



BUILDING FOUNDATIONS FOR CAREER READINESS

This Issue's Highlights:

- **Centerpiece: Industrial Technology Builds Strong Futures**
- **The Believe Project Partners with Pershing Elementary School**
- **1619 Project Book Study Group Has National Appeal**
- **Camp U Returns for Summer 2022**
- **Board of Education Candidate Statements**

In-Person Instruction Continues



HUMANIZE: Learning Reimagined

The School District of University City continues the 2021-22 academic year with a regular, five-day, in-person instruction schedule for all of its students and staff. Despite a large spike in COVID-19 cases due to the Omicron variant in January, all schools have remained open for in-person instruction, though a small handful of full classrooms had to quarantine during the peak of Omicron. Athletics continue with regular seasons in all sports.

“The drive and resilience of staff has been inspiring,” said Superintendent Sharonica Hardin-Bartley.

“Everyone is chipping in to make sure our students remain in-person. It’s been a remarkable show of collaboration, partnership and caring as teachers, support staff and administrators have taken on extra roles to help in schools,” Hardin-Bartley said. “What’s also truly uplifting is our students’ growing ownership of health and safety in their buildings and classrooms. It is wonderful to see our students reminding one another to wear their

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*Sharonica Hardin-Bartley
Superintendent of Schools*



Barbara C. Jordan teacher Carry Campbell leads kindergarten students in an English/Language Arts lesson in late January. District students in all grade levels continue with daily, in-person classroom instruction. The District uses multiple, scientifically-proven mitigation strategies to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in school buildings so in-person learning may continue through the entire school year.

masks and even voicing their health concerns to adults – and me – if they feel a situation can be improved for health and safety. They do this while continuing with their learning and many uplifting and impactful activities.”

The District continues with a full COVID-19 mediation plan to ensure a safe, healthy, flourishing and connected community. The plan is approved monthly by the University City Board of Education and includes

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Yes, We Believe!

Pershing Welcomes New Believe Project Literacy Lab



PERSONALIZE: Learning Reimagined

The little girl was drawn to a chunky new book stacked with others on a white bookshelf. She slowly took it down from the shelf and began leafing through the thick cardboard pages. Her eyes opened wide.

“That’s my hair!” she said.

The book featured a young Black girl about her age talking proudly about her hair that had been braided into tiny locs. The reader, a kindergartner at Pershing Elementary School, pointed to the character’s hair and the colorful elastic beads at the end of each loc. Then, she lifted a hand to her own hair and touched her similar braids and beads.

Just behind her, her older sister leaned on a bold mural beneath a depiction of a Black girl sitting on a tree branch beside a treehouse. The sister was also reading a children’s book featuring a character with a skin color like hers.

It was all part of the very exciting opening of Pershing Elementary School’s new Literacy Lab, a colorful, cozy classroom adorned with a purple couch, bold pillows and hundreds of children’s books featuring characters and authors of color. The room’s full wall mural, hand-painted by local artist Billy Williams, features whimsical children with different skin tones reading in a landscape emboldened by a bright blue sky. In the center of the mural, a hot air balloon with the word “Believe” ascends into that sky.

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Pershing Elementary School’s new Believe Project Literacy Lab contains hundreds of children’s books featuring Black characters and authors.

From our Superintendent of Schools



Sharonica Hardin-Bartley
Superintendent

Greetings, University City community:

I am delighted to tell you that your public school district continues with a full five-day per week in-person instruction schedule for all of our students despite the recent surge in COVID-19 cases due to the Omicron variant.

Keeping our students in school and on track while being safe and healthy is a hard task, but our staff, parents, caregivers and students continue to rally every day. Their resilience is remarkable. On my walks through schools, I certainly see challenges and opportunities to improve. But I also see a community truly caring for their students and one another. They share a profound understanding that, in this incredibly difficult time, the stakes are high for our children. We must continue to care, teach, love and learn – because the consequences of giving up are just too dire for our children.

Now, more than ever, I recognize just how special the University City community is in the St. Louis region. Our citizens, our parents and our students continue to show up for children. They continue to grapple with big picture issues, especially racial equity and our essential imperative to close the opportunity gap. I am a firm believer that healthy, honest and caring relationships are the nutrients in the soil that nurture learning and student growth. We cannot raise healthy

children without tilling the soil with opportunities and frank recognition and action against inequity, systemic racism and implicit bias, even as we grapple with an international pandemic.

This past month, as you will read in this issue, we tilled our soil with a 275-member community-wide Book Study Group in partnership with the University City Public Library. Every week the group dived deep into the issues and ideas presented in Nikole Hannah-Jones’ new book “The 1619 Project,” which reframes American history through the lens of the Black Experience and the Black contribution to the building of our country. It became clear to me that our entire community – old, young, white, Black or brown – wants equitable change for our students and the well-being of University City as a whole. We thirst for a better future while acknowledging how the past helps shape our present. Our students represent the future.

In Service Of Our Children,

Sharonica A. Hardin-Bartley
Sharonica Hardin-Bartley, Ph.D., PHR
Superintendent of Schools

From our Board of Education



Traci Moore
Board of Education
Secretary

Hello, U. City friends, families and neighbors!

As we settle into 2022 and head toward the warmth of spring, I am hopeful for our children and for the future of education in this country.

While our teachers, students and staff push through the difficulties brought on by COVID, and more recently the Omicron variant, our district is actively working to tackle the challenges that continue to be brought on by the pandemic. By deploying enhanced health and safety protocols and creating partnerships with experts in the health care field, our leadership is focusing on the safety and welfare of our students, teachers and staff.

In addition to its strong response to the virus, the District has been using every available resource to provide needed support to our students and the community at large, holding vaccination drives and providing drive-through testing – all of this while having provided nearly 1 million meals to families in need.

Through these challenges, our superintendent and her leadership team continue to uphold the integrity of our district by standing their ground on critical issues facing

the educational system in our state and country, leaning into what the late John Lewis called “Good Trouble.” Efforts brought by those to deny the history of our country haven’t discouraged the difficult discussions and teachings around race, class and equity.

As we continue to strive for academic excellence, we all know that the well-being, both mental and physical, of ALL of our children is most important; our district understands that and works towards it daily. We also know that the well-being of our teachers and staff is a priority, especially during these difficult times. We applaud the continued passion of these real-life superheroes.

I am extremely proud to be an alum of U. City Schools and to serve as a board member, but today I am even more proud of the compassion the District has shown for its students, teachers, staff and families.

All my best to each of you, and please stay safe.

Traci Moore
Traci Moore
Secretary, University City Board of Education

The personal opinions expressed in the letter above may not reflect that of the entire University City Board of Education.

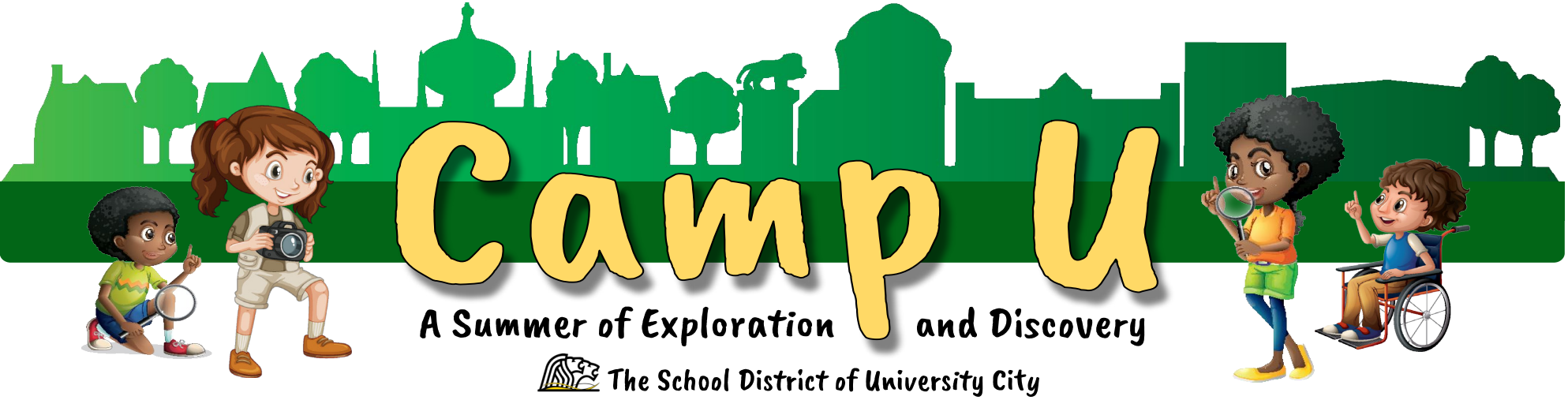
Stressed? Need time to reflect? Want some downtime?

Join us in...

The Peace Place

As part of its vision of well-being and joy, the District has created a virtual toolkit for wellness. The Peace Place offers guided exercises for mindfulness, quick escapes through sounds and music, creative exercises and more. The Peace Place is open to anyone who would like to take a little time for themselves to refresh, refocus and be well.

www.ucityschools.org/ThePeacePlace



Camp U Returns June 6 through July 1, 2022

The School District of University City is proud to again offer its students hands-on, fun and engaging summer learning through Camp U 2022: A Summer of Exploration and Discovery.

This year the camp will run for four weeks from June 6 through July 1.

Camp U is free to University City's rising first- through eighth-graders, and will be offered in-person Monday through Friday. Incoming first- through fifth-graders will attend camp at Jackson Park Elementary School from 8:40 a.m. to 3 p.m. with lunch included. Rising sixth- through eighth-graders will attend a half-day camp at Brittany Woods Middle School from 8 a.m. to noon.

Camp U is more than just a summer school. The free, in-person camp offers traditional teacher-led support in reading, writing and math, but in a dynamic way that utilizes partnerships and field trips with important St. Louis institutions, including the Magic House's MADE makerspace, COCA, the Saint Louis

Science Center, The Green Center and others. Teachers will again design their camps around themed topics that integrate hands-on learning and learning competencies.

University City High School will further continue its free half-day summer credit-recovery program from June 6 through July 1. Virtual credit-recovery options will be offered for high school students.

Camp U's programming offers children a chance to catch up and accelerate in reading, writing and math, and provides the joy and enrichment of a summer camp experience – giving students a chance to unwind, refresh and reconnect after a hard year.

Camp U will utilize safety and health protocols. Students will still physically distance while in buildings, and mask-wearing is required. Students will also be able to socialize and learn outside in healthy air and sunshine.

For more information and a link to register, please go to www.ucityschools.org/CampU.



Justin Davis to Head Brittany Woods Middle School

The School District of University City is pleased to announce Justin Davis has been hired as the new principal of Brittany Woods Middle School.

Davis will replace Dr. Grace Lee, who is retiring in June. He will assume the role of principal on July 1, 2022.

Davis most recently served as the principal of The East New York Arts and Civics High School (TEACH), a former charter school in Brooklyn, New York, that recently became a member school of the New York City Department of Education.

A native of North County, Davis earned a B.A. from Harris-Stowe State University and an M.A. from Lindenwood University. He got his start in education in the St. Louis area, teaching middle and high school social studies in Normandy and Ferguson-Florissant schools.

He moved to New York City in 2009 to become a social studies teacher at TEACH, where he served for 13 years. During his tenure there, he went on to serve as dean of students, assistant school leader, and then principal from August 2015 through Jan. 1, 2022.

“Mr. Davis engaged our students, staff and parents in meaningful dialogue regarding his experiences and desire to serve the Brittany Woods community. He was authentic and embraced the importance of community and, yes, relationships. He spoke to his understanding of equity and inclusion and emphasized quality tenets of school culture,”

said Superintendent Sharonica Hardin-Bartley.

Davis was hired after the District gathered intensive staff and student input on their vision of a new leader for the school. Davis said The School District of University City stood out as he began to explore his next steps.

“Towards the end of my high school career, my family moved from North County to the U. City area. A lot of my friends who went to Harris-Stowe where I graduated are also U. City alums. I love the people and the community,” Davis said. “When I look at the student data and demographics in University City, it generally reminds me of myself when I was growing up. The school system was a safe haven for me that allowed me to be able to put all of my energy and effort towards the work I had in front of me to become the person I am. I’m a pay it forward person. My goal coming back to St. Louis was to find a community that connected me to my roots, and to go into that community and create a culture that nurtures phenomenal human beings. I believe U. City is already on the cusp of that, and I’m excited to be a part of it.”



Justin Davis
Brittany Woods Middle
School Principal
Starting July 1, 2022

University City Board of Education Candidate Statements

Four residents have filed for candidacy in the April 5, 2022, election for two, three-year seats on the University City Board of Education. Asterisks (*) indicate the incumbents. The candidates, in order of filing, submitted the following statements and photos.

Matt Bellows*

As a resident of University City since 2012 and parent of a district kindergartner, I am seeking re-election to the School District of University City's Board of Education. I was raised in a family of public school educators and taught that a strong school district is the backbone of a vibrant city. My top priority as a board member is to continue to ensure all students in our district progress successfully through our district's schools, are college and career ready, and become engaged citizens.

Currently, I serve as Board President, having served as Secretary the year prior. It has been a privilege to work closely with the district's administration to expand our social emotional learning initiatives, refine and broaden our curriculum, and progress our district's mission for academic excellence. Together, our district pivoted to all virtual learning in spring 2020 through spring 2021 due to the pandemic and then transitioned thoughtfully and safely back to in-person learning this fall, all while keeping the wellness of our students, faculty, and staff the top priority. The district served meals to families in need, continues to provide vaccination clinics for the community, and listens to our medical experts when implementing mitigation efforts.

As a returning board member, I will continue to support our administration in their vision for the district and developing a relevant and challenging curriculum. I will continue to strive for viable financial wellness, so we can provide the necessary resources for our students and staff. Lastly and most importantly, I will continue to make sure every decision that is made that impacts the district, is made with kindness and thoughtfulness.

I look forward to continuing to serve the School District of University City.



Elizabeth Robinson

As a long time, resident of University City and parent of 3 students that currently attend Brittany Woods Middle School, Flynn Park Elementary and University City High School, I have a vested interest in the success of our schools. As a parent of a high school senior that started at JGECEC, I know firsthand that University City has a talented pool of educators. I want to make sure that we retain them. I have a passion for education, our youth and the community at large. Investing in our youth and community is essential to our future. I have worked in the educational sector for 15 years in various roles, so I understand the challenges and issues from all sides. It is my hope that by serving as a board member I can be an extension of this great community. University City has made great strides over the years and I want to be a part of the change that will make our schools even better. The guiding principle under the "Learning Reimagined" plan is to transform the life of every student every day, but what does that really mean for our students? While we have been working hard to keep students physically safe in the classrooms, what are we doing about their mental and emotional wellness? We must work together collectively to get our children in a mental space where they are not only present, but ready to learn. I have always wanted to serve my community and I feel this opportunity would be a great way for me to give back.



LaVerne Ford-Williams*

I have had the honor of serving as a member of the University City Board of Education for the past six years. After 37 years of devoted service to the School District of University City as a teacher and an administrator, I am blessed to be able to follow my passion of becoming a University City Board Member. During my tenure in the District, I worked at both the elementary and secondary levels. I spent the last thirteen years of my career working at Brittany Woods Middle School as an Assistant Principal. As a University School Board Member, I can proudly say that I continue to work diligently to build strong and rewarding relationships with our students, their families and our community.

The onset of Covid 19 has posed devastating challenges to every aspect of our schools and community. As a board member, I continue to work with the rest of the board and the superintendent to ensure our students are safe while attending our schools, experiencing high quality teaching/learning experiences and receiving social and emotional support when needed, all while practicing social and physical distancing. The Board has unconditionally supported Dr. Hardin-Bartley in leading a gallant effort to make sure our families receive necessary meals during the Pandemic as well as help with providing preventative measures regarding Covid. I also commend the University City community for their continued support in our effort to do what is best for our children.

As a prospective Board member, I remain devoted to working with the Board of Education and the Superintendent in making a positive sustainable difference in The School District of University City.



I am seeking your support and vote on April 5th. Thank you, LaVerne Ford-Williams

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School Board Candidate Statements

Continued from page 4

Jeffrey Blair

I have been married for 35 years and we have 4 beautiful children. I have a Bachelor's degree in Computer Science, and a Law degree from Rutgers University. However, I have always had a passion for working with helping youth realize their true potential. As the Director of the RISE Youth Group of NJ, I created programs to help underprivileged youth through mentorship programs, educational workshops, and community volunteer programs.

When we relocated to Saint Louis in 2010, I served as a Board Member of The Meacham Park Neighborhood Improvement Association. I spearheaded a number of youth initiatives, including establishing the Meacham Park Scholarship Fund, and partnering with the Kirkwood School District, in order to address the Academic Achievement Gap. Moreover, I also served as a member of the Juvenile Justice Committee, an innovative program that assists the Saint Louis Family Court by handling cases involving non-violent juvenile offenders. In 2015, my wife and I established Eyesee African American Children's Bookstore, located in University City. In raising our own children, we found it incredibly difficult finding books that reflected their beauty and rich heritage. But we understood how important representation is to their development, so we created Eyesee in order to help other parents find books that will help their children see positive images of themselves.

I am running for school board because I would like to lend my experience to the students of University City. I am a strong advocate for quality education and I understand that by investing in strengthening our youth, we ensure a bright future for our community and our nation. I'm aware of many important issues facing the district and I am ready to study and learn about these issues and make the best decisions I can in support of our children.





University City School Board Candidate Forum

Election day is Tuesday, April 5, 2022

The University City Education Foundation and University City High School PTO invite you to meet this year's school board candidates in a virtual, informal discussion moderated by the League of Women Voters.

Monday, March 28 • 7 p.m.

Submit a question for the candidates online by Sunday prior:
www.ucityschools.org/BOEForumQuestion

Register for link/password:
www.ucityschools.org/BOEForumRegistration

Free summer meal program returns

Attention ALL KIDS:
Visit your neighborhood University City Camp U / SLA site during specific dates and times and receive a breakfast and/or lunch at NO CHARGE.

Monday through Friday
June 6 - July 1, 2022

For list of locations and specific times, visit www.ucityschools.org/SummerMeals



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UCHS to Induct 11 Members Into Prestigious Hall of Fame


Despite delays due to COVID-19, 11 University City High School alumni selected in 2021 to join the prestigious University City High School Hall of Fame will finally get their day to be celebrated on Friday, Oct. 14, 2022.

The event, originally scheduled for Oct. 2, 2021, but postponed due to the pandemic, will take place at University City High School with a reception followed by the induction ceremony in the Charles A. Banks Auditorium. Tickets will go on sale in April. For more information, go to www.ucityschools.org/HOF2021.

Every two years, a committee of alumni and school representatives select new inductees from a prestigious pool of nominees with outstanding lifetime accomplishments in the arts, science, research, medicine, law, scholarship, mathematics, business, social justice and more.

The following alumni will be inducted in October:

- Kathryn (Pierce) Banks, Class of 1993, a lawyer, educator and legal advocate for children in the St. Louis region.
 - Jennifer (Roman) Boykin, Class of 1982, the first woman executive vice president of Huntington Ingalls Industries and the president of Newport News Shipbuilding in Virginia.
 - Donovan "Donny" Nelson Butler, Class of 1989, retired Army master sergeant who worked tirelessly for equal opportunity and the protection of civil rights against oppression, bias and prejudice within the military culture.
 - Reena Goldthree, Class of 1999, Princeton University scholar in African-American studies.
 - Linda "Cookie" (Dickson) Jones, Class of 1983, community volunteer and active, lifelong participant with U. City Schools.
 - Daniel Kaufer, Class of 1977 (deceased), a pioneer in the humane treatment of individuals with memory disorders, including Alzheimer's.
 - Earl Kessler, Class of 1959, an international housing expert working for solutions in impoverished communities around the world.
 - David Levi, Class of 1977, an internationally recognized artisan glassmaker.
 - Helene (Wagman) Sherman, Class of 1962, an outstanding mathematics educator who has influenced the teaching of math to K-12 students worldwide.
 - Richard Stack, Class of 1970, an internationally recognized opponent of capital punishment who has produced movies, books and public service campaigns to end the death penalty in America.
 - Stephanie Williams-Nelson, Class of 1977, a dancer and television, stage and movie actress.
- The new inductees will join a long and prestigious list of alumni who include playwright Thomas "Tennessee" Lanier Williams; internationally renowned rap artist Cornell "Nelly" Haynes; Marlon West, the lead effects animator for beloved Disney films; and many more. The new inductees' photos will join more than 100 others in the main entrance hallway of University City High School.



Induction Ceremony

has been rescheduled to

Friday, Oct. 14, 2022

University City High School
Charles A. Banks Auditorium

Tickets go on sale in April.
For more information,
go to www.ucityschools.org/HOF2021

UCHS POP-UP MARKET

Celebrating Entrepreneurship



Community is invited to attend. No admission fee!

Saturday
March 19, 2022
9 a.m. - 1 p.m.

Come Support Entrepreneurs in our Community!

University City High School
7401 Balson Ave. (63130)

Want to be a Vendor?

Vendor spaces are open to UCHS students and businesses in the U. City community. Non-refundable donation is required in advance. For pricing and registration:



www.ucityschools.org/031922Vendor

Formerly UCHS Entrepreneurship Showcase

Sponsored By:



Questions? Contact Ms. Woodward at cwoodward@ucityschools.org or 314-290-4114.

St. Louis Cardinals vs. Cincinnati Reds

U CITY DAY

at the Cardinals Ball Game



Featuring UCHS AF JRTOC Color Guard

Friday, **Sept. 16, 2022**

Game begins at 7:15 p.m.

Right Field Pavilion (section 331) seats at Busch Stadium, downtown

ONLY \$20

(a \$47 value)

Includes seat and voucher for jumbo hot dog & soda

Ticket sales begin soon. Details at

www.ucityschools.org/CardinalTickets

University City's 1619 Project Book Study Group Garner's National Appeal

PROBLEMATIZE: Learning Reimagined

In honor of February's Black History Month, the District's Office of Curriculum and Instruction wanted to do something big and different that also recognized the current political climate regarding the teaching of Black history in public schools. So, they partnered with the University City Public Library to conduct a deep dive into Nikole Hannah-Jones' new book, "The 1619 Project," through a community book study group.

The interest was instant and overwhelming. More than 275 people signed up to participate in the virtual sessions. Word of the event spread far beyond the boundaries of University City. Participants hailed from as far as California, Wisconsin, Georgia and New York.

The group met virtually on four Friday evenings in February. Each session featured a guest speaker, facilitated discussions in small chat rooms and a running document on a virtual Padlet to spark discussion and capture thoughts and individual opinions. Weather pending, the group planned to culminate the book study on Feb. 28 with an in-person, outdoor Fireside Chat in University City High School's Lions' Den courtyard to celebrate their discussions and takeaways from the experience.

The book study group was the brainchild of Christina Sneed, PreK-12 communication arts coordinator, who had previously included Hannah-Jones' texts in an AP Course for her Advanced English and Language Arts students. Sneed said the large interest clearly indicated our region and our country have an appetite for discussion beyond political rhetoric.

Harder Conversations

"I think that it really just reinforces the idea that U. City is a district that is not only willing, but encourages harder conversations," Sneed said. "We are willing to advocate for students and push everyone to think critically and openly while engaging in deep conversation about issues impacting our community."

University City High School student Mouhamed Ly, an 11th-grader who was also a small group facilitator in the meetings, said he found a surprisingly diverse community in the group willing to listen and intent on improving systems for racial equity.

"It was nice to have so many different perspectives and generations on Zoom because it challenges our ideas and creates an environment of healthy disagreements where we weren't just talking in an echo chamber or heard the same things we hear all the time," Ly said.

In November 2021, "The 1619 Project" was published amid divisive rancor about the teaching of Black American history in public schools nationwide. In Missouri, efforts continue in the state legislature to ban curriculum featuring the content of both Hannah-Jones' landmark book

and her earlier articles originally published in The New York Times in August 2019 to mark the 400th anniversary of the first slave ship arriving to the shores of North America.

1619: America's Origin?

"The 1619 Project" asks readers to envision the formative start of America history on that fateful day early colonists introduced slavery into the daily fabric of the making of America. The nation's founding, Hannah-Jones argues, is critically entwined with the legacy of slavery and systemic racism as well as the contributions of African Americans to the growth, culture and prosperity of the United States. America would likely be a lot different without the contributions of generations of the Black community, Ly concluded.

"A lot of Black people all throughout history have contributed and helped the economy grow, both locally and globally," he said. "Even in heavily segregated times, Black people contributed a lot to the creation of this country. If it wasn't for them, we would not be in the position we are now."

Trish Sandler, a parent of a Brittany Woods student, said it's important that difficult stories from our nation's past are heard in respect of the District's Black children and families, and also important for all children and families to fully understand the American experience.

"I think, for me, American history and the way it was taught to me as a kid, and, I think, even how it is taught today, is so one-dimensional. There's not a true representation of people's true lived experiences," Sandler said. "These ideals of equality and freedom – all of the terms that get thrown around about our American history – they really weren't meant for everyone, just a select group of people."

"We Were Not Indoctrinated"

Despite the rising controversy surrounding it, the District has not shied away from teaching Hannah-Jones' work nor talking about it. (Indeed, many Missouri public school districts, including The School District of University City, have been polled by a conservative think tank through a Freedom of Information request to determine and publicize the schools that teach "The 1619 Project." Proponents of banning the content have also asked private citizens to call school districts, investigate and report if

"The 1619 Project" is taught in particular schools.)

Well before the current controversy, Sneed introduced the New York Times' 1619 Project magazine in the 2019-20 school year to her AP English and Composition class as part of a year-long thematic study of different narratives of American history. As published in previous issues of PRIDE, students created thoughtful final projects focusing on topics about race in their lives, their local community

and beyond. They included documentaries on colorism bias in African American and American culture; the underlying issues of race and class in University City's ongoing issue of residents choosing private over public schooling; and perceptions of police among Black and white students as they grow from childhood into adulthood.

Sneed's students were also invited to write articles about their projects in The Gateway Journalism Review, a regional publication. In the summer of 2020, several students from the class went on to produce an Alexa Skill on the Black Lives Matter movement which can now be accessed by Alexa users around the globe.

"I think, for me, American history, and the way it was taught to me as a kid and, I think, even how it is taught today, is so one-dimensional. There's not a true representation of people's true lived experiences....These ideals of equality and freedom – all of the terms that get thrown around about our American history – they really weren't meant for everyone, just a select group of people."



Trish Sandler
SDUC Parent

As the controversy over the 1619 Project grew political in the past year, students in Sneed's class vocalized their support. Ian Feld, UCHS Class of 2021, now a freshman at Grinnell College, wrote an op-ed published in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch against "modern day book burning," in which he argued, "We students were not taught exclusively by it; we were not indoctrinated; but we were captivated. We examined and connected with it, criticized and scrutinized its claims, and we left our junior year of high school with a better understanding of how America feels to people whose generational histories have been left in the margins."

Jai'Den Smith, UCHS Class of 2021, now a freshman at Jackson State University, spoke about the experience of studying "The 1619 Project" to more than 100 listeners in a virtual panel discussion hosted by Women's Voices Raised for Social Justice. She was accompanied by Sneed and Superintendent Sharonica Hardin-Bartley on the panel. Sneed said Smith's remarks discounted the conservative argument that teaching authentic Black history in schools creates unhealthy and divisive tensions among students.

"Jai'Den highlighted how this study unified her and her peers," Sneed said. "She really appreciated the opportunity to talk about seemingly controversial topics with her peers in a safe space where, even if they all didn't agree, they were able to listen to others' perspectives and expand their understanding. As a result, they grow closer together through the process, even though students in the class came from very different circumstances and grew up on different sides of the city's Olive Divide."

Sneed also submitted testimony in Jefferson City against the proposed legislation to ban content taught in public schools.

"We only focus on the hard parts of history – the things that can be honestly traumatizing to students and young people, especially if we don't talk about the joy and agency of Black people over the years."



Michael Simmons
UCHS Junior

Deeper Learning: Lived Experiences

The book study group continued the conversation as participants delved with provocative questions and their own assumptions regarding race, history and established narratives about American history that disregard uglier parts of the nation's rise to a global power. Sandler said the District acted boldly to have these conversations despite statewide political pressure.

"The book study has given me a deep appreciation for U. City schools and its willingness to engage everyone in these conversations," added parent Cassie Power. "I appreciate the willingness to step into this and how inviting the sessions are, and I appreciate how the group is trying to build community. People truly care about these issues, but there aren't always spaces to think about them and talk with one another about what this means. The District is supporting students to navigate these hard histories and make meaning out of them and what to do in the future."

During the sessions, participants were asked to think about and respond to queries such as "Who gets to write and critique history?" and "How might reframing history help us understand the country's best qualities, developed over a centuries-long struggle for freedom, equality, and pluralism – a struggle whose DNA could also be traced to 1619?"

UCHS junior Michael Simmons said that discussion led him to a new understanding of principles for teaching Black history, as presented by Dr. LaGarrett King, founder and director of The Center for K-12 Black History and Racial Literacy Education at the University at Buffalo, New York.

"I especially appreciated his philosophy about teaching Black joy, because so often it seems like we only focus on the struggle," Simmons said. "We only focus on the hard parts of history – the things that can be honestly traumatizing to students and young people, especially if we don't talk about the joy and agency of Black people over the years."

Sneed said the book study group addressed all three pillars of the District's vision of Learning Reimagined. The event humanized, personalized and problematized the Black experience and offered differing perspectives on American history that challenged conventional thinking.

For Simmons, the experience also gave him hope. "There were people from all over the country. There were a lot of older white adults and older adults. It really, really gave me hope and encouraged me. I saw that these conversations aren't just being had among Black people. Other people are working to support us and the things that we are saying and wanting to do."

"The book study has given me a deep appreciation for U. City schools and its willingness to engage everyone in these conversations.... People truly care about these issues, but there aren't always spaces to think about them and talk with one another about what this means. The District is supporting students to navigate these hard histories and make meaning out of them and what to do in the future."



Cassie Power
SDUC Parent

Building Foundations: Industrial Tech Students Are Union and Career Ready

 **PROBLEMATIZE: Learning Reimagined**

By: **NANCY CAMBRIA**, *Director of Communications*

When he started his sophomore year at University City High School, Da’Shaun Calicutt knew that college was not for him. It was a confusing time as he went to school uncertain about why he was there and his future.

He knew he liked doing things with his hands. He liked putting his hands and mind to a task, “grinding it out,” and seeing it through to a final product. Then, the high school’s Counseling Office connected him with Career and Technology Education (CTE) teacher Stephen Wurst. Wurst, who is also a journeyman cabinetmaker, assured him that there was a strong pathway to a stable and well-paying career for him right out of high school.

Calicutt graduated from University City High School in January. In late February, he began an intensive, three-week pre-apprentice program at the St. Louis Carpenters Union Training Center.

“If they can get through that three-week course, they will get a guaranteed apprentice job with a large union construction company with full benefits and salaries,” Wurst said of his students. “They need carpenters so badly, they are just feeding these kids right into the industry.”

Equitable Access to Lucrative Careers

Trade unions nationwide have a shortage of skilled workers at a time when infrastructure needs repair, new housing construction and rehabilitation of properties are on the rise, and industries like tech are needing state-of-the-art facilities. In response, trade unions are doing extensive outreach with students and teachers to recruit directly out of high school.

In St. Louis, one construction company has gone a step further. In the aftermath of the death of high school student Michael Brown in Ferguson, Bob Clark, the owner of Clayco construction and a native of north St. Louis County, focused on bringing underrepresented youth into construction trades and trade unions. What resulted was the creation of the Construction Career Development Initiative (CCDI), which equitably connects high school students from mostly urban districts with union carpenters, electricians and other trade artisans, while also introducing them to the basics of the construction industry.

Calicutt, along with fellow students from the Construction Technology class, and their parents, attended a weekend Construction Academy with CCDI where they listened to industry professionals talk about their union careers. Students also went on tours of area construction projects. And, they got a flavor of what it was like to work for a big construction company. It was an eye-opener, from the \$17-an-hour starting apprentice salary down to the employee gym open to all Clayco employees.

But there was something more about the day that stuck with Calicutt. “The vice president of the company was up there, and she was speaking with us. She was telling us the difference between power and authority, and influence. You can have authority and power, but it really doesn’t

matter unless you have the influence to do something. She made a statement about if we had siblings. Well, I’m the oldest sibling. I might not have authority or the power over them but I can influence them to do things for their futures.”

Building Community and Careers in University City

The Clayco program is just one aspect of exciting employment, union and community connections being made through the high school’s CTE program. Students in the Construction Technology class have further embarked on a partnership with the University City-based nonprofit organization SHED, which stands for Sustainable Housing and Equitable Development. SHED connects volunteers with University City homeowners who need help with home improvements or maintenance to keep their houses in compliance with city codes. The work mostly takes place in the city’s Third Ward, where some residents are unable to maintain their older homes in need of repairs. University City High School students have been active members, helping with exterior improvements such as painting, landscaping, and general outside carpentry repairs.

But, in the new partnership, Construction Technology students will work with skilled union tradesmen and women to take on more complex repairs utilizing construction terms and techniques learned in their classes. This spring, students will help a University City homeowner with her unsafe back deck. With the help of partnering skilled workers, the students will demolish the old deck and build a completely new one for the resident, who just so happens to be a University City High School graduate.

“We are doing something that nobody else in St. Louis is doing,” Wurst said. “Our students are learning high-paying employment skills with professionals while also helping residents in their community.”

The District is also exploring a carpentry apprenticeship program so that students in Wurst’s classes and working on SHED job sites can earn-to-learn for a Department of Labor Apprentice Certificate in carpentry.

Jim Clarkin, a St. Louis-based union carpenter who trains apprentices, said the first year in any trade job is tough. But for those who make it through that year, the career is life-changing.

“They can always find work. They can always do something. If everything else tanks, they still have a trade that they can go back to,”



Before



After

From left to right, Industrial Technology students Dallas Hill, Elijah Merriweather, Kylin Fisher, Jordan Hudson and Da’Shaun Calicutt celebrate a job well done with the near completion of a new concession stand in University City High School’s outdoor courtyard. The students utilized design, demolition, carpentry, construction and technical skills to build the stand. Upon graduation, the students are prepared to automatically enter the St. Louis Carpenters Union pre-apprenticeship program, which leads to paid apprenticeship positions with area construction companies.

Clarkin said. “If you’re a carpenter, or in any trade, you have a skill. You can take that skill any place you want to go. You can take that anywhere in the country. You can take that anywhere in the world.”

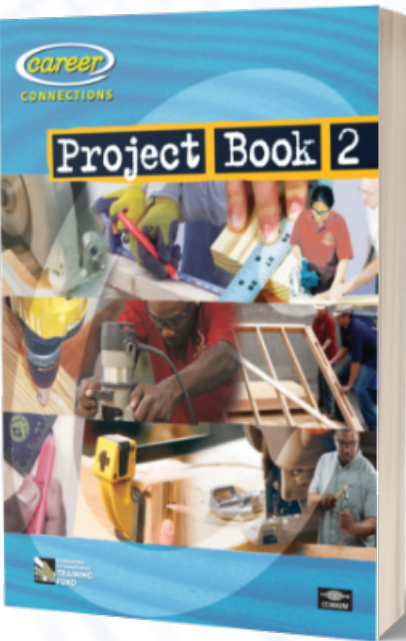
Lest one worry that the students are in over their heads, students study nationally certified training modules and have experiences in the high school that ensure the students have basic demolition, design, welding and woodworking skills. Forget the traditional book holder and cutting board projects (though beginner students build them, too). Over the past two years, the students completely demolished and properly disposed of a decaying storage shed in the high school’s Lions’ Den, a new student outdoor courtyard. They went on to design and build from scratch a complete concession stand for events held at the school. The process included laying a foundation and base, framing the structure, installing the walls and raising the roof, and then shingling the roof. Next up: gutters and rain barrels to help collect and water

the courtyard’s garden planters, also constructed by students. “Everyone was working together. It was a lot of teamwork,” Calicutt said about the concession stand. “It was like nobody was working by themselves. We were doing it together.”

Learning Reimagined

The Construction Technology program is just one of many designed under the District’s vision of Learning Reimagined in which students are college and career ready with equitable opportunities for modern, rigorous and relevant instruction and clear pathways into skilled jobs. Other district career pathways lead to health, engineering and computer programming connections that also lead to internships, trade school and future jobs.

“Schools have to be more than just feeders to college for those who
Continued on page 10



Industrial Tech

Continued from page 9


qualify or can afford it,” said Superintendent Sharonica Hardin-Bartley. “Schools must ensure that students have a vision and a way to build wealth and capital that takes them far beyond the working poor and into well-paying careers for life.” Even for students who are planning to attend college, new pathways to higher education are emerging.

Susan Hill, the District’s coordinator of PreK-12 social studies, college and career education and CTE, said career pathways also lead to a college education down the line.


“Students need multiple entry and exit points when it comes to their postsecondary education. Many employers are moving to a model of apprenticeship where they are hiring students with accelerated training and then compensating them to seek higher education so they can skill-up over the course of their careers.”

By late February, Calicutt was into his first week of the pre-apprenticeship program. It was challenging, but something he was prepared to do. He thinks he will specialize in carpentry.

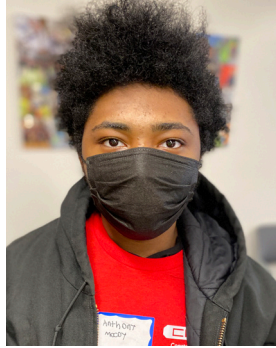
“I’ve been waiting just to graduate so I can start my career and do things,” he said. “I like working with wood. I can do carpentry for now. And I can start influencing people.”



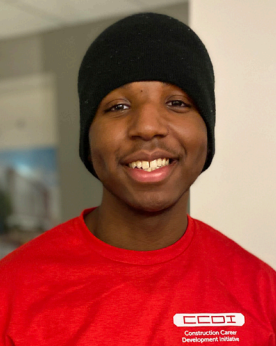
Da'Shaun Calicutt




Dallas Hill




Anthony McCoy



Jasper Primm



Adam Sanders



Roman Thomas

These University City High School students attended the Construction Career Development Initiative’s Construction Academy.

One Step At a Time: District Builds Career Pathways for All Students

The Industrial Technology program at The School District of University City is just one of several District career pathways that gives students step-by-step coursework and experiences that can set them up for well-paying, skilled jobs and apprenticeship programs right out of high school. Other pathways include Arts and Communication; Business, Management and Technology; Health Services; Human Services/ Transportation; Industrial and Engineering Technology; and Natural Resources and Agriculture.

The District is unique in Missouri because its career pathways begin in middle school and continue through high school. Pathways are woven into class electives that all students can pick and choose from, regardless of whether they believe they are college- or career-bound. The experiences give students a strong idea of what they like and dislike so that by their freshman year of high school, they have a more defined pathway and a clear course progression through high school toward a capstone – such as a required professional certificate, apprenticeship program or certification.

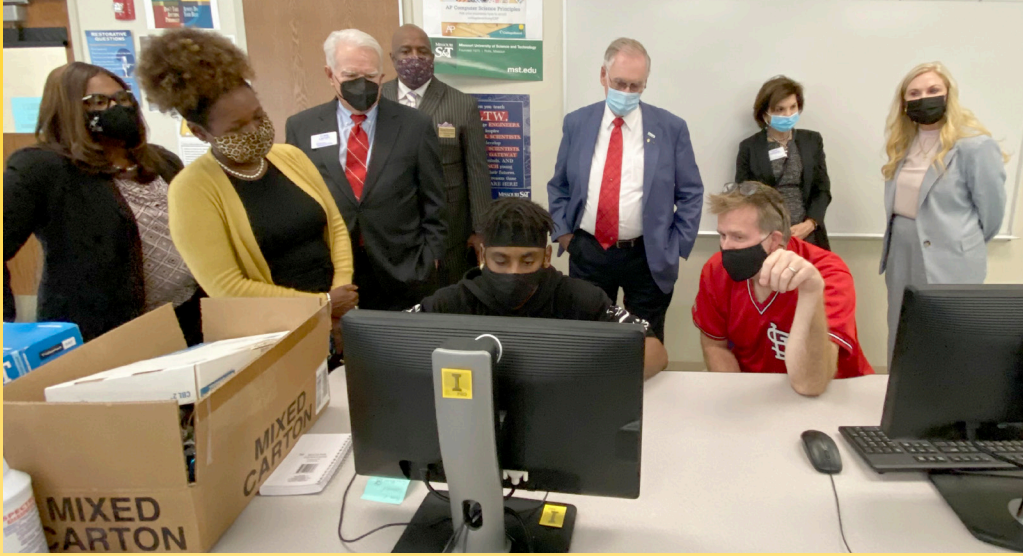
Nearly all career pathways give students an opportunity to intern or work with career professionals. For example, students in the Entrepreneurship/Business pathway typically work, manage, market and stock the high school’s Uniquely U Store. Racially diverse partners from local businesses often visit the class to help students build business plans. Students in the NAF Academies of Health Science or Engineering and Computer Science have opportunities for paid summer

internships with MasterCard, World Wide Technology and KPMG. Students interested in technology are also able to take coding and gaming building courses and can land internships with companies such as Daugherty Business Solutions, which can lead to full-paying tech jobs.

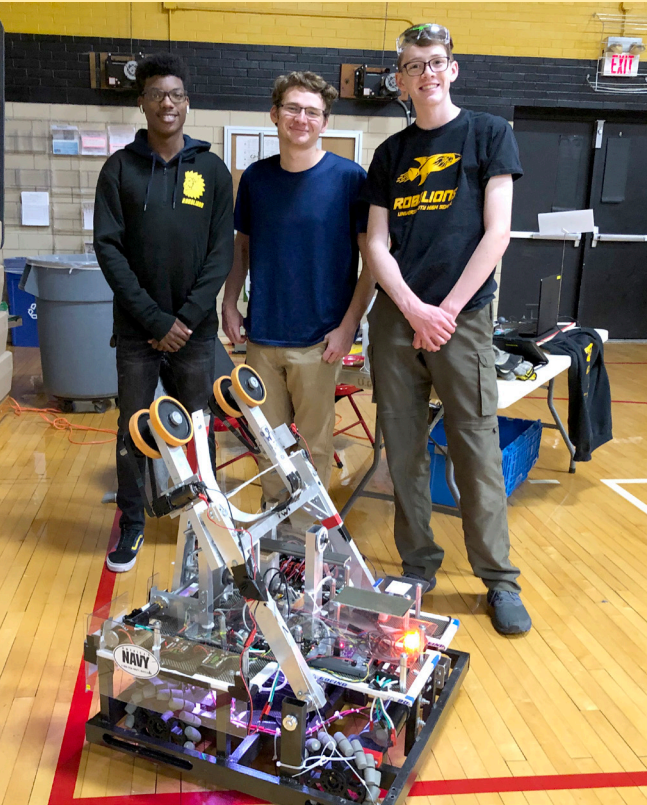
Many of the pathways overlap with involvement with NAF Academy, a nationally recognized network of education, business and community leaders who work together to ensure high school students are college, career and future ready. Students take NAF-certified courses and can participate in NAF-sponsored internships. These partnerships are particularly strong in health sciences, computer science and engineering.

Locally, students in industrial arts pursuing careers in carpentry, electrical or other building and engineering skills can join the local BUD program, which stands for Building Union Diversity.

Sometimes the opportunities are homegrown, right in University City. In addition to the District’s exciting opportunities with SHED (see main article on pages 8-10), students also have the opportunity to work toward EMT certification with the University City Fire Department. The District is also building its own technology apprenticeship program, where students will work directly with its technology provider in District jobs ending in a Department of Labor Apprenticeship Certification.



From middle school forward, all District students take electives that are stepping-stones in different career pathways that may lead to career-ready, postgraduate options. The pathways enable all students to determine interest in specific career areas whether they are college- or career-bound after graduating high school. The pathways include health sciences, computer technology, engineering, industrial technology and business.





Danny DuMaine Named University City’s Returning Artist for 2021

HUMANIZE: Learning Reimagined

Daniel “Danny” J. DuMaine, UCHS Class of ‘81 and a current music teacher at Pershing Elementary School, was named as the 2021 Returning Artist by The University City Municipal Commission on Arts & Letters.

DuMaine, who has been a professional musician for nearly 40 years, is an award-winning composer, arranger, performer and educator. While piano and saxophone are his main instruments, he also plays clarinet and flute. As the Commission’s 2021 honoree, DuMaine shared his expertise with music students in elementary, middle and high school classrooms in a series of sessions and master classes during American Education Week, Nov. 8-12, 2021.

Before graduating from University City High School, he attended University Forrest and McKnight Elementary schools, Brittany Woods Middle School and Hanley Junior High School.

“I realized my gift for music when I was in kindergarten,” DuMaine said. “My homeroom teacher played the ‘clean-up’ song on the piano. I dropped whatever was in my hands and I went to the piano to play what I just heard. That was the first time I discovered I could do that.”

Following high school, DuMaine received his Bachelor of Arts degree in music performance from Webster University in 1985. He earned a second bachelor’s degree in music education from the University of Missouri-St. Louis in 2001.

DuMaine has been with The School District of University City since 2018, teaching music to students in kindergarten through fifth grade at Pershing Elementary School. Previously, he taught choir and glee club in the St. Louis Public Schools for 18 years and was choir director for St. Alphonsus “Rock” Church beginning in 1988. For three years prior, he taught music concurrently at Washington University in St. Louis and DuBourg High School. He also served as music director for the St. Louis Rams and the McDonald’s Gospel Fest Concerts at the Fox Theatre in St. Louis.

The Commission recognized DuMaine with a public reception in the University City High School Pruitt Library on Nov. 10, 2021.

Since 1994, the Commission’s Returning Artist program enables artistically renowned graduates of University City High School to return annually to share their fields of work with District students. The goals of the program are to encourage students to investigate careers in the arts and to enrich arts programs in schools.

University City Education Foundation Awards 2022 Grants

The University City Education Foundation (UCEF) continues to be an active supporter of the District’s vision of Learning Reimagined by funding hands-on learning, activities and experiences for students.

Each year the nonprofit, independent organization raises funds and reviews grant applications from teachers, staff and students proposing unique projects.

In February, UCEF awarded more than \$14,000 in grants to 10 awardees to support their ideas and innovative approaches to education. The grants include \$2,000 to University City High School sophomore Shawn Coleman for materials to create a Makerspace Studio in the high school. The makerspace will be a collaborative workshop where students can gain practical, hands-on experience with new technologies and innovative processes to design and build projects. Other projects include:

- \$1,250 for Ready, Set, Go DJ, a project by Barbara C. Jordan staff member Wu Bakeman to train after-school students in DJ skills, equipment and musical selection.
- \$1,250 for Reading For All, a project by Barbara C. Jordan teacher Hallie Lindemann to purchase high-interest, easily decodable children’s books to support students working to read at grade level.
- \$500 for an Outdoor Classroom, a project by Pershing teacher Lora Davenport to construct areas for outdoor learning.
- \$1,250 for an outdoor Mud Kitchen, Part 1, a project by Julia Goldstein teacher Dawn Pulsipher to encourage motor skills, sensory perception, social-emotional growth and fun.
- \$1,250 for an outdoor Mud Kitchen, Part 2, a project by Julia Goldstein teacher Corrie Hamilton to stock the kitchen with tools and equipment.
- \$1,250 for Manga For Fun and Mental Flexibility, a project by UCHS teacher Kimberly Deitzler to meet the increasing student appetite for Manga, a Japanese genre of graphic novels. The collection will increase literacy skills and general interest in reading and reading for

pleasure.

- \$1,038 for Language Growth in Young Learners, a project by Julia Goldstein teacher Courtney Barnes to expand communication skills among our youngest learners through cause and effect toys, turn-taking games, sensory toys, books and other materials to help students in need of speech and language therapy.
- \$2,993 for Gizmo Online Labs, a project by University City High School science teachers to give students access to the Gizmo online STEM learning platform, a tool that improves graphing, measurement, prediction and science laboratory exploration and skills.
- \$1,250 to Morning Announcement Studio, a project by Brittany Woods Middle School teacher Lisa Hampton to improve student public speaking skills while producing a real-world morning announcement program that includes information gathering, reporting and recording the school news.

In the previous school year, UCEF supported students and families with special funding for both physical and social emotional wellness. Another \$5,000 was awarded to the District to improve and enhance its developing virtual learning program during a time when most students were learning from home due to COVID-19. Another \$6,900 in grants were awarded to individual student and teacher projects.

The UCEF is always seeking volunteers and members to serve on its board of directors. For more information, please visit the foundation’s website at www.ucityeducationfoundation.org.



Learning Continues

Continued from page 1

continued mandatory masking of all staff, students and visitors despite a difficult political climate in Missouri.

“I applaud our Board of Education for their work and their continued insistence that we follow the science and advice of our medical partners in preventing the spread of COVID-19 in our schools,” Hardin-Bartley said.

The District has so far hosted more than 25 different COVID-19 vaccination clinics and remains in partnership with Washington University School of Medicine to provide COVID-19 saliva testing for students, staff and district households. During January and early February, at the peak of the Omicron virus, the District further offered drive-up COVID-19 PCR (nasal swab) testing on Thursday evenings at University City High School to ensure all families had equitable access to testing.

Additionally, the District provided free KN95 masks for both staff and students. About 24,000 KN95 youth masks were distributed to our prekindergarten and elementary schools for our students.

Contact tracing remains a critical component of the District’s COVID-19 plan. The District currently employs a full-time nurse/contact tracer and three part-time contact tracers to track cases and close exposures and decide whether a staff member or student must quarantine. All current cases and quarantines are documented on a public COVID-19 dashboard viewable at www.ucityschools.org/coviddashboard.

As the school year progresses, there are also plans to bring back important traditions that had to be canceled or significantly changed in the past two years due to the global pandemic. Graduation for the Class of 2022 is scheduled in-person at Chaifetz Arena on May 23, 2022, with strict safety protocols in place that include proof of immunization or a recent negative COVID-19 test. The junior and senior classes also expect to move ahead with a safe prom in April – their first since the spring of 2019.

Every day, students are engaged in classrooms, outdoor school gardens, makerspaces, gymnasiums, athletics, science labs, studios, music rooms, reading rooms and on school stages, Hardin-Bartley said.

“The pandemic has not been easy in schools, but every day our students, staff, parents and caregivers put their hearts and minds together for learning in our school community. As a leader, that is incredibly rewarding to see.”



The complete Return to School Planning Guide for SY 2021-22 can be found at www.ucityschools.org/2021ReturntoSchool.

Safe, healthy, flourishing and connected

District shares a complete plan to address COVID-19

In August, the District released a 24-page Return to School Planning Guide outlining how it will strive to be safe, healthy, flourishing and connected while still dealing with a global pandemic. The guide can be found at www.ucityschools.org/2021ReturntoSchool. Here are some of the key strategies in the plan:

Safe

- Face masking is mandatory for all students, staff and visitors while in District buildings.
- Physical distancing of 3 to 6 feet will take place in all buildings at all times.
- Continuous cleaning and sanitizing of surfaces will continue.
- Parents will screen their children for COVID-19 symptoms every day prior to coming to school.

Healthy

- Vaccination of staff is mandatory.
- Vaccination of qualifying students is highly encouraged.
- COVID-19 vaccine clinics will be offered at regular intervals for our University City community.
- Free and easy saliva COVID-19 testing will be offered for all students, staff and affiliated household members in partnership with Washington University.
- The high school community will further be offered weekly COVID-19 saliva testing in partnership with Washington University.
- Intensive contact tracing in partnership with Washington University will continue throughout the District.

Flourishing

- Additional resources have been allocated for mental health and well-being of students, staff and families.
- The District continues its pledge to provide rigorous and relevant learning.
- The District has a heightened focus on racial equity and resources.
- The District will strive to maintain athletics, clubs, field trips, activities and community events in a safe and healthy way.

Connected

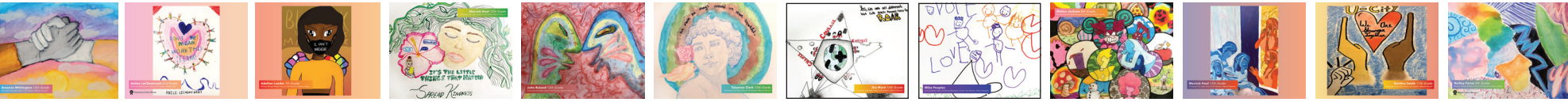
- The District will continue to maintain a COVID-19 Dashboard to track active cases and quarantines in all District buildings. (www.ucityschools.org/coviddashboard)
- The District will communicate COVID-19 statistics to all families every morning prior to the start of the school day.

U. City 2022-23 Municipal Calendar Features Student Art

Near the start of the new year, University City residents got a bright dose of creativity in their mailboxes when they received the University City Municipal Commission on Arts & Letters’ annual calendar. Thanks to a partnership with the city’s Young Artist Community Collaboration, every page of the community calendar features artwork by University City students under the theme of “Stronger Together.”

The student artwork encourages feelings of hope, compassion and encouragement. District art teachers submitted photographs of student art projects. The artwork was judged by the Arts Commissioners based on originality, message impact and visual appeal to promote and inspire strength and togetherness. The Commission selected winners in elementary, middle and high school categories, each of whom received a \$50 Blick Art Materials gift card and a spot in the calendar.

“The calendar is gorgeous. The artwork is timely, vivid and so creative,” said Superintendent Sharonica Hardin-Bartley. “Many thanks to District art teachers and the Commissioners for making this a beautiful reality.”



Pershing Elementary School Welcomes New Believe Project Literacy Lab

Continued from page 1

“When we were children, we didn’t have characters in our school libraries that looked like us,” said Julius B. Anthony, founder of the St. Louis Black Authors of Children’s Literature. “We so wanted that. We so wanted to see ourselves as the heroes and the leaders in the stories.”

Pershing’s new Literacy Lab is intended to make students of color true believers in themselves through the power of literacy. It gives all young students – particularly children of color – a chance to explore books on their own in a space of bright possibility. It was made possible by The Believe Project, an initiative of St. Louis Black Authors of Children’s Literature that supports the creation of such rooms in school buildings in urban schools in the St. Louis region. Pershing’s new Literacy Lab is the sixth such room created by The Believe Project.

Students who utilize the rooms are all called Believers – because they can see themselves in colorful and imaginative books that show that anything is possible.

“Literacy is a tool of liberation,” said Superintendent Sharonica Hardin-Bartley. “The Literacy Lab will help our students aspire for a future with amazing opportunities while also experiencing the joy of reading, which they will have for the rest of their lives.”

The concept is based on research. Studies find students read and comprehend better when they can identify with characters that look like them in the books they are reading. The room is targeted to students in grades K-3, though students in all grades at Pershing will have access to the room. Research finds that students who don’t read at grade level by third grade are less likely to complete high school or go to college. Pershing’s younger students will have access to the room for at least 90 minutes a week, and Pershing’s teachers will receive training from a literacy and equity expert at The Nine Network on how to best utilize the space with children for increased reading competency.

The opening of the room included a series of celebrations and events. On Friday, Nov. 12, Pershing students were given free copies of the yet-to-be-released children’s book, “Dream Street,” by popular author Tricia Elam Walker. The next day, about 70 people attended a grand opening celebration at the school that included music and singing by the students, a ribbon-cutting and tours of the room.



The ceremony gave the District a chance to thank The Believe Project as well as The Opportunity Trust, which provided a \$34,500 grant to cover the cost of transforming the room and teacher training. Other supporters include The Nine Network, Ready Readers, the Noble Neighbor, the Missouri History Museum, Turn the Page STL, and St. Louis Regional Literacy Association.

On Monday, Nov. 15, each classroom in the school was given tours of the room. For most teachers and students, it was the first time they had seen the labs. Many of the students were drawn to the mural of children reading and playing, some plopped into bean bag chairs, others made a beeline for the books, and others gathered around hand-held PBS reading devices. One student smiled and held his arms out, as if flying, as he stepped further into the room.

Students were also surprised to find television news cameras there. They and the room were featured on Fox2 News later that day.

The new lab is indicative of the innovative approach to learning at Pershing. In July 2020, Deitra Colquitt and Jessica Hawkins began leading the school as co-principals and have been introducing a school model that embraces the District’s focus on a human-centered approach to leadership. About 97 percent of the school’s children are students of color.

Hardin-Bartley and Julius Anthony also appeared on Fox 2 News’ “The Pulse” to talk about the Believe Project with host Jasmine Huda.

STAFF VOICE:

Deitra Colquitt, Co-Principal of Pershing Elementary School

Reprinted from the Oct. 28, 2021, edition of EdgeSurge, an online publication (www.EdSurge.com).

How an Experimental Redesign in School Leadership Saved the School and My Community

By: **DEITRA COLQUITT**

One day I was sitting in a shared office with my teammate, Jessica Hawkins. We just came from our monthly leadership meeting and were talking about the concept of distributed leadership. Distributed leadership was the model our district was moving towards under the direction of the new superintendent. Her vision was simple but revolutionary: reimagine school leadership by dismantling the hierarchy. Under this vision, principals no longer had to be “all-knowing,” and shared responsibility was encouraged, a new practice none of us had experienced before.

To understand this model better, we immersed ourselves in readings to see how we could personalize it for our school community. After a casual stroll through Twitter, Jessica and I came across “Leadership with Latoya,” a podcast that explores various topics on leadership. In one of the episodes, Latoya discussed the lessons she learned from co-principalship.

At that moment, it became clear: We could redesign Pershing Elementary School by implementing a co-principalship model.

It seemed radical at first, but I felt hopeful and invigorated to try something new. I turned to Jessica and said, “Why not us? How could we lose with the power vested in us from our superintendent and the support of our district’s teachers, staff, and parents?”

The decision to pursue this new model couldn’t have come at a better time. My school needed a radical change to increase academic achievement and enrollment and revitalize the sense of pride, confidence and joy in the school and our surrounding community. With the right drivers in place, our school would become one that serves students and families through education, community partnerships and family empowerment.

Ultimately, the plan we created would become a beacon of hope, love and connection for our school community.

Coming from a Community of Excellence

Despite my wildest ambitions, I never intended to become a school principal; my goal was to serve in the community that shaped me into the person I am today. Coincidentally, I happen to be an alum of the same school district where I now serve as co-principal. So, as you can see, my desire to serve this community is personal.

I know firsthand some of the experiences that my students will have because of their ZIP code. The School District of University City is minutes from Ferguson and located on Delmar Boulevard, one of the most racially divided areas in St. Louis, Missouri. At the same time, my school district has produced notable graduates who went on to make an impact in the world:

- Dr. Hadiyah-Nicole Green, a medical physicist that developed a cancer treatment using laser-activated nanoparticles;
- Ambassador Virginia E. Palmer, an American diplomat and former United States ambassador to Malawi;
- Wiley Price, an award-winning photojournalist; and,
- Tennessee Williams, a playwright and screenwriter who wrote “A Streetcar Named Desire.”

Needless to say, the 267 students in my school are a part of an elite group.



Deitra Colquitt

As a child, I loved being at school. I can remember the names of all my teachers, and to this day, if I run into one of them, I am embraced with the same love I felt in elementary school. My school was unique because the teachers stayed in the school systems for years, and generations of families had the same teacher; knowing that filled

me with a sense of safety and stability. I saw models of excellence daily and was pushed to be the best version of myself. I cannot express how grateful I am for every teacher who supported my development, and these experiences undoubtedly informed my practice as an educator.

I recall a conversation I had when I was substitute teaching before becoming a co-principal. During recess duty, another teacher approached me. During the conversation, she learned that I was an alum of the school. Then, out of nowhere, she said:

“You know Daniel Boone was always the lowest-performing school in the District.”

I was in shock. Her words felt like a sucker punch to my soul. I immediately felt the need to defend my experience, but at that moment, I didn’t have the words to respond. Finally, I managed to say, “Really?! I didn’t know that.”

That conversation has played out in my mind ever since that day and impacted what

I previously thought about my school community. I had no clue, and for that, I was thankful.

Subconsciously, it fueled my desire to work in the same district that educated and served me. Therefore, I felt it was important to shift the narrative for our students today and redesign our school with community and collective leadership in mind.

Staying True to the Process

There was no roadmap to the future my fellow co-principal and I were trying to create. Thus, we had no choice but to trust the process, trust each other, and lean on the devoted members of our community to bring this redesign to life.

After finishing the first year of our school redesign, Jessica and I found different ways to maximize collaborations with students and families to build a dream team. Fortunately, we had some notable wins along the way:

Family Engagement: First, Jessica and I increased family engagement and involvement by focusing on customer service. Throughout the school, Jessica and I conducted community think tanks. We invited five to seven families to discuss their hopes and dreams for their children. Upon our initial invite, some families were initially surprised that we asked for their input. They had never been invited to participate in school decision-making processes in this way. What should have been a 30-minute conversation lasted hours. We learned that our entire school community benefits when we expand the community we serve and not just the students themselves.

Student Input: Towards the end of the school year, we began conducting empathy interviews with students. Students shared their feelings on a wide variety of topics. One student shared, “We need a rap battle club so that students don’t have to fight.” Rap battles?! What a great

Continued on page 15

STUDENT VOICE:

Marley Gardner, UCHS Class of 2022

A student op-ed reprinted with permission from the U-Times, The University City High School Student Newspaper

If You Love U. City, Send Your Kids to the Schools

By: **MARLEY GARDNER**

“Where did you go to high school?” If you’re from St. Louis, you’ve probably been asked this more times than you can count. It’s how people gauge what your socioeconomic status may be, the type of community you grew up in, and who you may know. Each school, private or public, has its own set of stereotypes for people to use for judgment purposes.

U. City is not exempt from these stereotypes. In the 1950s and 1960s, it was known for its large Jewish demographic, and as that has shifted, so have the ideas people hold about the school. Often, when white people ask a white U. City student where they go to high school, it is met with looks of concern and the same not-so-subtle racist and classist remarks.

“Do you feel safe?”

“Are there other people like you?”

“What about the test scores?”

These examples barely even scratch the surface. The judgment becomes apparent as soon as a white student says they go to U. City. White people are full of concern and negative ideas of the school we love. They don’t know about the fiercely devoted community of advocates, the talented artists and the endlessly supportive staff. They also don’t know about the plethora of opportunities available to students like the Early College program, the EMT program or the robotics team. The reason they don’t know this is simple: They don’t care to try.

These relatives, family friends and strangers are not the only ones who think like this. Oftentimes, it’s the same community members who claim they love University City so much who refuse to send their kids to our schools. It’s no secret that the demographics of our schools don’t align with those of our community. In fact, University City as a whole is 55.03% white and 35.72% Black as of 2021, according to World Population Review. However, according to U.S. News, our school itself is 11% white and 81.4% Black. So what about all these other white people in University City who claim they love our Delmar Loop, parks and rich culture?

Many people in University City benefit from the community, but aren’t invested in it. They enjoy Black-owned businesses like De Palm Tree and eyeseeene, spend hours at city council meetings, and boast about how diverse their neighborhoods are, yet they refuse to send their children to University City schools.

One of the main arguments against U. City is our test scores. It’s no

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secret that they’re lower than where they “should” be. Every

year when EOC (end-of-course) testing rolls around, students are flooded with reminders about it. But it’s 2022, and if you haven’t heard, there are countless points about how standardized testing is not only a poor way of measuring intelligence, but racially biased. The most common arguments about it are simple: placing too much pressure on students causes issues with stress and anxiety, testing poorly accommodates different learning styles and disabilities, and it allows testing corporations to monetize learning.

However, the racial bias in standardized

testing is an even bigger issue, especially at U. City. Not only were Advanced Placement (AP) tests and the SAT pioneered by a eugenicist, but a lot of questions have a cultural barrier. To better understand a cultural barrier, a former Black English teacher at U. City explained a testing experience from her childhood. The question was about sledding (which is learned predominantly as a part of white culture) and she was so caught up in trying to understand what sledding was that she lost valuable time. This might seem inconsequential to someone who’s never experienced it, but imagine every single non-white student struggling on several questions like this; it really starts to make a noticeable difference.

Standardized test scores is generally the “safer” argument people make against U. City, but oftentimes the more taboo topics like drugs are what people are actually alluding to. It’s no secret, but this is an issue with teenagers everywhere. Spending thousands of dollars a year to send your kids to private schools won’t protect them from this reality.

These are just a couple of the arguments and stereotypes one is bound to hear about U. City, but they don’t hold up. We’re not a bad school because our test scores aren’t as high as neighboring districts like Clayton and Ladue. We’re not a bad school because not all of our students go to college. And we’re not a bad school because we’re predominantly Black. We’re a school full of future artists, athletes, activists, musicians, entrepreneurs, doctors and endless other possibilities.

Just because you live in U. City doesn’t mean you have to send your kids to the schools, but it does mean you need to examine the stereotypes you have about it.



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