

Wellness Spaces Lead the Way in Restorative Practices

HUMANIZE: Learning Reimagined

Over the past three years, The School District of University City has worked to establish Wellness Spaces in our schools, K-12th grade. These rooms are made to provide students with the opportunity to engage in a personally imposed form of “time out,” for reflection and emotional recalibration.

Executive Director of Student Services and Innovation Gary Spiller says the Wellness Spaces have become an essential mental health intervention, particularly on the middle and high school levels.

“We have Wellness Spaces established in five schools, with a goal to include them in all schools.” He added, “Our rooms feature custom artwork designed to be both soothing and inspiring. Trained staff are on hand to welcome students in to rest, reflect and regroup when their emotions are running high or when they are feeling overwhelmed.”

Many of today’s students are finding it hard to navigate the pressures of social media, national and local news, bullying and family. Add to that the effects of COVID-19, which are still lingering even four years after we were thrust into the matrix of quarantine, isolation, immunization and masking. Students were forced to the sidelines with no direct access to the support systems they had come to lean, on including athletic and social interactions with friends. For some, this lost time proved challenging.

The National Center for School Mental Health outlines a number of interventions and supports that have proven effective in preventing and

“We are focusing on family engagement in all that we do including opening the lines of communication. Face-to-face and heart-to-heart, we are making a difference for our students.”

Gary Spiller
Executive Director of
Student Services and Innovation



“This space is one where students can come and talk about issues they may have, and we can give different ideas and strategies to help them through those times,” says Well-Being Specialist Darren Brooks (second from the left) who helps lead the UCHS Wellness Space in room 204B. Joining him (from left to right) are UCHS seniors Kodie Gordon, Nelson Salame and junior Zoe Binion.

treating mental health issues. That includes universal interventions meant to positively impact the entire school population.

“Mental health drives attendance, positive behavior, academic performance and extracurricular participation. On the other hand, we have all seen the impact of untreated mental health struggles play out in the news media in the form of school and community violence and in the rise in teen self-harm,” says Spiller. “Students are in school for eight hours of the weekday, which makes it important that we are able to provide the support they need, when they need it. But, we cannot do it alone.” He added, “We are focusing on family engagement in all that we do, including opening the lines of communication. Face-to-face and heart-to-heart. We are making a difference for our students.”

The District has trained social workers in all schools and access to therapists as needed. Training encourages staff to recognize, watch for and report any concerning behavior so that we enact restorative measures.

St. Louis American Salute to Excellence: Merrill Named SEMO Counselor of the Year

PERSONALIZE: Learning Reimagined

Southeast Missouri State University selected University City High School’s Dual Credit and Early College School Counselor Kimberly Merrill to be recognized as its Counselor of the Year at the St. Louis American’s 2024 Salute to Excellence in Education Gala.

“Kim exemplifies excellence in all aspects of her role. She is unwaveringly committed to supporting our students’ personal and academic growth,” Superintendent Sharonica Hardin-Bartley said. “Kim does whatever it takes to meet our students’ needs. From college/career advising, supporting the testing process, serving as a trusted confidant, she shows up for students and families in meaningful ways.”

For Merrill, one of the most important aspects of being a school counselor is having a strong sense of support and community. “The biggest piece for us – to be able to create the college and career culture – is having leadership and support. Our superintendent, principal, assistant and associate principals allow us to go out and train; they encourage professional development. It has all been very helpful to bring everybody to the table and to see what the needs are.”

Merrill added, “I’m a community and village person. I believe in the village, and we have a village here to support our students. That’s a game changer.”



Kimberly Merrill
University City High School

Message From Our Superintendent of Schools



Sharonica L. Hardin-Bartley
Superintendent

Greetings University City Students, Families and Staff,

I always like to draft my message around the amazing activities and teachings happening in our schools every day but, today, my heart tells me to reflect on the Sept. 4 shooting at Apalachee High School in Winder, Georgia. I want to explore with you the “aftershocks” of the unconscionable acts of a 14-year-old that resulted in multiple injuries and the loss of four lives.

Education Week reports that there have been 30 school shootings this year that resulted in injury or death. School violence, anywhere, affects school communities everywhere. Almost immediately after the Georgia incident, educators started feeling the aftershocks as hoax threats swept across the country. According to the Missouri School Board Associations’ (MoSBA) Council for School Safety, hoax threats tripled in Missouri, resulting in the detainment or arrest of more than a dozen children, including at least two locally, thus far.

The takeaway for our young people is that hoax threats are not jokes, they are crimes. In University City, we continue to work hard to get that message across to students, family and community. Our safety response is simple – we will always put the safety of students and staff first, in all that we do. We will always take threats seriously until they are fully discredited by law enforcement. Those who choose to engage in this behavior, wasting hundreds of thousands of dollars in resources, should understand that there are consequences beyond the school district.

“If you see something, say something,” was the title of a New York City Transit campaign following the Sept. 11,

2001, terrorist attacks. Today, it is still our best lesson for ensuring safety in schools. Call the police, the school or our district Tip Line (314-290-4444). **Report the threat, but do not repost** as this can also send the police or even the FBI to your door.

We are reinforcing these messages not only through teaching, but also through upgrades on safety districtwide. We are fortunate to have our University City Police Department (UCPD) as partners to help us act on threats, analyze the intelligence information, advise and address concerns. If need be, they can also call upon their network of offices for a coordinated response.

My hope is that sharing what I can about our safety practices and protocols will help give you more peace of mind.

Our children deserve to feel safe at

school, and we are doing our best to reinforce that. Now I will end this message the way I had wanted to start – by telling you that I am in our schools every day, and our students and teachers are truly amazing. Despite the recent challenges, our staff reports that they remain excited and focused on learning and teaching.

For our part, our school board and administration are doing all we can to encourage brilliance and pursuit of excellence while building a safety network that helps push other concerns away.

In Service of Our Children,

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



Board of Education Spotlight



Bridget McDougall
Board of Education Director

Greetings from the Board of Education!

On Oct. 26, 2024, the well-being and joy of our students and staff will be on parade (literally!) as the annual homecoming parade makes its way west on Delmar Blvd. towards University City High School. Those who witnessed last year’s parade will well remember Jackson Park students decked out in gold, led by their new principal, Mr. Triplett, in a choreographed dance routine fit for the Grammys. You could almost hear the other school principals thinking, “Oh, it’s like that?” and immediately getting to work with their students on this year’s parade.

University City students, teachers, staff and administrators have a love and enthusiasm for the District that is a joy to witness; even if you do not currently have a student(s) in the District, we’d love for you to show up and be a part of the community joy. Engaging with others in the community is the best way to learn about our schools, and at the parade you will find students, teachers, staff, administrators, board members and parents who would

love to talk to you about our love of U. City schools!

Speaking of community, if you aren’t familiar with the many local and nonprofit organizations with whom we partner as a school district, I highly recommend you visit the community partners list on our district website. Aligning with our vision of Learning Reimagined, which includes rigorous, relevant, modern learning experiences, these partnerships provide lasting experiences for our students both inside and outside the classroom. From arts enrichment through the Center for Creative Arts (COCA), to math and science program grants awarded through the Bayer Fund, to urban agriculture programs with Gateway Greening, our district is rich in partnerships that benefit our students and community, and for that, we are grateful.

See you at the parade!

Sincerely,

Bridget McDougall
Director

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

School Board Elections Public Notice of Filing

The School District of University City encourages any qualified person interested in running for a position on the school board to file to be a candidate in the April 8, 2025, election, where there will be two, three-year term positions available for voter approval.

Date and process for filing is to be announced. Interested persons should visit www.ucityschools.org/BOE or contact Executive Manager for the Board of Education Lakesha Boyce at (314) 290-4002 or lboyce@ucityschools.org.

Congratulations to the 2024-25 U. City Teachers and Support Person of the Year

PERSONALIZE: Learning Reimagined

This year, The School District of University City introduced separate categories for elementary and secondary education Teacher of the Year recognitions in addition to Educational Support Person of the Year for the 2024-25 school year.

Erin Bratkowski, an English Language Arts teacher at University City High School is the 2024-25 U. City Secondary-level Teacher of the Year. Jennifer Hutchinson, a fourth-grade teacher at Jackson Park Elementary School, is the 2024-25 U. City Elementary-level Teacher of the Year. Christine Parks, a social worker at Jackson Park Elementary School, is the 2024-25 U. City Educational Support Person of the Year.

“We are delighted to recognize these educators for their tremendous impact on the lives of U. City students, families and staff,” Superintendent Sharonica Hardin-Bartley said. The District surprised the winners at their schools with balloons, bouquets and posters and celebrated them at the District’s annual U Are Special event back in May.

At Opening Day for Staff, awardees were given the opportunity to share some words of encouragement. “Think of all the amazing educators that you’ve shared spaces with, think of your students and their families, and think about the impact you want to leave in your classrooms and buildings each day,” said Hutchinson. “Allow that to be the driving force behind an asset-based mindset that creates excellent and engaging classroom experiences in spaces where our students are loved, educated and valued.”

If there is a teacher or educational support person you would like to nominate for one of these awards, please submit your nomination through www.ucityschools.org/TOYNom. The nomination deadline is the last Friday in January.



Surrounded by District and school administrators, UCHS English Language Arts teacher Erin Bratkowski was surprised to learn she was selected the 2024-25 U. City Secondary-level Teacher of the Year.



Her fourth-graders cheer as Jackson Park teacher Jennifer Hutchinson learns she is the 2024-25 U. City Elementary-level Teacher of the Year.



Christine Parks, Jackson Park social worker and the 2024-25 U. City Educational Support Person of the Year, is shown here speaking to all staff on Opening Day 2024.

District to Host Student Mock Elections in Preparation for 2024 General Election

PROBLEMATIZE: Learning Reimagined

“Educating our students about the democratic process is one of our most important responsibilities as educators,” said Susan Hill, Ed.D., Curriculum and Instruction coordinator. “The upcoming general election, Nov. 5, 2024, is an opportunity for our students and teachers to study an election that is historic in many ways, from the politicians vying for a chance to make history to the important issues at stake.”

On Oct. 24 and 25 (Thursday and Friday), The School District of University City will host a districtwide “mock election.” Mock elections are powerful teaching practices that encourage students, K-12, to cast their votes at school. “Prior to casting their votes, it is important that we educate students about the voting process, the issues and the candidates – allowing them to learn all they can, draw their own conclusions and vote their conscience,” Hill said.

Hill encourages parents to take their students to the polls when they go to vote. “Studies show that when students accompany adults to the polls, they get a chance to see the process in action, which goes beyond the classroom in offering an important lesson in personal responsibility.

“In these divided political times,” said Hill, “some educators may be inclined to avoid or outright ignore the role we play in helping

young people learn about the upcoming presidential election and other important statewide and national issues on the ballot.” She added, “In University City, we are choosing to empower our teachers to lean into discussions with students and to educate them on the power of their voices and the importance of their votes. That’s the U. City Way.”

University City mock election timing will vary by school. More information will be provided by your school and curriculum team.

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

STEAM EXPO

Title 1 Sponsored

Adding the ARTS to Science, Technology, Engineering and Math turns STEM into STEAM

Thursday, Nov. 14, 2024
6 - 7:30 p.m.

Brittany Woods Middle School
8125 Groby Road (63130)

For more information, visit www.ucityschools.org/STEAMExpo

ALUM SPOTLIGHT:

International Peace Run Torchbearers Stop at UCHS



Volunteer runners, who took turns carrying the “peace torch,” were enthusiastically greeted by UCHS and Jackson Park elementary students. These runners included representatives from all over the world.

Richard “Dick” Weiss Honored as Torchbearer in 2024 Peace Run

HUMANIZE: Learning Reimagined

On May 13, the newsman became the news as UCHS Alum Richard “Dick” Weiss (Class of 1969) joined the elite group of people to serve as torchbearers in the annual “Sri Chinmoy Oneness-Home Peace Run.” Named in honor of the late visionary, the Peace Run emphasizes the contribution that everyone can make to create a more harmonious world.

About a dozen volunteer runners took turns carrying the torch, symbolic of those held by the likes of Nelson Mandela and Mother Teresa. The team started out from New York in April, and on that rainy day in May, they stopped at University City High School (UCHS). The welcoming committee included UCHS and Jackson Park Elementary students who were joined by University City firefighters. As each runner spoke, students immediately noticed the accents which were representative of all parts of the globe and added a lyrical chorus to songs and games about the importance of the world coming together for discussions of peace.

The honoree, Weiss, is the visionary behind the River City Journalism Fund (RCJF). The non-profit’s roots go back to the unrest in Ferguson in August 2014. The award-winning reporter, editor and writing coach has more than four decades of experience in St. Louis media.

“We are excited to honor Dick and the team at RCJF for their unique vision and dedication to educating and providing opportunities for local journalists, helping news consumers gain a better understanding of news reporting and guide the media to more equity in reporting,” said Nayana



Hein, run coordinator and UCHS alumna. “They understand that we achieve peace through understanding.”

Even in high school, social justice was Weiss’ passion. “I worked at the St. Louis Post-Dispatch for 30 years and covered a lot of stories, edited a lot of stories, on social justice issues,” Weiss said. “When I left the Post, I wanted to continue doing that, so my wife Sally Altman and I created this non-profit; we called it, “Before Ferguson, Beyond Ferguson.” The idea was to find writers in our community who would write about social justice issues and then provide that material free to the hard pressed media in St. Louis.

“The press today,” Weiss added, “can’t cover everything the way it used to, and those donations, those stories, began to add up and we began to get more funds. Then along came a gentleman named Chris Keating who ran the Riverfront Times, and he wanted to get into the nonprofit world. Instead of competing, we merged, creating the River City Journalism Fund, and I guess that is the spirit of the peace run.” (Keating later sold the Riverfront Times and is no longer connected to RCJF.)

To the children in the audience, Weiss said, “You can be a success in your life in anything you want to do...if you have character, passion and intelligence. And, I am pretty sure I have already seen a demonstration of intelligence all across this arena, and character is wanting to do right (in this world).”

According to Hein, there are peace runs and relays across the globe. The events across the U.S. are expected to connect with 50,000 children in 1,000 cities and towns along the route. Never has such a show of solidarity been more important than it is today.

“We are not going to change the world overnight,” Hein said. “But we must all do something. The visibility of the runners are external reminders, but it’s what we feel in our hearts and minds that really matters.”

Volunteer runners from across the globe started in New York and made a stop in University City on May 13, 2024. More than 50,000 students in 1,000+ cities joined in songs of world peace.



UCHS Alum Richard “Dick” Weiss (Class of 1969) was honored as a torchbearer in the “Sri Chinmoy Oneness-Home Peace Run.”



UCHS Alum Renowned Filmmaker Bob Gale Takes Students on a Trip, “Back to the Future!”

PERSONALIZE: Learning Reimagined

It was Sept. 17 and, for the first time in 20 years, Bob Gale, University City High School (UCHS) Class of 1969 alum and 1999 Hall of Fame inductee, returned to his alma mater to take students back to the time when he and Robert Zemeckis were first green-lighted for the movie “Back to the Future” (BTF). Central character Marty McFly (Michael J. Fox) traveled back in time to meet his teenage dad and right some wrongs to help him do better for himself and his family in the future.

Despite years of rejections from the heads of major studios, the movie that debuted in 1985 resonated with audiences worldwide and opened the door for two sequels, and now, 30 years later, a musical that has just finished a run at St. Louis’ Fabulous Fox Theatre.

UCHS sophomore India Foote was among the students who watched the movie before the Academy Award nominated filmmaker took the stage to the delight of fans old and new. Foote was especially excited as she prepared to join Gale on stage for an interview. She said, “I have seen (BTF) multiple times over the years, including with my grandpa, but my best friend never saw it. She said she probably wouldn’t have watched it on her own, but she saw it and loved it!” Foote added, “My mom and sister were super excited for me because they knew I loved the movie. It was great getting to meet (Gale) to say, ‘hi,’ and talk face-to-face!”



UCHS Associate Principal Ernest Carter presents Bob Gale with a token of the school’s appreciation. Gale was excited to receive a Brittany Woods jersey, the inspiration behind the Hill Valley Bulldogs sports team in the Back to the Future franchise. This is just one of several references to U. City in the films.

Gale shared how he was influenced by experiences growing up in University City, including the lightning strikes of inspiration for writing BTF. “In third grade, students really liked my stories.” Gale said he was inspired to keep writing as he moved on to Brittany Middle (as it was called then) and then to UCHS. After first enrolling as an engineering student at Tulane, he eventually transferred to the University of Southern California Film School, where his career began to take shape.

Following a local flood in 1980, Gale was visiting his parents when his dad (Mark Gale, UCHS Class of 1940) invited him to retrieve anything he wanted to “hold onto” from the flooding basement. Gale said, “I’m digging through this stuff, and one of the things that’s in there was my dad’s high school yearbook. I discovered my dad was the president of his graduating class! I didn’t have any idea that this was the case.” Staring back at him was the face of a serious young man he barely recognized. “I start thinking...if I had gone to high school with my dad, would I have been friends with him? When I thought of that, I thought – that is a great idea for a movie. So that is how the idea of ‘Back to the Future’ came about.”

Even as a super-fan, Foote had no idea about the University City Easter eggs included in the film until Gale pointed out the name of the McFly subdivision, Lion Estates, and the Hill Valley Bulldogs sports team (Brittany Middle). “Back to the Future’s origins are all tied up with University City High School,” said Gale.

Gale’s experience included another message, “The most important thing I can talk about is rejection. They don’t teach you about rejection in school. Rejection, which is clearly a theme of ‘Back to the Future,’ is something we all have to deal with.” Gale noted that the BTF screenplay was rejected 42 times. “When you get rejected, remember that number, 42



Students India Foote and Casey Beard (right), who are part of the Yearbook and Newspaper Club, had the opportunity to sit down with alum Bob Gale (left) and discuss the filmmaking industry.

– if you believe in it, you have to keep going.”

Now, years after the third BTF hit theaters, the musical adaptation just finished a run at the Fabulous Fox Theatre. “It took surprisingly longer to get the musical made than it did to get the movie made. The idea was actually formulated by Bob’s (director Robert Zemeckis) wife, Leslie, who, after seeing ‘The Producers,’ suggested that we make a ‘Back to the Future, musical. I started working on it in earnest in 2006, when we went to composer Alan Silvestri and songwriter Glen Ballard. The songs that they wrote are still in the show.”

Now, 39 years later, BTF gives hope for that type of love and acceptance and how what we do today influences our futures. He advised: “Go to the St. Louis Art Museum, go to the Missouri History Museum, go to the Missouri Transportation Museum – don’t spend all your time on social media, because you’re probably not going to be inspired by posting on Facebook. Leave yourself open for it (inspiration).

“Let’s think about all the serendipity involved in the existence of BTF.” Gale asked, “What if there hadn’t been bad weather in St. Louis and the basement hadn’t flooded? I never would have seen it (his father’s yearbook)...It’s really important in life to leave yourself open, to have different experiences and expose yourself to stuff, because you never know what that proverbial bolt of lightning will strike.”



» Parade Route:

- Starts from the west end of the Delmar Loop by the University City Public Library
- West on Delmar
- North on Hanley
- East on Balson
- Ends at flagpole at UCHS

#UCHSHC24

THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF UNIVERSITY CITY
WWW.UCITYSCHOOLS.ORG

Register to participate:
ucityschools.org/HocoParade24



U. City Night Out D

Combined Back-to-School Rally and National Night Out Brought Fa

With the addition of the Starbucks ALL.IN. Community Program, the 2024 annual U. City Night Out & Back-to-School Rally generated a supersized, or “venti,” crowd, with more than 3,000 people joining in the fun on Aug. 6.

Co-sponsored by The School District of University City (SDUC) and the University City Police Department (UCPD), the community block party far surpassed the initial goals of providing school supplies, family meal support and community engagement. The UCPD’s Color Guard and bagpiper kicked off festivities, followed by 9-year-old Evie McNece, whose rendition of “The Star-Spangled Banner” stole the show.

UCPD officers and firefighters teamed up to grill hundreds of hot dogs and share Fitz’s sodas. They offered safety tips and fire truck tours and took the opportunity to introduce more families to important community resources.

According to Gary Spiller, SDUC’s executive director of Student Services, “We had record attendance, which means more of our families received what they needed to start school. Thanks to our major partners Starbucks, KidSmart, Operations Food Search and Schnuck Markets, Inc., we distributed 1,500 backpacks of school supplies, more than 1,000 hot dogs, 3,500 cake pops and 1,000 full family meal bags.” He added, “We are especially grateful to Refresh Community Church and Starbucks’ store managers for delivering more than 75 volunteers for the event.”

“We estimate that, in addition to those who attended the event, thousands more were positively impacted,” said Starbucks Project Specialist Jeff Dyson-Perkins. He added, “Our team of store managers were excited to see the ‘All.In.’ community partnership take shape and how the community responded to all of the hard work and planning.”

Capt. Dana Morley of the UCPD has led U. City’s National Night Out efforts for years and says this

year was one of the best. “The UCPD and the District once again joined forces to create this year’s National Night Out & Back-to-School Rally event, and I believe this year was the biggest event yet. The combination of numerous vendors, free school supplies, crime prevention information and lots of fantastic food and refreshments drew an even larger crowd than at previous events.” Morley, who is retiring from the force this year after 27 years of service, says, “It is my hope that future events continue to draw even more members of the University City community together for a great night of fun, entertainment and information.”

The Starbucks Village, which included the support of many community partners, was held inside Jackson Park Elementary School. In the Village, students could get free Great Clips haircuts and styles, play games with the Magic House or hit the “Fit Boutique” for books, new shoes, clothes and a backpack full of school supplies. A student Immunization Clinic was coordinated by District Lead Nurse Pat Wilson and a team of school nurses with support from the Visiting Nurse Association.

Next year’s U. City Night Out & Back-to-School Rally date is set for Tuesday, Aug. 5, 2025! Watch for details for next year’s celebration including booth registration at www.ucityschools.org/NNOBTSR.

To watch a recap video of this year’s event, visit www.ucityschools.org/NNOBTSR2024Video or scan the QR code below.



raws Record Crowd!

families Together



Thank You to...

- All Nations Church
 - America SCORES
 - Archwell Health
 - Behavioral Health Response
 - Better Family Life
 - Big Brothers Big Sisters of Eastern Missouri
 - Big Smile Photo Booth
 - Books for STL Kids
 - Bubble Bus
 - Cherished Youth
 - Cintas Corporation
 - Circus Kaput
 - College Bound STL
 - Costco
 - Dignity Period
 - Family Court of St. Louis County
 - For the 3rd WARD Plan
 - Freddie Ford Family Foundation
 - Fitz's Rootbeer
 - Gateway LUG
 - Girl Scouts Of Eastern Missouri
 - Grace United Methodist Church
 - Home Depot
 - Human Art
 - INN FROM THE STORM
 - KidSmart
 - Kiwanis Club of University City
 - Legal Services of Eastern Missouri
 - Magic House
 - MERS Goodwill
 - Missouri Army National Guard
 - Missouri Central Bus Company
 - Missouri Cyclones
 - New Era Dance
 - New Era Productions Dance Academy
 - Olive Orthodontics
 - Operation Food Search
 - PCHAS Mentoring
 - Preferred Family Healthcare
 - PreventEd
 - Principals and School Teams!
 - Purina
 - Raising Cane's Chicken Fingers
 - Refresh Community Church
 - Salvation Army
 - Schnucks
 - Smart Kids, Inc.
 - Sports Clips
 - St. Louis Area Food Bank
 - St. Louis Diaper Bank
 - St. Louis Voter Registration Group
 - Starbucks ALL.IN. Community Team
 - The Salvation Army-Midland Division
 - The Spirits New Northside Drumline
 - UCHS AA
 - UCHS Air Force JROTC
 - UCHS Athletics Department
 - UCHS Cheer Team, Golden Girls and Marching Band
 - UCHS Student Council
 - University City Education Foundation
 - University City Fire Department
 - University City Police Department
 - University City Public Library
 - Unleashing Potential
 - Unstoppable U Step Team
 - US Bank
 - Vision for Children at Risk-System of Care
 - VROOM/LUME Institute
 - Weinhardt
 - Women's Voices Raised for Social Justice
 - Wyman Center TOP & TCP
 - YWCA Head Start/Early Head Start
- Plus U. City Schools Staff, Administration and Board of Education



UCHS Hosts Special Olympics

PERSONALIZE: Learning Reimagined

In May, The School District of University City (SDUC) had the privilege of hosting the Special School District's (SSD) annual Special Olympics for students from 22 St. Louis area schools. Events were organized and held at University City High School (UCHS). UCHS Student Council students served as ambassadors and were partnered with students and teachers/coaches to ensure each Olympian had a wonderful experience. SDUC Superintendent of Schools Sharonica Hardin-Bartley helped open the ceremony by welcoming neighboring districts and joining with a student Olympian to officially launch the games.

According to SSD, the Special Olympics is open to students receiving SSD services. It provides sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports in order to help students with



Approximately 225 UCHS students volunteered as buddies, track and field workers, victory village game workers and concessions during the May 2024 SSD Special Olympics.

opportunities develop "...fitness, courage and friendships with other athletes as well as non-disabled peers."

The program also highlights the importance of physical education. Whether students decide to compete, announce the events or take part in related fun activities, the SSD Special Olympics provides every student with the opportunity to shine.



YOUR VOICE
YOUR CHILDREN

OUR COMMUNITY

PORTRAIT OF A GRADUATE



Academically Prepared

- Literacy
- Numeracy
- Media Information



Mindful of Self

- Persistent
- Self-Aware
- Self-Advocate



Innovative Problem Solver

- Curious
- Creative
- Critical Thinker



Mindful of Others

- Empathetic
- Collaborative
- Community Engagement



Learning Reimagined

Growing Together: Sharing Student Studies in Sustainability

PROBLEMATIZE: Learning Reimagined

Students studying sustainability at Brittany Woods Middle School (BWMS) hosted the District's annual "Growing Together" event this past spring. Growing Together was started in 2020 by an earlier class of students, under the supervision of their middle school sustainability teacher Anne Cummings, who wanted to plant the seeds of environmental responsibility and outreach to the community in support of personal and community gardens. The annual event, which remains entirely student-led, continues to expand. Each year, students give away free seedlings while showcasing what they are growing and producing in class.

According to Beverly Velloff, the District's PreK-12 Math/STEM and PreK-5 Science coordinator, the entire plant cycle from seed to growing to producing engages students in all three pillars of the District's Learning Reimagined: Humanize, Personalize and Problematize.

"District sustainability classes are geared to personal interests in keeping with our district's green initiatives," she said.

"Growing Together 2024 included special 'Pop Up' shops," Velloff added. "Attendees had the opportunity to purchase class-made natural and garden-themed projects, including honey sugar scrub, special custom potting mix, beeswax lip balm, homemade jams and jellies and more!"

Over the summer, the District's sustainability education and efforts didn't slow down. Eight students completed the District's summer agricultural internship and 10 students showcased projects at the Aug. 8-18 Missouri State Fair in Sedalia. Some of these student projects are available for review at www.ucityschools.org/2024StateFairProjects.

The students of BWMS invite the community to the 2025 Growing Together event scheduled for 5-7 p.m. on Tuesday, April 29, at BWMS, 8125 Groby Road (63130). For reminders and updates, visit www.ucityschools.org/GrowingTogether, their student-maintained website.



Several of the projects showcased at the 2024 Missouri State Fair are currently being utilized at Brittany Woods Middle School, such as Jayden Clay's "Web of Protection (Hawk Proof Chicken Net)" and Evan Smith's "Blackberry Trellis Design and Build."



The 10 students (above) who showcased projects at the 2024 Missouri State Fair were recognized by the University City Board of Education on Sept. 19 for multiple awards including Best of Show. These projects ranged from tutorials on how to create an outdoor sink to using technology to monitor school gardens and chickens.

UCHS junior Anthony Anderson's (right) "Anthony Anderson's Sugar Scrubs" project earned the 2024 Missouri State Fair's 4-H Building Best of Show for Leadership and Personal Development.



SDUC's New Website is now Home to MARTI!

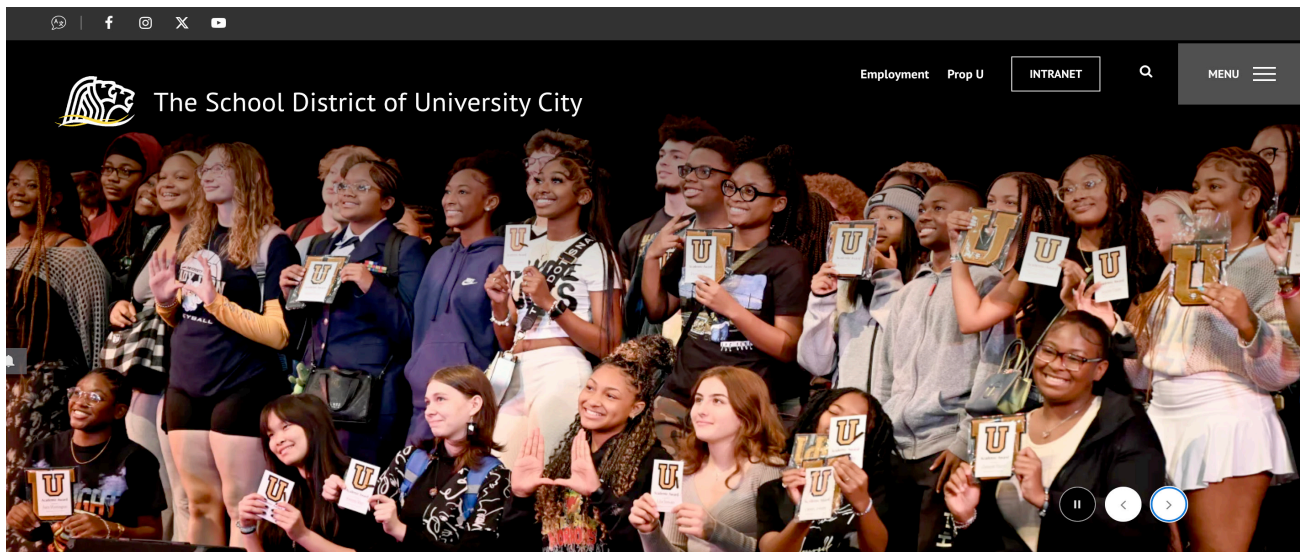
Like many school districts across the country, The School District of University City recently launched a new website that offers viewers a glimpse into the daily operations of the District and its seven schools, Prek-12th grade.



In this case, the transition was prompted by a recent decision by the popular hosting site Blackboard to withdraw from website management. The District selected Finalsite as its new provider and set out to update and modernize its presentation – complete with a new AI feature. The new tech/communications strategy called MARTI™, Managing Academic Resources Through Intuitive Artificial Intelligence, was created by the District's Director of Technology Ayinde Wayne and designed to draw information directly from the website in order to answer questions. And, like any good AI partner, MARTI is able to learn on the job.

Wayne explains that MARTI will quickly answer questions based on information on the website. "Our Communications team regularly updates our website, which means that MARTI will be able to answer 99 percent of the questions asked by school staff and the community." He added, "However, if there is an issue, the default is to flag our tech team to answer and then that updated answer will be added to MARTI's information bank."

Superintendent Sharonica Hardin-Bartley says, "We are always looking for ways to improve customer service for our families, staff and community. It is not meant to take the place of personal outreach; I love that interaction with families. However, when our families need



answers fast, we want to make it easy for them."

District communicators say that the new website in general has a new look and feel thanks to the use of large format photos and videos. It offers one-click access to information, forms, applications, enrollment and more. A Google Translate button offers more than 230 languages, including the top ones spoken in the District, with plans to add other translation services as well. Curator, a popular social media aggregator, allows the most important social media posts to stream automatically onto the front page.

Then next phase is for Finalsite to power the District App, which is currently and will continue to be available for free in both Apple's App Store and Google Play for Androids, under "University City Schools."

Hardin-Bartley added, "While we are excited for our community to have the convenience and connectivity that new technology brings, as educators we know it must be used wisely and always in the best interest of serving students, staff and community."

To see the District's new website and MARTI in action, please visit www.ucityschools.org.

District Seeks Input Regarding Cell Phone Use in Our Schools

The School District of University City has opened a discussion on cell phone use in our schools. Mobile phone and social media usage in and out of school has come under scrutiny, with researchers documenting the detrimental effect both can have on learning as well as on health and wellness. To let us know your thoughts on how we might work together to help the District protect class time by discouraging the use of cell phones in class, we ask that you please complete a survey at www.ucityschools.org/cellphonesurvey, or scan the QR code above.



Circling the Wagons for Restoration

HUMANIZE: Learning Reimagined

Selected from an elite group of regional change-makers, Washington University in St. Louis' Rowhea Elmesky, Ph.D., was honored last spring with the 2024 William H. Danforth St. Louis Confluence Award for breakthroughs in restorative practices. The award also recognized Elmesky's partners in The School District of University City and ABC Today, a Big Brothers Big Sisters of Eastern Missouri program.

Joining Elmesky was Susan Hill, Ed.D., District Curriculum and Instruction coordinator; Michael Peoples, Ph.D., University City High School (UCHS) principal; Matt Tuths, UCHS Latin and Social Justice teacher; Kaya Blount, UCHS graduate and Webster University student; and Olivia Marcucci, assistant professor of education at Johns Hopkins University.

Elmesky, associate professor of education and director of graduate studies, was praised for her heart, humanity and purity of purpose. She has worked with the District for nearly 10 years with a goal of improving student/teacher/administrator relationships and removing barriers to academic and socio-emotional development.

As an example of how UCHS has changed, Elmesky said that it starts on the first day of school. In other schools, teachers are typically expected to begin teaching content right away. However, as Peoples explained, "At University City High, teachers don't teach content the first week... (He was interrupted by applause.) Instead, we get into restorative circles to build

community and establish positive connections with our families and students."

Elmesky said that it is in that first week when students and teachers find out who their "person" is at school – with whom they mesh.

In building those bonds, students humanize teachers and teachers humanize students, an important pillar of the District's Learning Reimagined.

She advises that for any school district wishing to embrace restorative practices, "The starting point is to establish and build trust and shared vision. Conversations at the district level, blessings of permission and a baseline temperature read is where you start." She added, "It's okay to talk about and hear things we might not want to hear, but we are listening to grow and change and get better. We want to listen and identify a core group of individuals who want to be part of the change."



UCHS Principal Michael Peoples and District Curriculum and Instruction Coordinator Susan Hill were honored alongside Rowhea Elmesky.

New Agricultural Pathway Continues to Grow

PROBLEMATIZE: Learning Reimagined

Sophomore Maximiliano Rojas was one of the first students enrolled in University City High School's (UCHS) new agriculture program. As a freshman, he felt drawn to the field. He explained, "It's the fact that agriculture is a big part of our world and plays a big role in our community and I am interested to learn."

AP Biology Instructor Pamela Lester, Ph.D., is leading the coursework and says the UCHS agriculture course is the first of its kind in the St. Louis region. "We started last year with four students and ended the year with 20," Lester said. "There are now 80 students enrolled for the 2024-2025 school year, and the District is already planning to hire additional staff."

The District is working with Fresh Harvest 365, a St. Louis-based company specializing in container gardening around the world. "We are all anxious to receive our own shipping container this fall!" Lester added. "Students will use the shipping container to grow food using very little water and electricity to venture into hydroponic (in water) gardening."

The container, approved by the University City Board of Education in September, is an important new program addition funded partially through funds from the Proposition U bond issue.

Demetrius Bledsoe, CEO of Fresh Harvest 365 and Fresh Hire 365 (jobs in farming), explained, "UCHS was one of our first projects, and today, it is the first high school to cultivate this kind of smart farming system into their public school (curriculum)."

"We are integrating the hydroponic farming system with smart technology, Bledsoe added. "When the District's 320-square-foot shipping container arrives this fall, it will operate on just five gallons of water and 180 kilowatts of electricity daily and yield the equivalent of three acres of leafy greens and flowers." Bledsoe says that in conjunction with partners such as Bayer Crop Sciences and The Danforth Plant Science Center, "We are teaching students skill sets that will help ensure employment within the Urban Farming ecosystem. We are literally growing a new generation of farmers."

Superintendent Sharonica Hardin-Bartley, Ph.D., PHR, says the UCHS program is an expansion of the District's own Green Schools movement. "For the past few years, we have made a concentrated effort to make sustainability part of the curriculum as early as elementary school." She added, "Introducing students to agriculture and farming, including related technology, as early as possible will help them develop a sustainability mindset and a greater understanding of the opportunities that await them."

Curriculum and Instruction Coordinator Susan Hill, Ed.D., agreed and said, "We (the District) currently have assigned plant specialists in each school, an award-winning sustainability program at Brittany Woods Middle School and a strong gardening network of community partners like U. City in Bloom who help us maintain flower beds and raised vegetable gardens."

"In addition to Fresh Harvest, the District's partner network has grown to include experts at Washington University and the Danforth Plant Science Center," Hill explained. "Earlier this year, UCHS was approved as the first local chapter of Future Farmers of America (FFA), further expanding their opportunities in the field."

Lester says half the battle is raising awareness and piquing the attention



Dishing the Dirt: University City High School students examine microorganisms and other flying microbes in soil.

of today's students. "I am a plant pathologist by training, so I am a plant disease expert. I had no thoughts about agriculture until an internship with Monsanto, right after high school. That is when I fell in love with plant sciences." She continued, "I love it (agriculture) and I always knew that students would love it too, if only they knew these opportunities existed."

Lester went on to earn a bachelor's in biology from Truman State University in Kirksville, Mo. and a master's and doctorate in plant pathology/plant virology from Auburn University in Alabama and Clemson University in South Carolina, respectively.

"St. Louis is an agricultural town. It is an untapped market waiting for these students, and we want to ensure they are in the pipeline for these opportunities," Lester said. "One of our students is interested in landscaping as a career. Slowly but surely, they are figuring out what they want. From farming to resource management, also rooted in agriculture – the more exposure they get to different career paths, the more we will see students choosing agricultural careers."

UCHS is currently leveraging its new FFA partnership to enrich the curriculum. Lester says, "When most people think of agriculture, they think of farming, but it's also related to sustainability and producing food, fiber and animal products for life. In Introduction to Agriculture, our students will learn about livestock, soil types, food chains and taking care of the food environment by learning about erosion and keeping soil healthy for growing."

There is also plenty of crossover as UCHS merges agriculture and technology in many ways, including the use of vernier sensors to measure temperature, pH, conductivity, carbon monoxide and more. That crossover was the appeal for Ian Immar (UCHS Class of 2025), enrolled in the internship program. "Originally, I was considering electrical engineering, but I had heard of Fresh Harvest and as I was looking into it, I thought there might be some overlap."

Lester said, "Over the summer, interns were given a mini hydroponic kit, which we planted and watched seeds sprout. Now, they have their own little gardens to tend at home." Lester tells her students that with care, "You can grow almost anything in a pot," including, perhaps, a career in agriculture.

"St. Louis is an agricultural town. It is an untapped market waiting for these students, and we want to ensure they are in the pipeline for these opportunities."

*Pamela Lester, Ph.D.
UCHS AP Biology Instructor*



The first step in the introductory class is to learn more about differences in soil and what is optimal for growing.



Prop U in Progress!

As Proposition U (Prop U) priority projects start moving from the drawing board and into facilities and fields districtwide, our community will start to see significant returns on their investment of trust and support in The School District of University City. That includes the transformative benefits of Prop U and working together in support of students and families.

The District will center reports around the fall, winter, spring and summer seasons in four basic categories:

- > **DESIGN:** Development and approval of the full plan
- > **PROCUREMENT:** Bid process/permits
- > **CONSTRUCTION:** Progress from groundbreaking to installation
- > **COMPLETION:** Ready to go!

Several key projects were started this summer, immediately after the April 2 election, including the first sale of bonds to generate funds (June 2024). This fall, we can look forward to improvements in the following areas:

In July, Pershing and Jackson Park playgrounds kicked off, the specialized equipment has been received and permits are pending. The new, modern design is sure to be a hit with students, but it may require a bit of finesse with the timeline! A chief concern is minimizing the time in which the playgrounds are off-limits to students. The new “pour and play” surface is temperature sensitive. Presently, we are shooting for completion this fall.

In mid-September, the Board of Education approved University City High School’s (UCHS) new hydroponic container garden. The \$500,000 projects include a Fresh Harvest 365 shipping container and hook-ups for electricity and water – making it completely sustainable. The container, partially funded by grants, partner support and Prop U, will take an estimated six to eight weeks to install for completion in late October or early November.

Additional video cameras are being installed across the District. The District technology team is moving forward with an estimated completion in mid-December.

Plans for upgrades in secured entries at Barbara C. Jordan, Flynn Park and Pershing schools are underway with St. Louis-based partner Hankins Construction. District leaders hope to minimize any inconvenience to parents and visitors by having the project completed during the November/December breaks. In the meantime, they are pinpointing the temporary entrances and exits that are most convenient to parents and school buses.

The Flynn Park gymnasium is the last space in the District where there is no air conditioning. This will be remedied as the Operations team moves through scheduled school repairs. This project is expected to be



Banner is currently hung on fence facing Balson Ave. near Hanley Road.

finished by 2025, in time to fight off warmer temperatures.

Two larger projects are centered around fall sports. In fact, the Homecoming schedule was adjusted this year (see box below) to give flexibility in reimagining the current sports fields. We are hoping that the UCHS amphitheater-style, bowl seating can be preserved, while the field at Jackson Park School, located at the southeast corner of Hanley Road and Balson Avenue, will have more traditional bleachers. Bids are in process and planning is underway for both fields. The Operations team and school leaders will review the plan with residents who live near both schools.

More information about these bond issue projects will be available soon at www.ucityschools.org/PropUinProgress.



U. City Homecoming 2024 Updates

University City High School’s Muhl-Schemmer Stadium will undergo extensive renovations over the next couple of years. This will affect some U. City homecoming traditions. This year, the 2024 homecoming football game will be hosted at Jennings High School at 6 p.m. on Thursday, Oct. 24.

The Saturday parade will follow its standard route on Oct. 26, starting in the Delmar Loop at 10 a.m. and ending at UCHS with an alumni tailgate celebration (details will be available on the UCHSAA Facebook page).

The Saturday night student homecoming dance will proceed as planned.

UCHS Students Brew Up Success for Costa Rica Trip

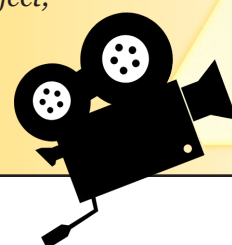
The U. City Farmers Market bustles with activity, delightful smells and lively music on Saturday mornings. Located centrally in the Delmar Loop, it’s a way for local growers, artists, chefs, musicians and other creatives to showcase their products and services. One of the newer booths includes a rotation of 20 University City High School students and teachers Jeffrey Hughes (Algebra 1) and Andrew Clark (Biology). You will find them there and at the Tower Grove Market every Saturday through November, selling fair trade coffee in two distinct flavors. Funds collected will support a class trip to Costa Rica in the spring of 2025 as part of the national “Show Me the World Project.” This project is a complete learning experience as it merges business and marketing skills in preparation for the trip and, while in Costa Rica, the students will learn, first hand, about the country’s commerce, landmarks and lush ecosystem.

“It’s more than a trip to Costa Rica, it’s an enrichment opportunity,” Clark said. “As a biology instructor, I want to show students real life experiences as we walk through the rain forest and look at nature and take in the living and nonliving systems. This will help them with the EOC (end-of-course) and ACT tests. That’s what we are hoping for, and it will be an awesome experience for these students.” And, of course, the students will learn more about coffee growing and production as coffee is Costa Rica’s third largest export.



Stop by the U. City Farmers Market and grab a bag (or two!) of single origin coffee in sweet and mild fruits (Pirris River) and sugar and nutty (Tarrazu).

To watch some behind the scenes footage from the Farmers Market and learn more about the Show Me the World Project, visit www.ucityschools.org/ShowMeTheWorldVideo or scan the QR code to the right.



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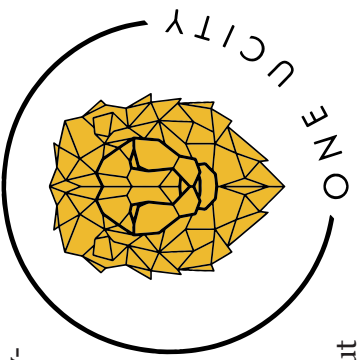
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One U City Events



One U City is a community-led organization of parent volunteers dedicated to serving ALL children throughout The School District of University City's elementary and middle schools. Representing parents/caregivers throughout the District, they are rooted in creating an equitable, inclusive and joyful community.

Throughout the year, they will be sponsoring district-wide events for all students, staff and families to enjoy. Be sure to mark your calendars for the following upcoming events:

- **All-District Fall Fest** – October 19 2-4:30 p.m., outside University City High School Carve a pumpkin or drop off a pumpkin that was carved at home for display at the Pumpkin Stroll 6-7:30 p.m., Return for **Pumpkin Stroll** to admire the pumpkins and enjoy **Trunk or Treat** on Jackson Park Elementary School parking lot
- **All-District Trivia Night** – February 22, U. City Community Center 6-10 p.m., Enjoy an adults-only night out of fun and games with your U. City family
- **All-District World Tour** – April 12, Brittany Woods Middle School 5:30-7:30 p.m., Celebrate the many cultures within our community and in St. Louis with performances, food and families sharing some of what they love about their cultures To learn more about One U City, please visit www.1ucity.org.

Dated Material. Distribute as soon as possible.

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Key District Dates for Fall and Winter 2024-2025

For the most current calendar information, visit www.ucityschools.org/Calendar. For Board of Education work sessions and regular meetings, go to www.ucityschools.org/BOE.

- October 18: No School – End of 1st Quarter
- October 19: All-District Fall Fest
- October 24: UCHS Homecoming (Football Game at Jennings)
- October 26: Homecoming Parade & Dance
- November 1: No School – Professional Development Day
- November 4: No School – Plan Day
- November 5: District Closed – Election Day
- November 14: District STEAM Expo
- November 25-29: No School – Fall Break (District Close: November 27-29)
- December 23-January 2: District Closed – Winter Break
- January 3: No School – Teacher Work Day
- January 10: No School – Plan Day/Records Day (End of 2nd Quarter)
- January 17: No School – Professional Development Day
- January 20: District Closed – MLK Day
- February 14: No Classes – Teacher Comp Day
- February 17: District Closed – Presidents Day
- March 14: No School – Plan Day/Records Day (End of 3rd Quarter)
- March 17-21: No School – Spring Break (District Closed, March 21)
- May 29: Last Day of School (subject to change, pending unscheduled closures)

PRIDE



THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF UNIVERSITY CITY

A publication for and about The School District of University City, Missouri

October 2024



This Issue's Highlights:

- Wellness Spaces /Restorative Practices - Page 1
- Kim Merrill, Counselor of the Year - Page 1
- Students Vote in Mock Elections - Page 3
- Dick Weiss Honored by Peace Run - Page 4
- Back to the Future's Bob Gale - Page 5
- Special Olympics - Page 8
- Growing Together at State Fair - Page 8
- Introducing MARTI on Website - Page 9
- New Agricultural Pathway - Page 10
- Prop U in Progress! - Page 11