill and Robert Gioia*

At Say Yes Buffalo, a collaborative approach is essential to ensure Buffalo's students have all the support, resources, and opportunities necessary to realize their proper place in Buffalo's future workforce. One key player in this shared approach is The John R. Oishei Foundation.

The Oishei Foundation boasts a long history of serving as a catalyst for change in the Buffalo community, starting with its namesake and founder, John R. Oishei. A highly respected businessman whose company changed the automotive industry, and whose vision and generosity continues to impact all eight counties of Western New York.

"Education is one of our foundation's largest investment areas," said John R. Oishei

Foundation President Robert Gioia. "But our efforts might fall short if it weren't for strong community partnerships with organizations like Say Yes Buffalo. We realized early on and continue to witness the creative ways their leadership team and support staff work collaboratively to support students and their families."

The Oishei Foundation's relationship with Say Yes began when the organization was a just a dream and a five-inch binder. In 2011, Oishei Foundation Senior Vice President of Programs Blythe Merrill joined Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo President and CEO Clotilde Perez-Bode Dedecker for a presentation in Indianapolis with the Lumina Foundation about The Kalamazoo Promise and other Promise programs throughout

the country. It was there that Merrill first met Mary Anne Schmitt-Carey, who was the President of Say Yes to Education. Merrill vividly recalls the binder that Schmitt-Carey brought to the breakfast meeting and the way she carefully walked them through the Say Yes model and turnaround approach. "For years, the Buffalo Public Schools received negative press for its outcomes and low graduation rates. In that moment, Clotilde and I knew that this was the transformative approach that our community needed to have a real impact," Merrill recalls.

Months later, an RFP was issued from Say Yes to Education for a new city-wide site. The response was collective and resulted in a competitive application that included \$14 million to cover initial costs and strong

community support from the Oishei Foundation, Community Foundation, higher education partners, political leaders, Buffalo Public School officials, religious, union, and business leaders. The effort was successful, and Buffalo became the newest Say Yes to Education site.

“What so many of us admired about the Say Yes concept was that it was more than just a scholarship. The program was comprehensive and recognized that education is important, but there are other matters that are just so complicated and impede a student’s ability to get through the rigors of a school day. The wraparound supports Say Yes provides help students to focus on their learning,” added Gioia.

One example of the critical wraparound services that the Foundation admires in the Say Yes approach is the role of the Say Yes Family Support Specialists (FSS). Merrill recalled an occasion when she was told about a student who one of the FSS team members was working with who had been absent from school. When asked about it, the student explained that she didn’t have a coat. “Without hesitation, the Family Support Specialist bought the young lady a coat. That seems so simple but it’s a perfect example of how the staff at Say Yes operates and how much they care. That’s why we have and will continue to be involved in ensuring Say Yes is here in perpetuity.”

Merrill is also a founding member of the Say Yes Buffalo Operating Committee, which

meets every three weeks to review progress, challenges, and opportunities related to Say Yes Buffalo and its work. “Say Yes operates with a great deal of transparency,” said Merrill. Even during this global pandemic, Say Yes regularly hosts community meetings to update the public on its programs and highlight students and their families. Prior to the shutdowns and need for social distancing, Say Yes held Community Meetings in various locations throughout the city so that everyone had access to the information and shared in the success.

During the initial planning stages, the Oishei Foundation made a \$1 million commitment over five years to the Say Yes Tuition Scholarship, but recently shifted its investment to Breaking Barriers. A partnership with the Greater Buffalo Racial Equity Roundtable, the City of Buffalo, Buffalo Public Schools, and Say Yes Buffalo, Breaking Barriers will expand the capacity of boys and young men of color to improve life outcomes and empower them to become agents of change in our community. “This was a natural fit for Oishei and our ongoing commitment to racial equity,” said Merrill. “We are also huge supporters of the program directors and Say Yes staff Tommy McClam and Daniel Robertson. They are exceptional leaders and have introduced us to so many amazing young men. It’s been a true honor to witness their graduations and other memorable moments.” Daniel is no stranger to the Oishei Foundation. He is a

proud “Oishei High School Scholar” and was part of the inaugural class in 1998.

The Oishei Foundation has always looked for opportunities to support and sit face-to-face with Buffalo students to hear their stories and aspirations. Through these interactions, the team has witnessed the growing confidence in Buffalo’s students and the positive outlook that has been realized from the work that was done and continues to be done because of the Say Yes Partnership.

“This was not easy. Local partners, state education, public, private, higher education, city, county, local law enforcement, and so many others had to agree that Say Yes was the right initiative to be the gamechanger we needed. “ I think our students and families and larger community are winning and that’s a great feeling that we will realize for generations to come,” said Merrill.

The Foundation also gives Say Yes Buffalo Executive Director David Rust high praise for his leadership, constructing a culture of doing more, and building an award-winning team they believe serves as a “best-in-class” model for other local nonprofits. “I just can’t lift Say Yes up enough. Each person on that team is willing to do whatever is necessary to help students and their families thrive. That benefits EVERYONE,” exclaimed Gioia.



# DONOR SPOTLIGHT

## Morgan Williams-Bryant

For Morgan Williams-Bryant, relationships, community support, and education have been the sun, water, and oxygen for her growth into a tall tree. Between her family, friends, and the amazing educators who have made up her “village,” she was never allowed to question whether she could do whatever she pursued. “My family is my heartbeat, and my village is strong. At every point in my life I’ve been surrounded by love and encouraged to lead with kindness,” said Williams-Bryant.

And it’s this background, steeped in family and community, that informs her participation in the mission of Say Yes Buffalo and so many other worthy community organizations and efforts.

A product of the Buffalo Public School system, Williams-Bryant made an important connection with her seventh grade English teacher, Ms. Reynolds. “I was immediately drawn to her because I could see myself,” she said. “She was dark-skinned, cool, young, and smart. It was important for me to see her at that moment because I was feeling awkward and unsure of my place in the world.” She

credits this relationship for opening her eyes to the world, and the catalyst for her application to the Buffalo Academy of Visual and Performing Arts for high school, which put her on track to attend Buffalo State College. “I could really tell she cared about my growth and success,” Williams-Bryant said.

Today, Ms. Reynolds is Dr. Ramona Reynolds, the director of the Office of Parent and Family Engagement for Buffalo Public Schools and is Williams-Bryant’s dear friend and fellow “soror” in Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.

As a student at Buffalo State College, Morgan could feel herself blossoming. She was actively involved in a number of on campus clubs and activities. It’s a part of her life that has motivated her career and deep involvement with Say Yes Buffalo. “My college years were seriously some of the best in my life. I made so many friends and developed necessary leadership skills. It’s an experience that I hope every student gets to realize,” added Williams-Bryant.

When she heard about Say Yes Buffalo, it all came home for her. “I was immediately



*Morgan Williams-Bryant*

drawn to the mission, the resources, and the way their incredible team sought to empower students," said Williams-Bryant. She could easily see how the Say Yes approach and programming aligned with the village that had been instrumental to her own upbringing. She immediately reached out to Executive Director Dave Rust to find out how she could get involved. He expanded her plans and recommended her to his former position as the Deputy Commissioner of Youth Services for Erie County, and tapped her for the Say Yes Operating Committee, which meets regularly to review challenges and opportunities related to the organization. She now serves on the Say Yes Endowment Committee, where she's charged with assisting the organization to raise critical funds that will allow future Buffalo Public School students to go to college and expand their reach.

And Williams-Bryant's reach is wide as she looks to "fulfill God's plan" to elevate her so that she might serve others. "I've always loved the mantra, 'lift as you climb,'" she added. In her work as the Chief Impact Officer at Girl Scouts of Western New York, she manages all aspects of membership, volunteer training and the development to girls' programming across nine counties. Williams-Bryant is also an active member of Elim Christian Fellowship, a member of the board of trustees for Medaille College, Leadership Buffalo, and Sadie Strong, a breast cancer awareness and support nonprofit.

She also serves as a board member and mentor for Women Who Lead, a volunteer for the Make-A-Wish Foundation, a member of the Buffalo Business First 40 Under 40 award selection committee, and a proud member of the Buffalo Chapter of The Links, Inc, a women's group that provides programming and scholarships to youth.

When she's not serving the community, Williams-Bryant is uplifting others and helping them to become Champion Made™ through her consulting business, MWB Ignites. "You only get one life, this one is not a dress rehearsal so it is important to maximize your potential now so that you can live out your dreams," she laughed. Most recently, she took her message of empowerment for others to a national scale with the launch of her first book *A Champion's Prayer Journey*. It's available now for purchase on Amazon.

"My mom was always open to other people pouring into me. She didn't know all the answers but encouraged me to surround myself with good people who would support my vision," shared Williams-Bryant. "People don't always know how to navigate the world, or how to react to the children of those who are just trying to figure things out. I'm one of those Buffalo kids who wanted and needed groups like Say Yes and the passionate people who support them to wrap their arms around me and help me win so that I can support others."

## #STAYTHECOURSE



Because of the pandemic, there were fewer opportunities for our scholars to take advantage of paid internships over the summer. But that didn't stop Tierra Purdue from working with Jericho Road Community Health Center.

"Learning about yourself at a young age and figuring out your likes and dislikes before you graduate college is a great advantage to have," she said. Say Yes gives their students that."

Heidi Romer, the Director of Community Advancement at Jericho Road, challenges other organizations to participate in the program. "If you have money, time and capacity you should feel obligated to do so," she says. "We have to be able to give back to our youth; they are our future leaders."

# DONOR SPOTLIGHT

## Samantha Nephew

As early as she can remember, Samantha Nephew was involved in community building beyond her family structure. From as early as 7 years old, her parents would take her and her sisters, Cassandra and Shelby, to community events to hand out flyers and other literature. At the time, her mother, Zenna Nephew, was the program manager at Good Schools for All. Her father, Art Nephew, worked for Men of Color Health Awareness. Thanks to their mother's influence, Samantha and Shelby are also founding members of the Community Foundation's 21st Century Fund, a giving circle that is open to anyone who wants to give back to Western New York.

Her parents are two big reasons she values the work of Say Yes Buffalo.

These days, Nephew is having a full circle moment and fulfilling her late mother's desire for her daughters to have a sense of ownership for the community. "It's so rewarding to run into my parent's old col-

leagues and have them reference her work in relation to my own path," said Nephew.

Born and raised in Buffalo, Nephew is a product of the Buffalo Public Schools system. She attended the Native American Magnet School where she was entrenched in her culture. "At the school, being Native American was normal and I wasn't mocked for being a minority. Differences were celebrated and it was an overall positive environment," she added.

Upon graduating in 2003, Samantha went to Lafayette High School (class of 2007). While at Lafayette, she was involved in the school newspaper, Model UN, the swim program, and not surprisingly she was voted "Most Likely to Become President." Her mother also advocated for her to enroll in courses at Cornell University during the summers of her sophomore and junior years of high school. "It was an insightful experience. I recall a moment when one of the teaching assistants asked us to write



*Samantha Nephew, holding a photograph of her parents, Zenna and Art.*

a thesis. Everyone in the course seemed to know what they were doing. I went to my room and cried because I was lost. At that moment I realized there was a lot that I didn't know and immediately started to take my studies seriously," said Nephew.



Since then, she's earned a bachelor's degree from Buffalo State College, a master's degree from St. Bonaventure University, and is currently completing her second master's degree in Public Administration from Buffalo State College.

Like many young people, Nephew's career has taken many forms, but education, climate change, and policy work have been a constant and will hopefully continue to shape her career. From joining the Buffalo Parent Teacher Organization (BPTO) to serving as a substitute, she sees herself in today's students and wishes Say Yes Buffalo were around during her academic career. "So many of my friends would've loved the connections, wraparound services, and the added tuition support," said Nephew. Through her involvement with the BPTO and Citizen Action of New York she was able to learn more about Say Yes and the policy side of education. Her passion for the organization might even be related to her connection to the physical office space. "So many formative moments in my life happened at 712 Main Street. I would sit in what is now the Say Yes Founders Room and work on volunteer work that my mom gave me," laughed Nephew. Between her unique connection to the office and her own connection to the current Say Yes scholars who like her had trials to overcome, donating and advocating for the organization is an easy decision.

When Nephew wasn't working on behalf

of Buffalo's students, she could be found working on the political campaigns of April Baskin, Nate McMurray, and various Common Council races. The connection to her childhood is just too obvious to ignore, as many of her middle school years were spent with her parents and sister working on Jeremy Toth and Sam Hoyt's Assembly races in the late 90s.

Her career has also included working on racial justice issues for organizations like PUSH Buffalo. There, she worked in marketing and learned how race impacts environmental, housing, transportation, and other basic human needs. "Who I have become as a manager, volunteer, and a person was shaped by this experience and all the knowledge I gained. There are so many systemic issues that people experience, and I feel obliged to provide a better quality of life for all people," said Nephew.

In 2015, she joined the inaugural Open Buffalo Emerging Leaders program. The experience taught her how organizations like Open Buffalo and Say Yes help people to identify the power of their own stories.

Looking ahead, Nephew hopes to use her wide range of experience in community organizing, politics, event planning and communications to help her community, create policies that uplift people, and continue the long legacy of community work that is in her blood.



*As a graduate of Buffalo Public Schools, Samantha Nephew gives to Say Yes because she knows how impactful this program would have been to her. Above, leaving home for Native American Magnet #19 with her sister, and below with her mother, graduating from Lafayette High School.*



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Elizabeth Danahy in honor of Emily Wyckoff  
 Julie & Cutler Greene in honor of Emily Wyckoff  
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 Jerilyn J. Hickey & Eric R. Frasch in honor of Morgan Williams-Bryant  
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 Anthony Pendergrass in honor of Tanice R. Pendergrass  
 Susan & David Schubbe, in honor of Vincent & Mary Walsh  
 Sinatra & Company Real Estate in honor of Chip Berry  
 Sinatra & Company Real Estate in honor of Kevin Brinkworth  
 Sinatra & Company Real Estate in honor of Gary Burns  
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 Sinatra & Company Real Estate in honor of John Militello & Duane Cady  
 Sinatra & Company Real Estate in honor of Walid Daham  
 Sinatra & Company Real Estate in honor of Edmund Eaves  
 Sinatra & Company Real Estate in honor of Tom Fahland  
 Sinatra & Company Real Estate in honor of Richard Ferranti  
 Sinatra & Company Real Estate in honor of Todd & Cindy Goldstein  
 Sinatra & Company Real Estate in honor of Gordon Gross  
 Sinatra & Company Real Estate in honor of John Grabski  
 Sinatra & Company Real Estate in honor of Mark Jauquet  
 Sinatra & Company Real Estate in honor of Kenneth Edward Barrett  
 Sinatra & Company Real Estate in honor of Kert King  
 Sinatra & Company Real Estate in honor of Lee Marc  
 Sinatra & Company Real Estate in honor of Larry Mattar  
 Sinatra & Company Real Estate in honor of Luis & Natalie Mendez  
 Sinatra & Company Real Estate in honor of Michael Militello  
 Sinatra & Company Real Estate in honor of Anthony Nanula  
 Sinatra & Company Real Estate in honor of Philip Nanula  
 Sinatra & Company Real Estate in honor of Steven Nanula  
 Sinatra & Company Real Estate in honor of Christopher O'Donnell  
 Sinatra & Company Real Estate in honor of Mark Ogiony  
 Sinatra & Company Real Estate in honor of Paul Nanula  
 Sinatra & Company Real Estate in honor of Eric Reich  
 Sinatra & Company Real Estate in honor of William & Carol Lorenz

Sinatra & Company Real Estate in honor of Lisa Williams  
 Sinatra & Company Real Estate in honor of Tony Zinaty  
 Sinatra & Company Real Estate in honor of Marian McCarthy  
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 Sinatra & Company Real Estate in honor of George Churakod  
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 Sinatra & Company Real Estate in honor of Michael Glick  
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Corrine Barr, in memory of Dr. James "Moose" Dempsey  
 Mrs. Beverly Blue in memory of Mrs. Sandree Blue  
 Marilyn G. Carmichael, in memory of James "Moose" Dempsey  
 Katrina Butzer, in memory of Mary Anne Ditsious  
 Bob & Kathy Chyka in memory of Mary Anne Ditsious  
 Mr. & Mrs. Timothy & Eileen Conboy, in memory of James "Moose" Dempsey  
 Lisa Conn, in memory of Joseph T. Murray  
 Argery Cooke in memory of Mary Anne Ditsious  
 Gail Cronin in memory of Mary Anne

Ditsious  
 Eileen Crotty in memory of Mary Ellen Crotty  
 Kevin D. & Mary Dobson McDonald, in memory of Susan R. Bean  
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 Julie & Cutler Greene in memory of Finley R. Greene, Jr.  
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 Joseph M. and Martha R. Jennings Trust, in memory of Dr. James "Moose" Dempsey  
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 Florine Luhr in memory of Patricia Sheehan Evans  
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 Robert Myers, in memory of Mary Ann Ditsious  
 Dr. Barbara Nevergold in memory of Dr. Kenneth Seals, MD  
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 Kerri Page-Lehmbeck in memory of James "Moose" Dempsey  
 Norvella Pendergrass in memory of Crystal Austin-Seymore "Mama Crystal"  
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Patricia Reeder, in memory of Joseph T. Murray  
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 Marci Wiseman in memory of Naomi Rosenhoch

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 Sharon Lomison in memory of Mary Ann Ditsious  
 Aaron Lowinger



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 Margaret Murray, in memory of Joseph T. Murray  
 Michael Nanfara  
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 Norvella Pendergrass  
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 Colden Ray  
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 Patricia Reeder, in memory of Joseph T. Murray  
 Analiese Reigstad, in memory of Joseph T. Murray  
 Peter Rindfuss  
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 Anne Schaefer, in memory of Joseph T. Murray  
 Donna Sholk  
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 BUY BOOKS AT TALKING  
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# Our Team

**Abdi-Kani Aden**  
Family Support Specialist

**Ahlam Ahmed**  
Community School Navigator

**Durgham Alyasiri**  
School Zone Leader

**Osa Amadasu**  
Family Support Specialist

**Daytuan Antonetti\***  
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VLSC Program Coordinator

**Sarah Blish**  
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**Alex Brady**  
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**Deborah Brannon**  
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Community School Navigator

**Amedria Byrd**  
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**LeRondra "Lee" Byrd**  
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**Cynthia Collins**  
Parent Center Liaison

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**Yolanda Gatewood\***  
Scholarship Coordinator for College Outreach

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Talent Acquisition and Development Manager

**Marisol Gomez**  
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Say Yes Intern

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**Ericka Heary**  
Summer Camp Specialist

**Aaron Jackson**  
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**Nikia Jackson**  
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Community Schools Navigator & Executive Administrative Assistant

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Administrative Assistant

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**Jon Krol**  
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**Eric Maldonado**  
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Boys and Men of Color Senior Director

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Family Support Specialist

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**Ta-Tanisha Palmer**  
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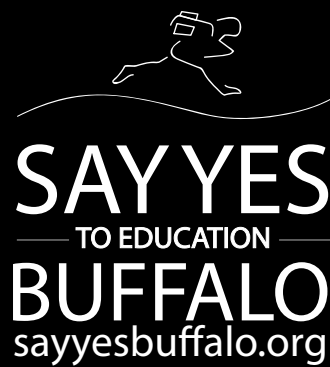
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Community School Navigator

**John Weeks**  
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**Emily Wyckoff\***  
Senior Director Development & Strategic Partnerships

**Lieza Zions**  
Parent Center Liaison

\* Denotes staff who are also an active donor to the scholarship fund.



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