



UTICA COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

FOCUS FOR THE COMMUNITY

OCTOBER 2023

A PUBLICATION FOR THE RESIDENTS OF UTICA COMMUNITY SCHOOLS



From the Superintendent...

Robert S. Monroe

How we use facilities can inspire remarkable achievement

Utica Community Schools is committed, in partnership with the community, to empower students to positively transform their future and the world.

In UCS, we strive to prepare students for success beyond UCS, focusing on their education and safety today, and ensuring our schools are meeting student needs both now and in the future.

This commitment requires us to constantly review the use of our physical resources, to make certain our buildings are functioning safely and effectively and meeting the needs of the students and families in our community.

As we shared during last year's Safety and Success Bond election, we are considering attendance patterns at the elementary levels in anticipation of opening two new schools and – at the secondary level - the future of the Heritage site.

Over the next few weeks, our focus is on the future needs of the Gene L. Klida Utica Academy for International Studies (GLK-UAIS) and Heritage Junior High School, which have been sharing a facility for the past 16 years.

During that time, enrollment and building needs in GLK-UAIS and Heritage have experienced significant changes. In addition, community input received from both our facility survey and as we developed the UCS Empowered Strategic Plan centered on the long-range use of the facility.

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UCS Empowered Guides District's Future Excellence



Schwarzkoiff Elementary first graders, (left to right) Kenneth Downey and Alonte Garrett work on a 'get to know me' activity at the start of the school year.

Utica Community Schools is starting the 2023-24 school year with its focus firmly on the future.

The UCS Board of Education has adopted a long-range strategic plan called "UCS Empowered" that provides a road map for the future excellence of our schools.

"The UCS Empowered plan contains the work and aspirations of an entire community," Superintendent Robert S. Monroe said.

The plan was adopted following a two-year process that reflected the many voices of community members.

UCS Empowered was created through survey data, focus groups, planning committees and the analysis of current and future trends related to demographics, student achievement, financial resources, and overall facility needs.

The plan is driven by newly adopted vision, mission, core values and graduate profile. It also identifies improvements through three strategic priorities:

- **Culture of Empowerment**
We will ensure all students are engaged in experiences leading to the academic growth and achievement enabling them to prepare for the careers of their choosing.
- **Culture of Caring**
We will ensure a sense of belonging and inclusion to foster engagement in a safe and respectful community.
- **Culture of Transformation**
We will ensure programming, resources and facilities support reimagining UCS.

"Utica Community Schools is a district with a proud tradition of excellence," Monroe said. "We will honor and respect this storied legacy as we reimagine what school can be for our students."

uticaK12.org/pathways

PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS

PERSONALIZE YOUR JOURNEY FORWARD

THURSDAY, JAN 25, 2024

FROM 6:00-8:30PM

AT HENRY FORD II HIGH SCHOOL
11911 CLINTON RIVER RD.
STERLING HEIGHTS, MI 48313

An Event Open To All Families!

Created to ensure families and students are aware of the opportunities, services and programs available to Utica Community Schools students. By beginning a plan early, parents can set their students on a path that best fits their needs and interests.

Expanded AVID program will help secondary students follow their dreams

Lucas Sweis is a Malow Junior High School seventh grader with a plan.

He already knows that he wants to be an entrepreneur and own a small business like his parents. To get there, Sweis will need experiences that allow him to challenge himself and be organized.

Enter Advancement Via Individualized Determination (AVID).

AVID, which has been expanded into Malow Junior High School and Eisenhower High School this year, is a national research-based program that stresses development in key areas of organization, study skills and critical thinking.

“AVID is important because students are building confidence and lifelong skills to help them become successful in courses they will take later in their high school years,” said Veronica Tow, the AVID building coordinator at Malow Junior High. “In the AVID class we are not only working on curriculum but also skills like teambuilding, critical thinking, collaboration, time management and problem solving.”

Utica Community Schools was the first Macomb County district – and one of only six in Michigan – to offer AVID when it was introduced in 2011.

Based on its success, AVID was expanded over the past few years to other schools and

is now part of all 11 secondary buildings. UCS has also expanded professional development opportunities for teachers, including hosting an AVID conference with 150 educators from the region and across the nation. A similar workshop is planned for March.

“The AVID program truly embodies our mission to inspire remarkable achievement,” Superintendent Robert S. Monroe said. “It has been proven to make a difference in the lives of our students by creating a smaller, family-type atmosphere with a strong network of support.”

There are 748 UCS students enrolled this year in the 36 sections spread across district secondary schools.

A key part of the AVID success is that students remain together throughout their secondary years to build a supportive community.

As members of the inaugural class at Malow Junior High School, the 20 students in Tow’s class will remain together until they graduate from Eisenhower High School in 2030.

“The goals for our first-year AVID students are to build strong connections with their peers both inside and outside of the classroom,” Tow said. “We are working with students on how to become a leader and incorporate WICOR (Writing, Inquiry, Collaboration, Organization, and Reading) strategies in all of their classes.”



Malow seventh graders Leonora Dedvukaj, Lucas Sweis and Jonathon Skorupa take part in a teambuilding program as part of their first year in the Advancement Via Individualized Determination (AVID) program.

For a recent project, the Malow students worked together to create a tower out of balloons and masking tape. The balloons could not be held up by taping them to the table or a wall.

The project gave students experience in skills that are central to AVID and those sought by employers: organization, teamwork, problem-solving and innovation.

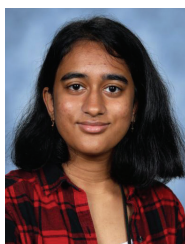
A student who took part in the project, seventh grader Leonora Dedvukaj, said she liked the unique nature of the program and its focus on helping her achieve her career goal of becoming a therapist.

“I think of AVID as a new adventure,” she said. “I think it will be a place where I can find help if I struggle throughout the next few years until graduation.”

Five UCS students named among top one percent of high school seniors



Ishioka



Nayak



Pawlicki



Singh



Van De Winkle

Five Utica Community Schools students are among only 16,000 U.S. seniors to be named 2024 National Merit semifinalists.

UCS National Merit Semi-finalists are: Katrina Ishioka, Amrita Nayak, and Brendan Pawlicki, of the Gene L. Klida Utica Academy for International Studies; Harjot Singh, of Utica High School; and Katie Van De Winkle, of Eisenhower High School.

Singh and Van De Winkle are also part of the Utica Center for Mathematics, Science and Technology.

National Merit Semi-finalists are among the top one percent of the nation’s high school seniors.

“Our entire community is proud of the accomplishment of our National Merit semifinalists,” Superintendent Robert S. Monroe said. “Through hard work and the support of their UCS teachers, they represent our high expectations and how this district continues to open doors for our students to a successful future.”

More than 1.6 million students of the Class of 2024 entered the National Merit Program by taking the 2023 Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test. The nationwide pool of semi-finalists includes the highest scoring entrants in each state.

To move from semi-finalist to finalist status, students must submit a detailed scholarship application. The application includes information about their academic record, participation in school and community activities, demonstrated leadership, an essay, record of consistently high academic performance, a recommendation by an official of their high school and SAT scores that confirm their PSAT/NMSQT performance.

Finalists have an opportunity to continue in the competition for 7,140 National Merit Scholarships totaling \$28 million next spring.

UCS high schools recognized among nation's best

All UCS high schools have once again been named among the best in the nation by *U.S. News and World Report*.

Eisenhower, Henry Ford II, Stevenson and Utica High Schools have placed among the top 11 percent of 33,300 public high schools, according to the annual ranking.

Six factors determine the schools' ranking based on their performance on state assessments and how well they prepare students for college.



How we use facilities can inspire remarkable achievement

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Our long-standing citizens' committee – the Enrollment Distribution Advisory Committee – is providing input into this process. Their input will be considered in a final decision along with enrollment projections, the engineering and building needs assessment from our auxiliary services department, the best use of resources and – most importantly – making sure our students have access to programs and experiences that will empower their future.

Following a decision on the Heritage site, we begin a focus on a multi-year review of our elementary attendance patterns. This review is in anticipation of the construction of schools over the next few years and significant renovations at several elementary buildings.

Safe, secure, and educationally vibrant schools remain a priority. We recognize that change can be difficult. By working in partnership, we can improve the opportunities for our students today and position our district to continue supporting student success for our future generations.

For more information on this planning, please see www.uticak12.org/buildingforthefuture.

Sincerely,

Robert S. Monroe
Superintendent of Schools

Points of Pride



UCS office manager earns top state award for driving transportation services

A typical day for Kathy Chodnicki starts with dozens of phone calls, quickly filling morning

routes based on changes to driver availability, answering questions from staff, and ensuring any needed spare buses are well maintained and equipped for the road.

And that is long before most others even start their workday or have their first cup of coffee.

“Dispatching is very rewarding to me because I love the communication with the drivers, office staff and the community,” the Utica Community Schools Transportation Dispatcher said. “I make sure every bus driver knows what they should be doing that day. It’s like a puzzle that needs to be solved every day, and every day it is different.”

Her commitment to keeping UCS transportation on the road has earned her the “Office Professional of the Year” by the Michigan Association for Pupil Transportation.



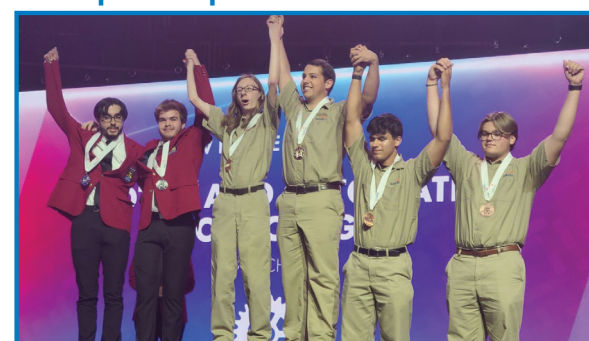
UCS sophomore named Key Club's Michigan representative for UNICEF

Luna Alaowad, a Gene L. Klida

Utica Academy for International Studies sophomore, has been selected as the UNICEF Ambassador to represent the State of Michigan through Key Club International.

Elected this summer to the position, Alaowad said her role will be coordinating fundraising efforts and to inform others about the nonprofit's positive impact on children worldwide. Student ambassadors from each state meet regularly in zoom meetings and will gather at Key Club's conference in May.

UCS team earns national SkillsUSA championship



Two Utica Community Schools students were named national champions in a robotics and automation problem-solving competition that featured top students from across 24 states.

Max Pagel and Logan Derenge, who graduated in June from the Utica Center for Science and Industry (CSI), took first place in the SkillsUSA competition earlier this summer. This is the first national SkillsUSA championship for CSI, a half-day specialty program in UCS.

UCS student achieves perfect M-STEP Math score for third time



Bemis Junior High School 8th grader Isabella Bronzovich has achieved a perfect Michigan Student Test of Educational Progress (M-STEP) Math score for the third consecutive time.

The M-STEP is an assessment to gauge how well students are mastering state standards in Math, English, Science and Social Studies.

Bronzovich has achieved a perfect M-STEP Math score each time she has taken the test – in 3rd, 6th and 7th grades.

4 FOCUS

Our Voice

Inspiring Remarkable Achievement



“As an educator of more than 20 years, my goal is to help students empower themselves so they can make their lives and their world a better place.”

Beth Grillo
Principal



“My teachers drive me and really help me. When you grow up you just want to be the best you can be in life.”

Diego Harden
11th Grader



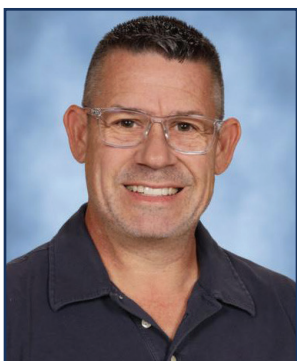
“Wherever our students go, they will feel safe.”

Linda Yousif
Newcomer
Program Teacher



“It is important to inspire our students to be the best versions of themselves.”

Maggie Wittwer
Paraprofessional



“The arts are integral to the curriculum and are really the building blocks for student learning in all subjects.”

Matthias Krenzer
Elementary Art
Teacher



“Our partnership with industry inspires our students by allowing them to see what the real world is like and what they can expect when they begin their careers.”

Doug Hartley
UCS High School

Teacher and Graduate, Former Computer Business Classroom Volunteer

CTE staff awarded over \$200,000 to further their education

Utica Community Schools Career and Technical Education (CTE) department was awarded over \$200,000 through the State of Michigan’s ‘Grow Your Own’ grant. This seed allows UCS to fund the education and certification of its existing staff to help address current school staffing needs.

“It was motivation to go back and take the classes,” said James Zerilli, computer science teacher at Stevenson High School. “If it helps me, helps the CTE program and is a grant, then absolutely, because the cost of tuition is really high – it helped a lot.”

Geoff Clark, Director of Career and Technical Education at UCS, said the district was awarded the grant in June and quickly partnered with Western Michigan University to provide CTE course training for

current or future teachers.

“The money from the state allows us to pay for teachers’ course work and reimburse for books and registration fees associated with these courses,” Clark said.

So far, 11 teachers have taken advantage of the grant and will receive CTE certification through Western Michigan University.

Zerilli is looking to gain a different perspective through his studies and has already benefited from his first course.

“I think anyone that works with students would benefit,” said Zerilli. “Secretaries, paraprofessionals, lunch aides, custodial staff – we’re all teachers; we work with students on a daily basis and teach students life skills in some way, shape or form.”

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