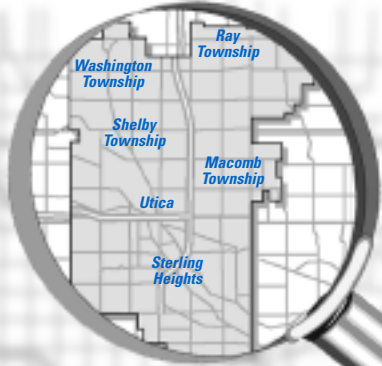


FOCUS for the community



A Publication for the Residents of Utica Community Schools

From the Superintendent...



by Christine M. Johns, Ed.D.

Beyond the Basics – Providing Stability in a Changing World

The first month of the new school year indicates we are off to a great academic start. This year also promises to be one of challenges and change. As a school district, I believe we are ready to continue giving our students the opportunity to soar to even greater academic achievement.

That is because Utica Community Schools has a long history of providing its students, parents and community members with both a high-quality educational product and a sense of stability in this changing world.

During the 2008-2009 academic year, our students' achievement in standardized testing, such as the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) taken by elementary and junior high students, and the Michigan Merit Exam (MME) taken by high school juniors, outpaced school districts in both Macomb County and the State of Michigan.

This achievement, of course, is the direct result of our teaching staff, building administrators and parents who support our students and their success. However, more work needs to be done. As adults concerned about the success of the community's most valuable commodity – our children – we will continue to support them with the best academic programs possible as we strive to reach the 100 percent proficiency mark on the state tests, the goal set by the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) as part of the federal No Child Left Behind legislation in all core subject areas.

continued on page 3

West meets East at Oakbrook Elementary

Partial immersion Mandarin language study, developed with assistance from the Confucius Institute at Michigan State University, was successfully introduced this fall to 44 full-day kindergarten students at Oakbrook Elementary School.

The program is funded by a U.S. Department of Education grant to implement the study of strategic global languages with the intent of having students progress from kindergarten through high school, eventually pursuing mastery of the language in college. The grant also funds Mandarin study for secondary students at the Utica Academy for International Studies (International Baccalaureate), the Utica Center for Science and Industry and the Utica Center for Mathematics, Science and Technology.

The Oakbrook kindergartners are grouped between two classrooms, spending mornings in one, afternoons in the other. In the "Western" classroom, teacher Beth Herppich conducts lessons in English. In the



Oakbrook teacher **Ruoying Chen** leads kindergartners (clockwise) **Paul Hang, Avery Shroat, Colin Gulli, Miranda Smith** and **Abigail Zauner** and their classmates in a mathematics lesson conducted almost entirely in Mandarin. Research indicates that very young minds can more efficiently acquire language skills.

"Eastern" classroom, lessons are taught in Mandarin by Ruoying Chen, a native of China's Sichuan Province. Partial immersion means that nearly everything on the "Eastern" side, including directions and classroom management, is conveyed in Mandarin.

Chen, who began studying English in middle school and has taught Mandarin at the college level, said that giving children an early start in another language makes fluency much easier later on.

Already, both she and Herppich note that the children

understand much more than they are able to articulate. They expect many will be speaking sentences in Mandarin by year's end. Student Toby Layson practices at home by counting his toys and teaching his older brother the names for things in Mandarin, said his father, Chris Layson.

Utica Community Schools leads county and state MEAP and MME/ACT scores

Each year, all students statewide in grades three through nine take the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) tests. All eleventh graders take the Michigan Merit Exam/American College Test (MME/ACT).

MEAP and MME/ACT scores help determine how well students are learning the state-prescribed curriculum. The test data reveals academic strengths and weaknesses, whether classroom instruction is meeting every child's needs and serves to guide the planning and implementation of programming intended to improve student achievement.

In the coming school year, UCS will continue its focus

See page 4 for complete MEAP and MME/ACT scores

on effective teaching, not just to prepare students for the state assessments, but to assure their success at the next grade level and toward ultimate successful completion of state high school graduation requirements that include geometry, algebra I and II, biology and chemistry or physics.

While there is still work to do, the district's MEAP and MME/ACT scores from the latest testing year, 2008-2009, show continued progress toward

the No Child Left Behind requirement that 100 percent of students meet state proficiency targets in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics by 2014.

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Utica Community Schools

Points of pride

Costco donated backpacks to some 600 students in need this fall in Utica Community Schools. The backpacks were filled with school supplies purchased by four local Kiwanis clubs: Kiwanis Club of Sterling Heights, Sterling Heights High Noon, Utica-Shelby Township and Shelby-Macomb Daybreakers. The Kiwanis also provided dictionaries to all UCS third graders – more than 2,100 students. The books are theirs to keep.



The Utica Community Schools Foundation for Educational Excellence recently donated \$12,000 to the district's student scholarship fund. The money was raised at the Foundation's first Annual Arts & Idols Gala fundraiser held last May. The Foundation is a volunteer organization whose mission is to raise funds to provide educational opportunities for UCS students beyond what the district's budget can allow.



School year 2008-09 marked the first time UCS ninth graders at three of our schools – Davis and Eppler Junior High and Ford II High schools – were given the opportunity to take an Advanced Placement (AP) course, in this case, AP World History, an advantage previously limited to upperclassmen.

Applause is due all students who challenge themselves with AP coursework, but especially the following ninth graders who earned a score of 3, 4 or 5 on the AP World History final exam, thus qualifying them for college credit at many colleges and universities:

Davis JHS – **Alison Brousseau, Andrew El-Alam, Alex Garland and Brittany Shirk** (scores of 3); **Salvatore Leone, Lillia Rheinlander and Amit Shah** (4); **Curtis Hill** (5)

Eppler JHS – **Xavier Dries, Antonino Matina and Anthony Russo** (3); **Brandon Van Sickle** (4); **Pedro Espinosa and Nicholas Simopoulos** (5)

Ford II HS – **Nathan Baxter, Jonathan Coldicott, Caitlin Duffy, Sydney Glide, Michael Langlands, Afifah Latif, Alexander Luksch, Ariana Mirian and Ajna Uzuni** (3); **Akshdeep Dhaliwal, Justin Harris** (5).

As funding challenges continue, UCS continues to do more with less

Student programming in place for 2009-2010, despite bleak state funding forecast

All Michigan public schools, including Utica Community Schools, receive the majority of their funding for daily operations from the state school aid fund, which is controlled by the Michigan legislature.

Revenue from the six-mill state education tax assessed on local property does not go directly to UCS. Instead, property tax and a portion of the state income tax and sales tax are paid into the school aid fund, along with revenue from other sources.

The legislators then decide how many of those pooled dollars will be returned to local schools in a per-pupil allocation called the Foundation Allowance or Foundation Grant.

Under this system, which began in 1994 with Proposal A, sufficient revenue to adequately fund schools depends primarily on economic factors. During the past eight years, Michigan's shrinking tax revenue, fueled by job losses, lowered property values and tightened consumer spending, has steadily eroded the school aid fund. As a result, districts received less than full funding during these years and twice had funding reduced mid-year.

The Foundation Allowance remains in flux for 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 school years. It is apparent that UCS will see no increase in student funding for the current year, 2009-2010. Moreover, the district may experience another reduction that could reduce funding by as much as \$218 per student, a loss of more than \$6.3 million. The funding picture worsens in 2010-2011, when reductions as high as \$500 to \$800 per-pupil are being predicted. If this happens, UCS could lose as much as \$23 million. There is little reason to think the trend will reverse unless the Michigan legislature develops a new source of revenue to fund public schools.

A very real crisis was temporarily averted last spring when the state needed to cut \$370 per-pupil from the 2008-2009 school operating budget. UCS was spared this loss of \$10.9 million when emergency federal stimulus funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act filled the state's budget gap. That was a one-time fix. Not enough

stimulus money remains to cover this year's predicted loss, let alone the huge losses that could come in 2010-2011.

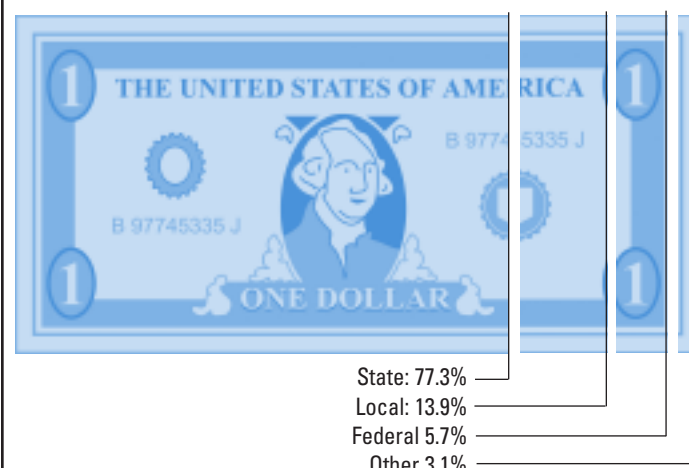
The recession is impacting everyone. But, unlike businesses, which can downsize until the economy rebounds, schools must continue to offer the best possible education – well beyond the basics – to all the students who come through their doors. The district can't afford not to. For students in classrooms today, this is their one time to prepare for the future. They can't wait for the economy to recover. All of Michigan is counting on today's students to become a well-educated workforce that will build the state's return to financial stability. While state legislators have for years talked about how to fix school funding, Utica Community Schools has done something about it, continuing year after year to do more with less.

In the past six years, UCS has eliminated 360 employee positions – 84 this year – and reduced spending by more \$42.3 million. UCS closed a school, sold unused property and instituted an energy management system that so far has netted more than \$6.5 million in cost avoidance. Cost avoidance is the money not spent due to energy conservation. This amount is already built into the district's budget, so it is not available for other use. In addition, UCS has worked to secure federal grants for new learning opportunities such as Mandarin Chinese and International Baccalaureate and in career and technical education.

Despite the uncertain economy, UCS will continue providing every child what it always has – stability in a changing world and world-class learning opportunities with the dollars available.

Note: At press time, Michigan again faced a huge budget deficit for its upcoming fiscal year, as the state legislature continued to seek budget consensus among its members. Because the law requires school districts to submit their budgets by July 1, UCS must operate the first three months of its fiscal year on a "best guess" of what its funding might be.

UCS Operating Budget – Funding Sources



Did you know?

- The district's operating budget pays the day-to-day costs of running the schools. As indicated above, state funding, including the per-pupil Foundation Allowance, makes up 77.3% of the UCS operating budget. Local revenue comes primarily from the non-homestead millage on commercial and second home properties in the district. Federal dollars are paid to UCS for mandated programs such as Title I (for at-risk students) or in the form of federal grants. Other sources include special education funding from the Macomb Intermediate School District.
- The Foundation Allowance UCS expects to receive from the State of Michigan for the 2009-2010 school year ranks in the lower one-third of Macomb County's 21 school districts.
- Federal stimulus money enabled Michigan to meet its school funding obligation in 2008-2009, saving student programs and teaching positions. However, the stimulus funds will not be sufficient to offset anticipated state revenue shortfalls in 2009-2010 and 2010-2011.
- Over years of state funding deficits, UCS has had to draw on its fund equity, or reserve budget, in order to make up the losses. If UCS is forced to spend its remaining fund equity to make up for continued losses, the negative implications will be far-reaching. First, because the fund equity is a one-time source that cannot be replaced under the rules of Proposal A, once it's gone, it's gone. With no fund equity, the district would have to borrow and repay with interest enough money to cover its operating costs from July through October each year until the first state funding installment is received. In addition, the district's bond rating could become less favorable, costing taxpayers more interest to repay the bonds, leaving fewer dollars for intended projects.

Updates on state funding, as well as the district's 2009-2010 budget, are posted on the district website: www.uticak12.org.

What about the lottery money?

People often ask what happens to the state lottery money and why can't it fix the school funding problem. These are the facts: Lottery money is earmarked for education – however, it accounts for only 6 percent of the state's total school aid fund. Even at that, the lottery only replaces the state's contribution, because for every lottery dollar that goes into the school aid fund, the state gives a dollar less. In reality, the state's general fund may be a little further ahead, but the schools are not.

Why can't the district spend bond issue money for general operating costs?

By law, a bond issue can only be used for the state-approved projects listed in the ballot proposal. Bond dollars cannot be spent on operating costs, such as payroll or utilities. The \$112.5 million bond issue approved in 2009 will fund necessary district improvements in the areas of technology, educational parity and facilities, including energy-saving items such as classroom lighting and restroom fixtures at some schools. The 2009 bond issue did not increase the district's existing 3.5 mill debt levy – the fourth lowest in Macomb County.

All UCS schools on Michigan's honor roll; all achieve AYP

The federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law requires all public schools and school districts in the nation to annually demonstrate Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in student academic achievement.

In the latest reporting year, 2008-2009, all 40 schools in the Utica Community Schools district achieved AYP. In addition, the school district as a whole met the AYP mark, something it has done annually since 2002 when the law took effect.

The standard for attaining AYP varies among the 50 states, depending on the assessment used to determine achievement progress. In Michigan, AYP is largely based on student performance in English language arts and mathematics on the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) in elementary and junior high school or the Michigan Merit Exam/American College Test (MME/ACT) in eleventh grade.

The MEAP or MME/ACT scores, both in total and within student subgroups, such as special education; race or ethnicity; economically disadvantaged or English language learners, are factored into determining whether a school meets Michigan's AYP mark. In addition, NCLB requires that at least 95 percent of students enrolled take the test. Schools must also meet qualifying attendance or graduation rates.

UCS earns high marks

Education YES! is Michigan's letter-grade system of public school accreditation.

Two-thirds of the grade is based on a school's MEAP or MME/ACT scores and whether overall student achievement on the tests is increasing at a rate fast enough to attain 100 percent proficiency by 2014, as NCLB requires. School-reported performance on 40 other student achievement indicators counts for the remaining one-third of the grade.

This compiled data is calculated on a 100-point scale where 90-100=A, 80-89=B, 70-79=C, 60-69=D and 50-59=F.

This year, all schools in the UCS district again made the state honor roll, earning either an A or B. As you can see by the chart at right, 31 schools maintained their A grades from the year before, while three more improved to an A.

Michigan's School Report Card for UCS

Adequate Yearly Progress Status (Yes/No) and Education YES! Grades

Elementary Schools	2007-08	2008-09
	AYP/Grade	AYP/Grade
Beacon Tree	Yes/A	Yes/A
Beck Centennial	Yes/A	Yes/A
Browning	Yes/A	Yes/A
Burr	Yes/B	Yes/B
Collins	Yes/A	Yes/A
Crissman	Yes/A	Yes/A
DeKeyser	Yes/A	Yes/A
Dresden	Yes/B	Yes/A
Duncan	Yes/A	Yes/A
Ebeling	Yes/A	Yes/A
Ewell	Yes/A	Yes/A
Flickinger	Yes/A	Yes/A
Graebner	Yes/A	Yes/A
Harvey	Yes/A	Yes/A
Havel	Yes/A	Yes/A
Magahay	Yes/B	Yes/A
Messmore	Yes/A	Yes/A
Monfort	Yes/A	Yes/A
Morgan	Yes/A	Yes/A
Oakbrook	Yes/A	Yes/A
Plumbrook	Yes/A	Yes/A
Roberts	Yes/A	Yes/A
Rose Kidd	Yes/A	Yes/A
Schuchard	Yes/A	Yes/A
Schwarzhoff	Yes/A	Yes/A
Switzer	Yes/A	Yes/A
Walsh	Yes/A	Yes/A
West Utica	Yes/B	Yes/A
Wiley	Yes/A	Yes/A
Junior High Schools	AYP/Grade	AYP/Grade
Bemis	Yes/A	Yes/A
Davis	Yes/A	Yes/A
Eppler	Yes/A	Yes/B
Heritage	Yes/A	Yes/A
Jeannette	Yes/B	Yes/B
Malow	Yes/A	Yes/A
Shelby	Yes/A	Yes/A
Senior High Schools	AYP/Grade	AYP/Grade
Eisenhower	Yes/A	Yes/A
Henry Ford II	Yes/B	Yes/B
Stevenson	No/B	Yes/B
Utica HS	Yes/B	Yes/B
District AYP	Yes	Yes

Districts are not given Education YES! grades.

From the Superintendent...

continued from page 1

I am particularly pleased to report to you that more than 90 percent of the students taking the MME were issued National Readiness to Work certificates, confirming that they have achieved proficiency in a series of work-based skills; such as being able to effectively apply their reading and writing ability in a business setting. These skills are even more important as we look to this generation to remain in Michigan as adults and help revitalize our economy.

We will further utilize our district's firmly-established College Culture. We expect that all students will consider post-secondary academic or training pursuits not as a "want" but as a "need" to succeed in life. And Utica Community Schools will provide them the pathways to that next step after high school.

A record number of our secondary students are now enrolled in Advanced Placement courses, an opportunity for more rigorous study and the ability to receive college credit. The College Board reported that in 2008 both student enrollment and the number of students who took the optional Advanced Placement final exams were higher in UCS than in any other public school district in Michigan.

In fact, between 2006 and 2008, there was a 62 percent increase in enrollment in Advanced Placement courses among our students and an 80 percent increase in final exams taken. Despite many more students participating, the percentage of students who received scores sufficient to receive college credit remained steady.

UCS students are pursuing dual enrollment opportunities in record numbers as well, taking courses at local colleges and universities even as they complete their high school credits.

These "beyond the basics" options are open to all secondary students in our school district. In 2009-2010, we look forward to expanding our course offerings even further, with the introduction of Mandarin Chinese.

As our community deals with the changing economic landscape, its school system has provided needed stability for many of our students and their families. UCS classrooms, with our caring, concerned staff, remain havens of routine

and order for our students, in the sometimes unpredictable adult world.

We support increased academic rigor that is required by the Michigan Department of Education. It is absolutely the right direction for our students in order to prepare them for success in the changing world economy. At the same time, we must also be realistic about our budget limitations. These are not easy times in our state, nor in UCS, but our district will continue to manage its resources and plan its budgets prudently and with foresight.

It appears there will be no increase in school funding from the state for the 2009-2010 school year. Districts may have to accept another reduction from the state, which would require further reduction in expenditures, as well. To address repeated funding shortfalls over the past six years, UCS has eliminated 360 employee positions – 84 in 2009-2010 – and reduced its operating budget by more than \$42.3 million.

In addition, our district has put employee health care options in place to reduce costs, closed a school, sold unused property, instituted an aggressive energy management system and taken other actions. But the days of one-time, quick fixes are gone. Unless the economy suddenly recovers and revenues improve, this district faces hard choices with regard to programs and operations.

Even after making \$6 million in budget reductions for the 2009-2010 fiscal year, we still face an uncertain future which may require further reductions this year. This is primarily because the state legislature, which provides the majority of funding to public schools, has yet to approve a state budget. At best, we will receive the same funding allocation we received last year. At worst, school districts could receive a significant loss in per-pupil funding as the state attempts to balance its budget.

Despite these challenges, we pledge that Utica Community Schools will continue to provide the best academic program for the dollars available. We will continue to offer our students opportunities that extend well beyond the basics, providing stability in a time of uncertainty. I look forward to working with you as we progress through the 2009-2010 school year, together.

Save the Date for the 2010 UCS Academic Blitz!



All Utica Community Schools 7th, 8th, 9th and 10th graders and their parents are invited to the third annual Utica Community Schools Academic Blitz

Thursday, **FEBRUARY 4, 2010** – 7 to 9 p.m.
At **Henry Ford II High School**

Don't just think about college...
start preparing **NOW!**

Start your "game plan"
for higher education at the **BLITZ**

UCS leads county and state scores continued from page 1

MICHIGAN EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT PROGRAM (MEAP) Percentage of students achieving proficiency:			
Grade 3	2006	2007	2008
Reading	92%	91%	92%
Writing	65	69	71
English language arts (ELA)	87	88	90
Mathematics	92	95	95
Grade 4			
Reading	90	90	89
Writing	53	58	52
ELA	85	84	84
Mathematics	88	91	93
Grade 5			
Reading	89	88	88
Writing	60	70	75
ELA	83	85	86
Mathematics	78	81	84
Science	88	87	91
Grade 6			
Reading	92	90	89
Writing	83	83	87
ELA	88	89	90
Mathematics	79	81	88
Social Studies	85	80	84
Grade 7			
Reading	86	78	85
Writing	76	84	84
ELA	83	81	86
Mathematics	77	81	88
Grade 8			
Reading	83	84	84
Writing	77	82	82
ELA	80	83	86
Mathematics	82	84	84
Science	84	86	83
Grade 9			
Social Studies	86	84	81

MICHIGAN MERIT EXAM (MME) GRADE 11 Percentage of students achieving proficiency:			
Reading	2007	2008	2009
UCS	63%	71%	67%
County	57	61	57
State	60	62	60
Writing			
UCS	50	56	57
County	37	41	40
State	40	41	43
English Language Arts (ELA)			
UCS	58	65	63
County	48	52	49
State	51	52	52
Mathematics			
UCS	58	61	65
County	44	46	47
State	46	46	49
Science			
UCS	64	65	66
County	55	54	53
State	56	57	56
Social Studies			
UCS	87	87	89
County	83	80	81
State	83	80	81

AMERICAN COLLEGE TEST (ACT)			
Composite	2007	2008	2009
UCS	19.7%	20.3%	20.4%
State	18.8	18.8	19.0

Have questions about the ACT?
Parents and students can learn more about the ACT (American College Test) by going to the official ACT web site, www.act.org, and beginning the search by clicking on "The Test" in red.

Complete MEAP and MME/ACT reports for the individual UCS schools are available at www.uticak12.org. Pull down the District Information tab, click on MEAP/MME Scores, then select a school.

Did you know?

- On the 2009 Michigan Merit Exam, Utica Community Schools led all 21 Macomb County school districts in every subject area.
- On the 2009 America College Test (ACT), the four UCS high schools – Eisenhower, Ford II, Stevenson and Utica – scored first, second and tied for third of all high schools in Macomb County.
- District students in special education posted overall significant gains on the state tests.

H1N1 flu updates available online and on cable TV

The latest information about the H1N1/Swine Flu is available through the district website, www.uticak12.org and UCS-TV channels 15/22.

Residents will be able to access a Public Service Announcement from Dr. Kevin Lokar, Medical Director of the Macomb County Health Department. He outlines symptoms of the virus as well as preventative measures which can be taken to

avoid contracting the flu. Other information/updates will be provided as they become available. The web site updates are available at any time; television broadcasts will be continuous throughout the day, as part of the station's regular programming.

Utica Community Schools is working in cooperation with the Macomb County Health Department and the other public school districts in

Macomb County to provide timely information and to assist the Health Department as it prepares to disseminate flu vaccine later this fall.

If you have questions or concerns, please contact your family physician or the Macomb County Health Department at 586.466.7923 or access the Department website at www.macombcountymi.gov/publichealth.

2009-2010 District Calendar

October 30
Half day for elementary

November 3
No school – teacher professional development

November 12 – 20
Parent/teacher conference window (two evenings)

November 19
Half day for all students, PM conferences

November 25 – 29
No school – Thanksgiving break, classes resume November 30

December 23 – January 3
No school – Holiday break, classes resume January 4

January 18
No school – Martin Luther King Day

January 21
Half day for all students, secondary exams

January 22
Half day for all students, secondary exams

February 13 – 21
No school – Mid-Winter break

February 22 – 26
Elementary parent/teacher conference window (one evening)

Calendar Change
The Spring 2010 secondary conference window has been changed to March 1-5, so as not to conflict with the ACT/MME exam schedule.

March 1 – 5
Secondary parent/teacher conference window (one evening)

March 8 – 12
High school ACT/MME exam

April 2 – 11
No school – Spring break, classes resume April 12

May 28 – 31
No school – Memorial Day break

June 16
Half day for secondary students; secondary exams

June 17
Last day of school – half day for all students; secondary exams

AHERA Annual Notification – 2009/2010 School Year

This annual notice is required by the Asbestos Hazard Emergency Response Act (AHERA) to inform Utica Community Schools parents, employees and residents of the district's Asbestos Management Program.

Asbestos surveillances are conducted every six months and continue on a regular schedule. The next three-year reinspections are scheduled for January and February of 2012. All surveillances and reinspections are conducted by Michigan licensed asbestos inspectors.

Asbestos abatement was conducted at six UCS facilities during the 2009/2010 school year (summer). All asbestos abatement is conducted by Michigan licensed asbestos abatement contractors after school hours, during breaks and during the summer recess. Notifications are provided to potential occupants prior to scheduled abatement.

The UCS AHERA management plans are available for review at each school or at the Auxiliary Services Facility (ASF), 6600 Eighteen Mile Road in Sterling Heights. Summaries of abatement projects prior to the 2009/2010 school year are included in the plans, and complete documentation is maintained at the ASF. Inquiries regarding the program can be directed to the district's AHERA designee at (586) 797-7130 during business hours.

NOTICE OF NONDISCRIMINATION

In compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the Elliot-Larsen Civil Rights Act and the Persons with Disabilities Civil Rights Act, it is the policy of Utica Community Schools that no person shall, on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin or ancestry, sex, age, disability, height, weight, or marital status be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination during any instructional opportunities, programs, services, job placement assistance, employment or in policies governing student conduct and attendance. Any person suspecting a discriminatory practice should contact the Executive Director of Human Resources at Utica Community Schools, 11303 Greendale, Sterling Heights, MI 48312 or call (586) 797-1000.



586.797.1000

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Distinguished Award
Michigan School Public Relations Association

Award of Excellence
National School Public Relations Association

Visit www.uticak12.org for information on programs and curriculum, school news, district calendar, annual reports and employment opportunities.

Information about the district is also available on UCS Television, which broadcasts on cable channels 15 and 22.