

ucity

PRIDE



Removing Barriers to Care
Supporting Students' Success

Once Lions
Now Leading with Pride



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

SPRING 2025-26

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THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF UNIVERSITY CITY

Sharonica L. Hardin-

Bartley, Ph.D. PHR

Superintendent of Schools

The School District of University City does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability and provides equal access to designated youth groups. For details, visit ucityschools.org.

KEY DISTRICT DATES FOR SPRING AND SUMMER 2026

For the most current calendar information, visit www.ucityschools.org/Calendar.

March 13:	No School <i>0.5 Records Day/0.5 Work Day</i>
March 16-20:	No School <i>Spring Break (District Closed: March 20)</i>
March 27:	One U City - Trivia Night
April 1:	Kindergarten Open Houses
April 6:	One U City - U Spark
April 9:	No School <i>Professional Development Day</i>
April 10:	No School <i>0.5 Plan Day/0.5 No Contract</i>
April 22:	Spring Resource Fair
April 24:	District Art Night
April 27:	U. City Strings Performance <i>at U. City Public Library</i>
May 18:	UCHS Commencement
May 20:	U Are Special Honorees and Retirees Reception
May 25:	District Closed - Memorial Day
May 29:	Last Day of School <i>Early Release/0.5 Records Day</i>
June 9-July 2:	Camp U & Summer Learning Academy
June 19:	District Closed - Juneteenth

For Board of Education work sessions and regular meetings, go to www.ucityschools.org/BOE.



MESSAGE FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT



Happy Spring,
U. City Family,

Reflecting on this school year, I am filled with gratitude and pride for all we have accomplished together in The School District of University City.

In February, we celebrated Black History Month, a time to honor the achievements, resilience, and lasting contributions of African Americans to our nation and our community. While we recognize Black history every day, this month gave us a special opportunity to come together. From performances and literacy nights to read-ins and classroom activities, I loved seeing students and staff engage, learn, and share stories about the people and history that continue to shape our world. Moments like these are truly inspiring. We also remembered the life of Rev. Jesse Jackson, Sr., a pillar of hope, strength, and social justice for all Americans. Rev. Jackson was known for his masterful oratory and represented the Civil Rights movement firsthand, a movement that is, unfortunately, still relevant today. Living his legacy fosters community and resilience.

“At the end of the day, we must go forward with hope and not backward by fear and division.”

- Reverend Jesse Jackson, Sr.

This year also brought exciting new opportunities for our students. In January, University City High School launched its first-ever Future Farmers of America Chapter in St. Louis County. Students now have a chance to explore leadership, agriculture, sustainability, and hands-on learning in an urban setting. Looking ahead, our school-based health center will open in Fall 2026, giving students expanded access to health care and wellness services right on campus. These milestones express our commitment to supporting students' growth and leadership in every part of their lives.

In November 2025, we held our annual State of the District and Strategic Planning Meeting. Together, we reviewed our plan to make sure

it continues to reflect the values, goals, and priorities of our University City community. We also shared highlights from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's Annual Performance Report. Our District earned a score of 80.7 percent, a 5.5 percent increase from the previous year. This progress is a direct result of the dedication and hard work of our students, staff, and community, and we can all be proud of it. And yes, we have more to do.

While we have much to celebrate, we also recognize the challenges facing public education today. The majority of our funding comes from local sources, including Prop U, with limited state or federal support. Proposed changes, like cuts to programs that directly support students, including free and reduced lunch, have real implications for our schools. In addition, Governor Kehoe has proposed an A-to-F grading system for schools. While intended to provide a simple measure of school quality, it may not fully capture the strengths, programs, and progress that make our schools unique. We will have opportunities to discuss in more detail our current data, curricular offerings, the proposed grading system, and our refreshed strategic plan. Please be on the lookout for updates.

Looking ahead, I am inspired by the creativity, resilience, and leadership I see in our students and staff every day. I cannot wait to celebrate our **Class of 2026 on May 18 at Chaifetz Arena**. Their hard work and bright futures are a reminder of why we do this work. Together, we will continue to grow, innovate, and make sure every student has the support and opportunities they need to thrive.

In Service of Our Children,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sharonica L. Hardin-Bartley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized 'S' at the beginning.

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

Board of Education

SPOTLIGHT

As members of the Board of Education for the School District of University City, we are proud to share an update with our residents on the tremendous progress being made through the Prop U initiative. Thanks to the community's investment and support, our district is transforming in ways that directly enhance safety, accessibility, sustainability, and student opportunity — all while remaining responsibly within budget.

One of our highest priorities has been student and staff safety. This month and next, we are closing out major security upgrades across the district. The vestibule project at Jackson Park is nearly complete, and Flynn Park's new secure vestibule is fully finished. These improvements include ADA-compliant ramps, rail lighting, redesigned front offices, and updated administrative spaces. With these latest upgrades, every school in our district now has safe entry points and is fully ADA compliant — a significant milestone in ensuring both accessibility and security for all.

We are also excited about the progress of Jackson Park Field, which is scheduled to be ready in time for the first game at the end of March. Meanwhile, Brittney Woods' new sustainability classroom has been completed, expanding hands-on environmental learning opportunities for students. At University City High School, a new climate-controlled sustainability container has been installed. Using only five gallons of water per day, it has the capacity to grow the equivalent of up to two acres of produce — an innovative step forward in sustainable education and food systems learning.

Importantly, all of these accomplishments have been achieved while maintaining strict fiscal discipline. Every project completed thus far has remained within budget — a reflection of careful planning, oversight, and stewardship of taxpayer resources.

Looking ahead, momentum continues. Construction on a new school-based health center at the high school is set to begin this month. We remain on track to complete Phase I of Prop U by summer 2027 and begin Phase II as scheduled. Flynn Park's HVAC replacement is under contract to begin in summer 2026 and is projected for completion before the 2026–2027 school year. Renovations to the UCHS auditorium and the weight room will soon begin, alongside district-wide roofing improvements.

These are ambitious projects, operating on aggressive timelines with many moving parts. Even in the face of significant challenges — including a tornado and the ice storm Fern — our district remains focused, organized, and on schedule.

Prop U represents more than construction; it reflects a community commitment to safe schools, innovative learning environments, and long-term stewardship. We thank the residents of University City for your continued trust and partnership as we move forward together.



Guerin Pichon, Director



Meet Our School Board Members



Monica Stewart, Ed.D.
PRESIDENT

Liaison to University City
High School and ROAR
Academy at LLC



LaVerne Ford-Williams
DIRECTOR

Liaison to Flynn Park
Elementary School



Karen Bernstein
VICE PRESIDENT

Liaison to Barbara C.
Jordan Elementary School



Guerin Pichon
DIRECTOR

Liaison to Brittany
Woods Middle School



Kay Gage
SECRETARY

Liaison to Pershing
Elementary School



Tameka Staten
DIRECTOR

Liaison to Julia
Goldstein ECEC



Matt Bellows
DIRECTOR

Liaison to Jackson Park
Elementary School



Whitaker Staudt
**STUDENT
REPRESENTATIVE**

University City High
School Senior

Board Meetings

Board work sessions are typically held on the first Thursday of each month at 5:45 p.m., while regular board meetings occur on the third Thursday at 7 p.m.

Regular meetings take place at the McNair Administration Building (7700 Olive Blvd., 63130) unless otherwise noted, while work sessions are held virtually.

For meeting details, Board information or how to become a Board member, please visit ucityschools.org/BOE.

Meeting agendas and minutes can be found at ucityschools.org/BoardDocs.

2026-27 Meeting Dates

July 16, 2026 Regular Meeting	Jan. 21, 2027 Regular Meeting
Aug. 6, 2026 Work Session	Feb. 4, 2027 Work Session
Aug. 20, 2026 Regular Meeting	Feb. 18, 2027 Regular Meeting
Sept. 3, 2026 Work Session	March 4, 2027 Work Session
Sept. 17, 2026 Regular Meeting	March 11, 2027 Regular Meeting
Oct. 1, 2026 Work Session	April 15, 2027 Regular Meeting
Oct. 15, 2026 Regular Meeting	May 6, 2027 Work Session
Nov. 5, 2026 Work Session	May 20, 2027 Regular Meeting
Nov. 19, 2026 Regular Meeting	June 3, 2027 Work Session
Dec. 17, 2026 Regular Meeting	June 17, 2027 Regular Meeting
Jan. 7, 2027 Work Session	

University City Board of Education Candidate Statements

Three residents have filed for candidacy in the April 7, 2026, election for three, three-year seats on the University City Board of Education. According to The School District of University City's Policy BBB-1: School Board Elections, there will not be a School Board Election in April 2026 since the number of candidates who have filed is equal to the number of positions for each office to be filled by the election.

Asterisk (*) indicates the incumbent. The candidates are shown in order of filing.

Anelise Curtis

I am a parent of two boys with my oldest attending Kindergarten at Flynn Park.

My career in the early childhood education field has provided me with valuable knowledge on how to navigate and access resources across three states and in settings ranging from urban to rural. I have a strong belief that all children should have access to high quality education, and I am equipped with the advocacy skills to explain the importance and value of focusing resources on our most vulnerable population — young children.

I gained a Bachelors in Early Childhood Education from Illinois State University with endorsements in Special Education and Multilingual Learners. My formal teaching experiences include everywhere between birth and 3rd grade, and I did my student teaching in a 2nd grade special education inclusion classroom at Blue Ribbon school.

My purpose in running for the University City school board director is to bring my expertise as a strong child advocate to the table. If elected, I plan to add my fresh perspective to our strong unified board to bring the most effective, equitable, and productive level of change to ensure all our students can access the academic excellence our district provides because every child deserves an educational environment that allows them to reach their fullest potential.

Being familiar with the research on neurocognitive child development, focusing on the wellbeing of children can have profound impacts on the entire community including those who are not currently utilizing the public schools. Due to the leadership choices to focus on areas of health and emotional wellbeing, our district is already steps ahead of others across the country. I wish to continue supporting their pillars to Humanize, Personalize, and Problematize. It would be an honor to represent and fiercely advocate for our vibrantly diverse community.



Kay E. Gage*

It has been a profound privilege to serve as a Board Director for the School District of University City (SDUC) over the past three years. When I first sought this office in 2023, I was motivated by a lifelong love for University City and a deep-seated dedication to our children's futures. That commitment remains constant.

As a member of our "Team of Eight," I have worked to ensure our district does more than just function, but flourish. Together, we have approved curricula that empower our teachers and inspire our students. We successfully passed Proposition U with your help, sparking transformative capital improvements that our children can see and feel in their schools and on the grounds. Throughout the highs of our celebrations and the weight of our challenges, we have stood firmly beside our families and staff.

My service extends beyond the district wall, to ensure SDUC has a voice in every important conversation. Whether representing SDUC on the Special School District (SSD) Governance Board, serving on the Economic Development Retail Sales Tax (EDRST) Board, or acting as a liaison for our Alumni Association, my goal is always the same: advocacy for our school community.

I look forward to serving three more years to protect our momentum. Stability in leadership is essential to ensuring our current initiatives take full root. I want to continue this work to ensure every student graduates not just with a diploma, but as a productive, engaged citizen ready to lead. Let's continue going far, together, with a vision of Learning Reimagined.



Karen Bernstein*

I am honored to re-introduce myself as I prepare to serve another three-year term on the Board of Education for the School District of University City. As a proud resident of over a decade, my commitment to this district is rooted in both my professional background and my passion for our community's future.



I originally ran for the Board to bridge the gap between education and business. With a career spanning teaching, school administration, and my current role in compliance, I aim to bring a balanced perspective to our district's governance. Over the last two years, I have had the privilege of serving as Board Vice President, working alongside my colleagues to ensure our schools remain a place where all students can thrive.

I am incredibly proud of what we have accomplished together. During my tenure, we successfully passed Prop U, utilizing those funds for transformative construction projects across our campuses. We also approved the opening of a School-Based Health Center to support student wellness and expanded our innovative agricultural and sustainability programs. To improve our internal operations, I served on the Board Evaluation Committee and have helped define new policies and protocols that have streamlined our productivity and accountability. I have also served on the Finance and Operations Committee and the Policy Committee, and as a delegate for the Missouri School Boards' Association.

As I look toward the next three years, my focus will remain on providing a high-quality education for all students while also ensuring the long-term financial sustainability of our district. I am eager to see our current initiatives reach their full potential.

Thank you for your continued trust. I look forward to working together to pursue The School District of University City's vision of "Learning Reimagined" over the next three years.



Exciting Updates on Our Prop U Projects!

This fall and winter, our Proposition U (Prop U) projects have been making great strides, with Phase 2 projected to begin in 2027.

Some recent highlights include the new secure entryways at Jackson Park and Flynn Park Elementary. With these completed, every school in our District now has a secure vestibule. Brittany Woods Middle School students have already been hard at work in the new Sustainability Kitchen, where Brittany Brand will create their signature sustainable products! The UCHS Sports Complex is also nearing completion and will be a central hub for student athletics.

Looking ahead to this summer, we will begin updates such as the Flynn Park gymnasium HVAC system and renovations to the UCHS auditorium.

Phase 1 completed projects:

- Jackson Park and Pershing playgrounds
- Secure entryway at Julia Goldstein, Barbara C. Jordan, Flynn Park, Jackson Park, Pershing
- Parking Lots (Phase 1)
- Brittany Woods dance floor
- Brittany Woods security track
- District-wide video cameras, safety and premise access security
- New hot water pump at Julia Goldstein
- UCHS sustainability container
- District-wide safety/wayfinding signage
- Brittany Woods sustainability classroom

We have also launched a video series to share all the progress on [#PropUinProgress](#). Stay connected and see the latest updates at ucityschools.org/propu.





University City High School Launches First FFA Chapter in St. Louis County



On Tuesday, January 20, University City High School proudly celebrated the launch of its Future Farmers of America (FFA) Chapter, the first of its kind in St. Louis County. This milestone reflects the District's growing commitment to agricultural education, bringing sustainability and hands-on learning to an urban setting.

Student officers from the Missouri FFA joined the celebration to officially charter the chapter, opening the door for UCHS students to grow as leaders, develop real-world skills, and explore meaningful career pathways in agriculture, sustainability, and environmental stewardship. Dr. Pamela Lester, UCHS Agriculture Teacher and FFA Advisor, shared her excitement about the program, saying it "opens up a world of opportunities for our students, as it is a premier leadership organization."

Superintendent Sharonica Hardin-Bartley, Ph.D., PHR, reflected on the significance of the moment, noting, "The launch of UCHS' FFA Chapter gives students hands-on experiences in agriculture and leadership while showing that careers in this field are within reach for everyone. By weaving sustainability and agriculture into our school community, we are creating new opportunities and inspiring students to explore paths they may never have imagined."

The FFA Chapter builds on the agriculture course introduced at UCHS during the 2023-24 school year, the first of its kind in the St. Louis area.

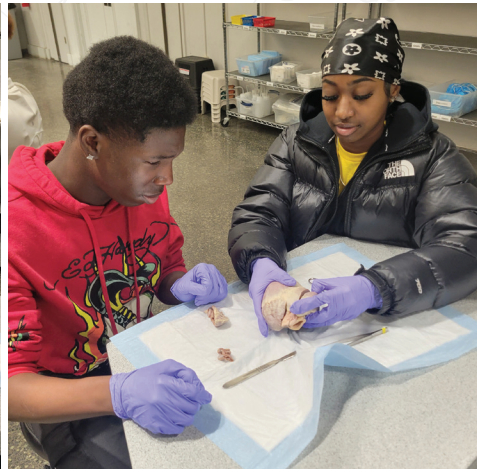
That work continued this past summer with the installation of a shipping container converted into a hydroponic farm, providing students with meaningful, hands-on experience in sustainable agriculture and food systems. UCHS is now the first high school in the region to use the Fresh Harvest 365 Smart Farm System and the first in St. Louis City and County with a state-approved career and technical education program in agriculture.

The launch of UCHS' FFA Chapter marks an exciting new chapter in the District's commitment to student growth, leadership, innovation, and sustainability. The future is bright, and it's growing right here in University City.



Anatomy in Action:

University City Students Experience Science Up Close



Squeamish? Then Sherry Wibben's Anatomy & Physiology class at UCHS might not be for you!

For juniors and seniors enrolled in her dual credit course, science comes to life in unforgettable ways. Each year, students visit Saint Louis University Medical School, where they have the rare opportunity to see a human cadaver and watch a guided dissection, all while learning directly from medical students and professors.

"This is something my students never forget," Wibben said. "I have freshmen who tell me they have heard about it from their older siblings who went through the experience. It really does change minds."

During the visit, students first get an up-close look at a cadaver, exploring the human body in a way that cannot be replicated in a textbook. They then watch a detailed dissection in a high-tech lab, with large screens showing every step, giving them the same perspective medical students receive during their training. "This is the real world. This is exactly the smell," Wibben said. "Even kids interested in going into accounting or some other field still think it is so cool because it is a once-in-a-lifetime experience."

This year, Wibben was one of University City Education Foundation's grant recipients, helping ensure that all students can participate in the program regardless of cost. Reflecting on its impact, she said, "A lot of them use it because they want to go into the medical field, and they think, 'If I can do this, then I think I can do that.'" For students in her class, the experience is more than a lesson; it's a chance to see science come alive, spark curiosity, and inspire confidence that stays with them long after the lab visit ends.

Real-world science.

Real medical training.

Real impact on students' futures.



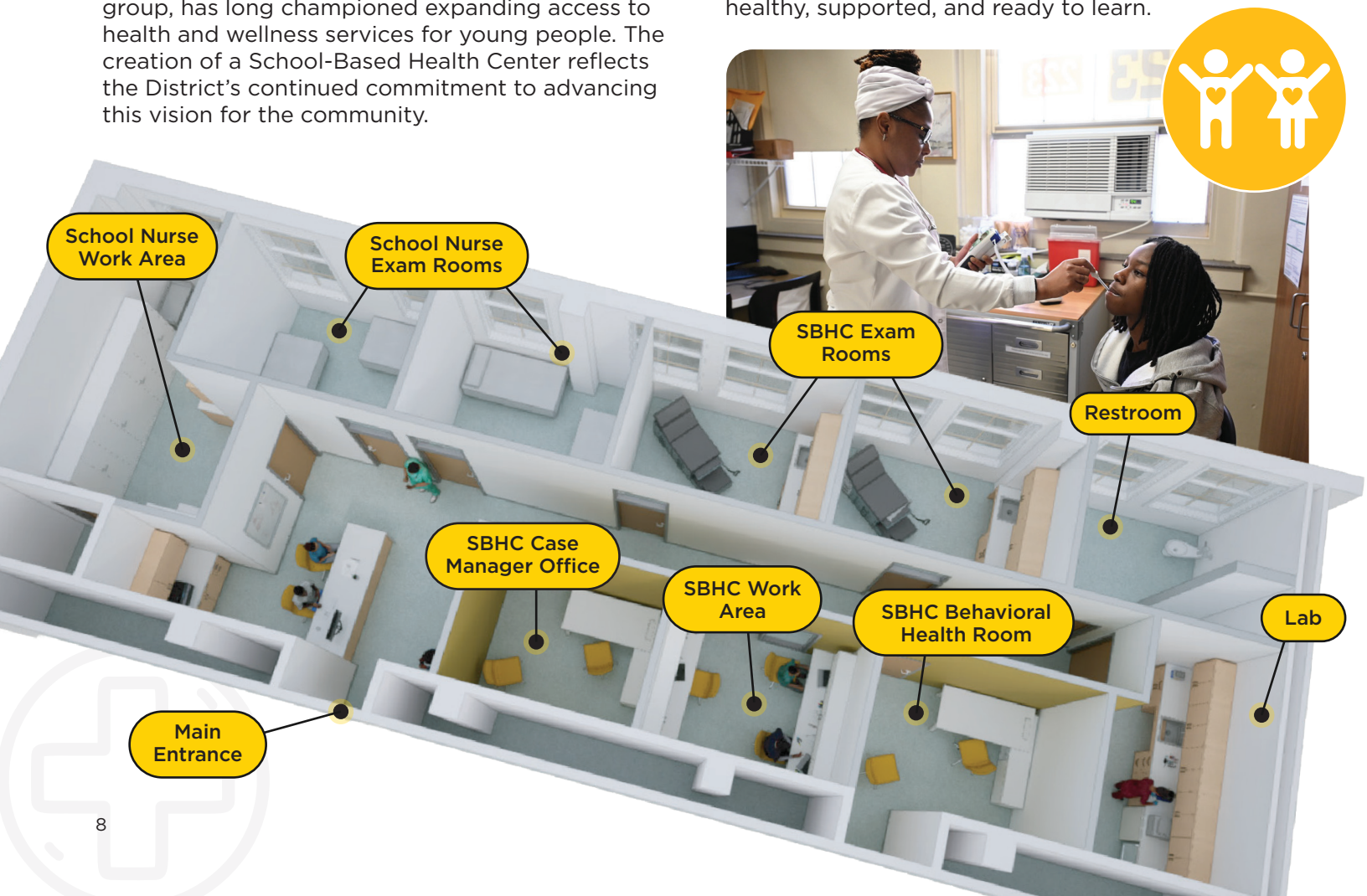
The School District of University City Announces Partnership to Develop **SCHOOL-BASED HEALTH CENTER** at University City High School

The School District of University City is partnering with Washington University, Family Care Health Centers, School-Based Health Alliance of Missouri, and Healthy Blue Missouri to establish a School-Based Health Center (SBHC) designed to provide comprehensive health services to students at University City High School.

This initiative aligns closely with the Schools as Centers of Health recommendation from the 2015 Ferguson Commission Report. Superintendent Sharonica L. Hardin-Bartley, PhD, PHR, who served on the Commission's Youth at the Center work group, has long championed expanding access to health and wellness services for young people. The creation of a School-Based Health Center reflects the District's continued commitment to advancing this vision for the community.

"For nearly a decade, it has been our vision to bring accessible, high-quality health care directly to our students," Hardin-Bartley said. "We are excited to offer on-site healthcare resources that support both academic and life success. We are deeply grateful to the James S. McDonnell Foundation for helping make this center a reality."

The new School-Based Health Center will offer sustainable, reliable, and easily accessible physical and mental health services. By meeting students' needs on campus, the center will reduce common barriers to care and help ensure students are healthy, supported, and ready to learn.



Why School-Based Health Centers?

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE FOR ALL CHILDREN

School-based health centers provide health care to all children with parental permission, regardless of insurance coverage or ability to pay (often at no or low cost).



REGULAR PREVENTIVE CARE

When health care is far away, expensive, or difficult to access, children are less likely to receive regular preventive care. School-based health centers offer care where the children are—in schools.



KEEPING CHILDREN IN SCHOOL

School-based health centers help keep children in school and engaged in learning by addressing health concerns quickly, supporting mental wellness, and returning students to class as soon as possible.

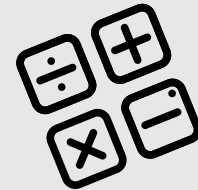


STRONG PARENT AND SCHOOL SUPPORT

When parents give permission for their child to be seen at a school-based health center, they know they will not have to miss work to care for minor problems, and that their child will receive prompt attention from health providers trained at working with youth. School administrators and teachers are extremely supportive of school-based health centers because health centers allow them to focus on their role of educating students who are healthy and ready to learn.



District to Adopt EnVision+ Math Curriculum for 2026-27



The School District of University City is excited to announce that beginning in the 2026-27 school year, the District will adopt the EnVision+ math curriculum across all grade levels. The decision comes after a careful multi-year review by a district team that included Beverly Velloff, the District's PreK-12 Math, K-5 Science, and STEM Coordinator.

"The goal was to find a curriculum that truly engages students in thinking, problem-solving, and making connections, rather than just memorizing procedures," said Velloff.

The district's curriculum induction cycle spans five to six years. The K-5 review began in June 2025, with the team establishing key criteria: student-centered, inquiry-based learning that is accessible to all learners, including multilingual students and those with IEPs. The team met monthly to evaluate potential curricula, brainstorm ideas, and provide teacher feedback before reaching consensus in January.

EnVision+ stood out not only for its focus on conceptual understanding, hands-on problem-solving, and collaborative learning, but also for its accessibility. A local representative is available to support teachers, listen to their needs, and incorporate feedback through focus groups.

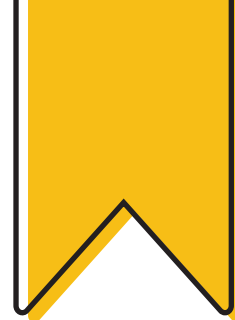
"It's a curriculum that pushes students to think, instead of telling students how to think," Velloff said.

Families may notice students explaining their thinking more than just giving answers, a positive sign that EnVision+ is helping them engage deeply with math concepts. Teachers are receiving ongoing training to ensure a smooth transition and strong implementation come the start of the 2026-27 school year.



The School-Based Health Center represents a significant step forward in supporting the health and academic success of students at University City High School. This collaborative effort with Washington University, Family Care Health Centers, and School-Based Health Alliance of Missouri reflects a shared commitment to removing barriers to care and strengthening student well-being. As the project advances, the District will continue to provide updates to families and the community regarding timelines, services, and opportunities for engagement.





Barbara C. Jordan Hosts Reading Success Night to Strengthen Early Literacy

In mid-January, families, students, and educators gathered at Barbara C. Jordan Elementary School for a Reading Success Night, an evening focused on supporting students with Reading Success Plans (RSPs) and strengthening the home-school partnership.

“We wanted families to really understand what reading instruction looks like today and how we work together to support students,” said Emily Wesche, instructional leader at Barbara C. Jordan. “Reading is not something that happens in isolation. It’s a partnership between teachers, students, and families.”

Krystal Barnett, founder and CEO of Bridge 2 Hope who specializes in parent advocacy and education, also stopped by the event. Wesche shared that the school connected with Barnett through the Emerson Early Literacy Grant process, where she served on the steering committee. “She specializes in helping parents understand their children’s needs and navigate school systems so they can advocate for what’s best for them,” Wesche said.

That grant work continues to shape literacy efforts at Barbara C. Jordan. The school is in its second year of the Emerson Early Literacy Grant, which supports schools ready to expand strong early literacy practices. Through the grant, the school formed an early literacy team of teachers, reading specialists, multilingual staff, district literacy support, and SSD representation. The grant has allowed Barbara C. Jordan to hire an additional reading specialist, partner with the Missouri Reading Initiative, and establish a first

grade lab classroom for modeling best practices. Grant funds also expanded access to Volume of Reading texts connected to the Wit and Wisdom curriculum.

Wesche said the impact is already visible. “Teachers are talking about students as readers in a much more



specific way. They are using data differently, planning more targeted instruction, and really understanding the skills students need next. We are seeing students meet their goals in small groups, and that’s encouraging.”

During the event, families observed classroom strategies, participated in hands-on activities, and learned ways to support reading at home. “We know families want to be involved, and they want what’s best for their children,” Wesche said. “This night is about creating a safe, supportive space where we can be honest, share data, and work together. No one is expected to be an expert. We’re learning together for the sake of our kids.”

Reflecting on her team, Wesche added, “I am so proud of our teachers and our early literacy team. They are not shying away from the challenges in front of us. They are asking what we can do differently and leaning into the work every single day. I see that commitment at BCJ, and it gives me so much hope for our students.”

Reading is not something that happens in isolation. It’s a partnership between teachers, students, and families.

from UCHS Hallways to “I Do”

Alumni Darrion Smith and Kelsi Bryant's Journey

Darrion Smith, University City High School Class of 2017, and Kelsi Bryant, Class of 2018, have been inseparable since their high school days and recently celebrated a major milestone, marrying this past October! Both successful in their careers, they credit their time at UCHS with shaping their academic paths, professional goals, and even the foundation of their relationship.

“The most amazing thing about Kelsi is she’s a leader,” Darrion said. “I saw her as a leader in high school, and she’s still leading people every day.”

Darrion’s journey began on the baseball field, where coaches John Bass, Craig Morris, Chris Little, and Christopher Topher played a pivotal role in his growth. “They helped me grow as a man and taught me lessons I didn’t even realize I was learning,” he said. “They showed me how to build relationships and how to lift others as you move forward.” Both Coach Bass and Coach Morris are still at UCHS, continuing that work with the next generation.

Kelsi’s experience was similarly shaped by mentorship. She credits social studies teacher Yul Amerson and longtime mentor Dr. Hardin-Bartley with helping her see what was possible. “Seeing a Black woman succeed at such a high level showed me what I could achieve,” Kelsi said. She also points to UCHS programs like CollegeBound for helping guide her through the college application and financial planning process.

Their paths crossed in the cafeteria, of all places. “I was having a bad day,” Kelsi recalled, “and Darrion happened to be the closest person to me. I just really needed a hug. A couple of days later, we exchanged numbers.” The rest was history. From senior night promposals to an October wedding, their story is filled with moments that felt meant to be. The wedding took place in Kelsi’s favorite month, complete with rainy weather she loves and blue hydrangeas she had long saved on her Pinterest board. In a sweet surprise, a local florist gifted the



flowers. It felt like one more sign they were exactly where they were meant to be.

Both have pursued advanced degrees and meaningful careers. Darrion earned a bachelor’s degree in Psychology from Lincoln Christian University and a master’s in Sports and Fitness Administration from Georgetown University. He now serves as Director of Pitching Development at Presbyterian College, with aspirations of becoming a Division I pitching coach and, eventually, an athletic director. Kelsi holds a bachelor’s degree in political science from Lawrence University and a master’s in higher education from Louisiana State University. She is the Assistant Director of Custodial Services at the University of South Carolina and is pursuing a PhD in Higher Education Administration. Her dream is to become a college professor and administrator.

When asked what advice they would offer current UCHS students, Darrion emphasized the importance of balancing athletics with academics. “Understanding that sports aren’t everything is key,” he said. “Keep your GPA up. Academic success opens doors beyond athletics.” Kelsi encouraged students to fully embrace the opportunities around them. “Take advantage of everything U. City has to offer. Network, have a vision, and share it with the people who can help you succeed.”

Reflecting on their journey, Kelsi shared, “I continue to reflect on why Darrion was put in my life so young. We’ve done long distance, moved to Louisiana, moved to South Carolina, but having someone who is growing through each step with you is beautiful.”

From high school hallways to careers across the country, Darrion and Kelsi’s story is rooted in the place where it all began. University City High School did more than prepare them for college. It helped shape a partnership, a purpose, and a future they are still building together.

U. CITY ALUMNI

Leading with Pride

If there is one thing that defines The School District of University City, it's pride. Not just school spirit, but a deep connection to community, tradition, and possibility. For some alumni, that pride comes full circle when they return to serve the District as educators and leaders, giving back to the same schools and community that shaped them.

We spoke with four alumni who now hold leadership roles in the District: Board of Education Secretary Kay Gage, UCHS Associate Principal Ernest Carter, District PreK-12 Math, K-5 Science, and STEM Coordinator Beverly Velloff, and Pershing Elementary Principal Deitra Colquitt. Each shared memories of their own experiences in U. City, the mentors who inspired them, and the lessons they carry into their work today.

Kay Gage, who graduated from UCHS in 1986, recalls the guidance of administrators and educators such as Herman E. Shaw. "Being an alum gives you a unique perspective. You remember what it felt like to be a student here — the teachers who pushed you, the community that supported you. That experience shapes how I advocate for our students every day," she said. She sees her service as part of a long-term effort to strengthen the schools and honor the legacy of educators and leaders who influenced her.



Gage remembers events that brought the community together, from school performances to literacy nights, and the feeling of pride that came from being part of a supportive, multicultural environment. She encourages students to take full advantage of the opportunities around them. "U. City is home. You should take advantage of every program, every chance to be involved, and remember the community is behind you."



Ernest Carter, UCHS Class of 1989, recalls growing up immersed in U. City traditions. He participated in school bonfires and spring flings, spent countless hours on the football field, and built meaningful friendships that lasted beyond the classroom. "I learned resilience and community here. Sports and school events taught me lessons you can't always get in a classroom. Those experiences shaped how I coach, how I lead, and how I support students who are navigating challenges I once faced," he said.



Carter credits mentors like Mr. Sam Austin Jr., the principal during his time at UCHS, and also the late Mr. Herman E. Shaw, for holding students to high standards while encouraging them to do their best. "They didn't let you slide by. They expected your best and taught you how to get there," he said. Beyond academics and athletics, Carter said the hands-on guidance and real-world lessons from his teachers and coaches shaped the way he supports students and athletes today.



Beverly Velloff, UCHS Class of 1994, remembers her fifth-grade teacher, Ms. Mary Gaines, for recognizing her potential and inspiring her confidence. “I spent most of my career here because I wanted to give back to the District that shaped me. U. City is in my blood. It fills my bucket every day when I see kids learning, exploring, and achieving. That sense of community, that pride, it runs through me, and I want every student to feel it too,” she said.



Velloff reflected on what made U. City special for her as a student. “U. City is a unique place. What stands out the most is the friendship, community, and sense of belonging. Some of my closest friends are ones I grew up with in U. City, and so many doors were opened up for me by being a student here,” she said. She encourages students to make the most of their time in the District. “Enjoy every minute of it. Make the most of it. Take advantage of all the opportunities that you have,” she added.



Deitra Colquitt, UCHS Class of 1998, credits her high school teacher, Ms. Vernon Beard, for shaping her vision of excellence and grace. “As an African-American female teacher, she inspired me to believe in myself and see what I could achieve,” she said. Colquitt fondly remembers how Ms. Beard often quoted Maya Angelou, teaching students lessons about confidence and dignity.



Colquitt carries those lessons into her leadership at Pershing Elementary. “U. City taught me the value of community. It was a place where you could be yourself and be supported. I want every child at Pershing to feel seen, heard, and capable of doing amazing things,” she said. She also hopes that students leave school with a sense of joy in learning. “I want students to remember Pershing as a place that sparked joy and did not dim their light,” she said.



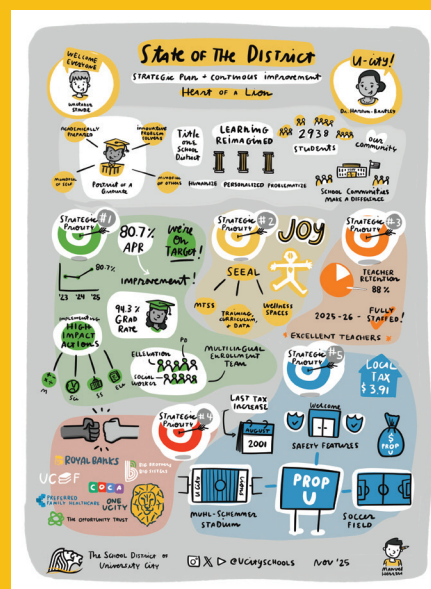
For these alumni, pride in U. City is not just about remembering the past. It is about giving back and fostering a community where students feel supported, challenged, and celebrated. Their stories show how the guidance of mentors and meaningful experiences continue to shape the next generation.

U. City Community Comes Together for Annual State of the District and Strategic Planning Session

On November 10, 2025, families, staff, and community members gathered for the School District of University City's annual State of the District and Strategic Planning Session. The event celebrated progress, shared key updates, and invited input on next steps for students and staff. The District earned an overall score of 80.7% on the 2025 Missouri School Improvement Program Annual Performance Report (APR), achieving full accreditation and improving on last year's results. Community members can explore full APR results, rankings, and supporting data through DESE's Comprehensive Data System portal at ucityschools.org/apr.

The District's instructional vision, Learning Reimagined, continues to guide current practices and will be refreshed in the coming months as part of the Strategic Plan update.

Adding a special creative touch, educator and illustrator Manuel S. Herrera joined the session and captured the discussion in real-time artwork. His illustrations highlighted the District's priorities and celebrated the community partnerships that make U. City schools strong.



Presentations from the meeting are available online. English version: ucityschools.org/soddeck2526; Spanish version: ucityschools.org/sodespanol2526



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University City Education Foundation: Together for Our Schools

Earlier this year, the University City Education Foundation (UCEF) welcomed Earl G. Strauther as its new Executive Director. With extensive experience in nonprofit and community leadership, he joins the Foundation at an exciting time for its work in support of our schools.

Founded in 1996, UCEF is an independent, nonprofit organization that operates separately from the School District of University City, yet works in close partnership with the District to expand opportunities for students. Through private donations and community support, the Foundation funds enrichment programs and innovative initiatives that enhance learning beyond traditional public funding.

We are deeply grateful for UCEF's partnership and their unwavering commitment to our students and educators. Their impact is felt across our schools every day.



MAKE A GIFT

To learn more or to make a gift in support of our students, visit ucityeducationfoundation.org.



One U City to Host Rummage Sale in June

One U City, a dedicated group of parent volunteers supporting elementary and middle school students across the District, is hosting a community-wide rummage sale at Jackson Park Elementary School (7400 Balson Ave.) over two weekends: **June 5-7 and June 12-14.**

The sale will take place daily from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. and will feature a wide variety of treasures for every shopper. Donations are warmly welcomed and may be dropped off at Jackson Park Elementary from Tuesday, June 2 through Thursday, June 4.

We hope you'll join us to shop, donate, and support our students!



DONATIONS

For details on accepted items and specific drop-off times, visit ucityschools.org/rummagesale.