

Academy provides support to assistant principals



***Middletown High's** new assistant principal, Dominic Banks, offers encouragement to students Christian Britton, Jordan Vaughan, Dianna Sartin and Spencer Scott on exam day.*

Dominic Banks joined **Appoquinimink School District's Middletown High School** as assistant principal this school year, his sixth as an administrator but his first in Delaware. He knew the Delaware Department of Education's new Assistant Principal Academy would help his transition.

"This was an opportunity to learn what happens around the state and collaborate with other administrators," Banks said, adding often the only other assistant principals one has a chance to interact with are from one's own building or district. "I'm interested in seeing what others are doing from district to district."

Creating a professional learning community for assistant principals and providing stronger induction supports is exactly what state leaders had in mind when they launched the program this fall. Inspired by the Maryland Department of Education's AP Academy, the program fills a void in professional learning in the state, said Kelley Brake, the DDOE education associate who leads the program.

"Best practice research reveals that the second most influential factor (after teacher effectiveness) on student academic, social and emotional success is the principal of a school," Brake said. "This year's AP Academy is targeted to provide the kind of supports needed by new and novice assistant principals, new principals to the state, and any new principal who may have been a teacher or teacher-leader and may have jumped into the role of a first-year administrator without the benefit of an assistant principal experience."

Participants benefit from national and state expertise. The first session was led by the Delaware Academy of School Leadership (DASL) with the second and final sessions led by the National Association of Secondary School Principals with DASL supporting participants in the field between sessions. The Delaware Association of School Administrators (DASA) also partnered with the department to support communications of these sessions.

The academy launched with a small group in the fall, and about 45 leaders representing all three counties joined the second session this month and will attend the concluding in-person session this spring. Cohort members are invited to continue in the program next year.

Learning from their peers and building networks of support across the state will help them succeed, participants said.

“Sometimes you have to get out of your own building and district to get a different perspective,” said Paul Iaboni, who is in his first year as assistant principal at **Brandywine School District’s Lancashire Elementary** after 20 years working as a counselor and administrator in secondary schools.

Amanda Archambault, serving in her first year as assistant principal at **Cape Henlopen School District’s Sussex Consortium**, said she appreciates having a safe environment where she can bounce ideas around and share experiences. So much of your first year is “not knowing what you don’t know” so meeting others in the same position is helpful because they can share resources, ideas and supports, she said.

The department will continue to create such networks while providing meaningful induction experiences to new leaders across the state. That is good news for participants such as Banks.

“I am always looking to learn and find ways to improve my craft. The AP Academy provides an awesome opportunity for me to exchange ideas and best practices with other administrators across the state of Delaware,” he said.