



*From the Superintendent...
Robert S. Monroe*

*Rebounding,
Accelerating and
Moving Forward*

Dear UCS Community:

Throughout my years as an educator in our district, I have always believed the greatest strengths we have in Utica Community Schools is our resilience and capacity to plan for both the expected and unexpected.

Because of this, we stand ready to rebound from the challenges of the past year to be even stronger and better than before. We are eager to return our students to the routines and traditions they've sorely missed.

Our students expect the adults in their lives to make the best decisions for their wellbeing at home and at school. And we won't let them down.

While visiting our schools these past few weeks, I felt a sense of satisfaction observing the familiar sights and sounds of learning. Reading and recess, science labs and sports, music and mathematics – the rhythm of activities that make schools such a positive environment. We are back and it's great!

Rebounding – regaining possession of the ball and driving it to the basket – is a great analogy for what is happening right now in our classrooms, in person and virtually, as teachers and students work to regain

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More than \$16 million in bond improvements welcomed UCS students to the 2021-22 school year



Jeannette Junior High students were greeted this fall with a newly renovated media center, part of several infrastructure and renovation projects district-wide, funded by the bond issue UCS voters approved in 2018. This new technology-rich learning center provides students with inviting spaces for group and individual study. Quiet work nooks and dedicated conference rooms enhance student options.

See Bond Issue Update on page 4



The UCS Continuous Improvement Process and Strategic Planning Initiative

Utica Community Schools is celebrated for student achievement that consistently surpasses county, state and national benchmarks. UCS instructional programs and educators earn countless awards statewide and nationally year after year.

Our most recent graduation rate stands above 95 percent, with the majority of our students pursuing postsecondary education.

Maintaining this level of excellence does not happen by accident, but rather through continuous improvement actions to accelerate the high educational standards our community expects and deserves.

Following the challenges of the past year, the district's priority going forward is to assure every student has what he or she needs to fully engage academically and accelerate for success at their own level of ability.

Aligned with these efforts, this fall we are initiating *Accelerate UCS!*, a collaborative process of strategic planning and continuous improvement.

You may ask, what does this mean and how will this work?

Accelerate UCS! is an integrated tool for consistent deep analysis of current and

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UCS counselor named Michigan's best

As a certified school counselor, Catherine Livingston has dedicated her career to meeting the needs of her students at every



C. Livingston

level of their academic and emotional needs.

It's this "whole child approach" that has earned the Henry Ford II High School counselor selection as the 2022

Michigan School Counselor of the Year by the Michigan School Counselor Association (MSCA).

"It truly is an honor to receive this award. It not only represents my accomplishments, but also the accomplishments and positive things UCS is doing for our students and their academic careers, and especially their social and emotional mental health needs," Livingston said. "They say it takes a village to raise a child. I say it takes a dedicated, united school district to educate the whole child."

In announcing the award, MSCA cited Livingston for leadership in providing resources and support to fellow counselors to address students' mental health needs.

Bridge to Kindergarten – Young Fives off to a great start

Utica Community Schools is pleased to announce a new program for kindergarten-age students who may need additional time before beginning a traditional program.

Bridge to Kindergarten – Young Fives is a program to provide young children a year of further development and maturity before entering traditional kindergarten. The program is offered for the first time this school year at select elementary schools in the district.

"The Bridge to Kindergarten - Young Fives program will give many of our youngest students the gift of time as they begin their transition to kindergarten," Superintendent Robert Monroe said.

Advanced Placement scholars

Nearly 500 Utica Community Schools students earned top honors through the rigorous college-level Advanced Placement (AP) program this past school year.

The College Board, which administers the AP tests, announced that 468 UCS students received national scholar designations.

AP courses, which are offered at all UCS secondary schools, give students the opportunity to earn credit or advanced standing at most colleges and universities.

Students must successfully pass College Board exams to earn college credit. Students are graded on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest. Honors earned by UCS students this past year include:

- AP Scholar with Distinction status to 127 students who earned an average score of at least 3.5 on all AP exams taken and scores of 3 or higher on five or more exams.
- AP Scholar with Honor status to 87 students who received an average score of at least 3.25 on all AP exams taken, and scores of 3 or higher on four or more exams.
- AP Scholar status to 254 students who received scores of 3 or higher on three or more exams.

In addition, two UCS students were recognized for submitting research as part of an AP seminar course and one student was awarded an AP Capstone Diploma.

In the 2020-2021 school year, 2,200 UCS students took a total of 3,583 AP exams. Currently, 31 Advanced Placement courses are offered in our district.



Big plans to support students

Since 1986, the Utica Community Schools Foundation for Educational Excellence has worked to fund additional learning and enrichment opportunities for students.

If the terms classroom educational grants, Superintendent's Scholarships and the Sixth Grade Career Focus Luncheon ring familiar at your house, it's because the Foundation's financial backing made these programs possible. These events continue to be traditional touchstones in the lives of thousands of UCS students past and present.

Recent grants include support for Ozbots Across the Curriculum, Coding Comes to Life and Henry Ford II High School's female woodworking class that produces high-quality paddle-boards that attract wide interest, including from celebrities.

The 16-member volunteer group raises funds for their good work through business and corporate sponsorships, an annual golf outing and individual contributions to the Foundation's Century Club. "Our goal is to assist and help fund educational-based endeavors for UCS students and teachers," said UCS Foundation President Sherman Abdo.

"The best way for parents to get involved is to become members of the Century Club," said Abdo. Anyone interested in the Foundation's efforts or in making a tax-exempt donation is asked to visit www.UCSfoundation.org.

UCS Bridge to Kindergarten



The full-day program was designed and is being taught by highly-qualified UCS teachers. The curriculum integrates early childhood and beginning kindergarten standards that develop students' literacy,

math and social and emotional skills.

Students will have group and individual work with hands-on activities designed around their unique needs.

Students will also receive weekly art, media center, music and physical education learning experiences.

Parents are encouraged to visit www.uticak12.org/UCSbridgetokindergarten to learn more about the program.

UCS teacher leads city beautification project

Something beautiful is blooming in downtown Utica, thanks to Davis Junior High School teacher and professional artist Gail Borowski (below), who led efforts to paint a meaningful mural on the east wall of the Utica fire station on Auburn Road.

The mural, made possible through a partnership with the Detroit Institute of Arts, came to life with the help of Utica community members, residents and UCS teacher and student volunteer artists.

“This has really become a whole community partnership,” Borowski said. “I think nothing can make an artist prouder.”

Charlie Garling, director of studio programs for the Detroit Institute of Arts, said Borowski was chosen for the quality of her work, her Utica roots and the trust the DIA has in her.

Utica is one of eight communities selected for this year’s Partners in Public Art (PIPA) program, a DIA outreach that creates lasting works of public art.

For the Utica piece, Borowski submitted three design ideas to city officials, with the community leaders eventually choosing a series of flowers that represent what makes the city such a great place to live. The DIA surveyed residents on what they liked most about living in the City of Utica.

The flowers and their unique meanings are: *Amaryllis* - pride, many residents indicated

pride in their city.

Lily - courage, several residents’ requests honored police and fire fighters.

Carnation - I will never forget you, for residents of the past and Utica’s long history.

Magnolia - love of nature, local parks and the Clinton River were popular responses.

Dahlia - dignity, Utica residents are ambitious and proud.

Iris - wisdom, residents love their schools and success, asking for Utica High School representation, specifically!

Tulip - love, mentioned often with regard to their city.

Zinnia - never forget absent friends, residents noted that UHS graduates often return to Utica to raise their own families.

Chamomile - energy in adversity, symbolizes determined pioneers who founded the town upon arriving in horse-drawn wagons.

Rosemary - remembrance of Utica’s roots.

Utica HS junior Sarah Monticciolo, who helped paint the mural, said, “I’m really excited to be here because it’s a great opportunity. I really love doing art and I thought it would be a new thing to try.”

Borowski said she is proud of the team’s work to create a mural that will symbolize the community for generations to come.

“While there’s a lot of meaning in every line, shape and color, sometimes you just need some beauty in a cool, historic city,” she added. “Some place pretty to rest your eyes.”



Accelerate UCS! from page 1

future student needs at each grade level across our 36 schools and myriad programs, taking into consideration what is working well and what may require change. Simply put, the steps in the *Accelerate UCS!* process are:

- Assess needs
- Develop and implement an action plan
- Monitor progress
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation and outcomes

In the first semester, school-based and district-level teams will begin assessing needs – some of which may be common to all, while others may be unique to a school or grade level. Staff, parents, students and building and district administrators will be surveyed for input to determine priorities for improving student academic growth.

In the second semester, our improvement efforts will be centered on research-based practices. *Accelerate UCS!* activities will advance from information gathering to establishing goals, identifying and implementing action plans and finally, measuring and monitoring results.

Our work will focus on a defined number of achievable goals to deliver high-quality experiences for students. Periodic updates will follow throughout the process to keep you informed of our progress.

Erfourth selected to lead MRA

Teacher Jill Erfourth can trace her love of reading to her days as a student at Flickinger Elementary.

Now, as the newly selected president of the Michigan Reading Association (MRA) professional educators’ organization, her lifelong passion for



J. Erfourth

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Erfourth leads MRA *from page 3*
literacy will impact Michigan's 1.4 million students.

"The ability to read, write and communicate connects people to one another. Books can be mirrors, windows and doors building empathy and community. There is power in story," Erfourth said. "Stories inspire agency and activism, help us celebrate, respect and value what makes us each unique while highlighting commonalities we share as humans."

"As president, I plan to carry out our mission of empowering Michigan students and educators through literacy while expanding our strategic plan to support equity in literacy and book access for all students," added Erfourth, the district's K-6 literacy consultant.

Her focus will be to expand partnerships with the community and give educators more opportunities for professional growth through webinars and networking sessions.

School Calendar 2021-2022

October 29
Elementary Half Day
Secondary Full Day

November 2
No School K-12

November 11
Elementary Half Day
for Conferences
Secondary Full Day

November 24-26
Thanksgiving Break
No School K-12

December 17
Secondary Exams
Secondary Half Day

December 20
Secondary Exams
All Students Half Day

December 21
End of the Marking Period
All Students Half Day

December 22-31
Winter Break
No School K-12

January 17
Martin Luther King Jr. Day
No School K-12

February 21-25
Mid-Winter Break
No School K-12

April 4-8
Spring Break
No School K-12

April 15
Good Friday
No School K-12

May 27-30
Memorial Day Weekend
No School K-12

June 8
Secondary Exams
Secondary Half Day

June 9
Secondary Exams
All Students Half Day

June 10
Last Student Day
All Students Half Day

Notice of Nondiscrimination

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

Bond Issue Update

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An improved learning environment is in store for UCS students this fall, thanks to more than \$16 million in recent bond-funded renovations.

"The investment our community is making in its schools has a direct impact on our learning environment," Superintendent Robert Monroe said.

"This investment is making a difference by funding improvements within the bond issue's focus areas – enhancing safety, improving technology and addressing the long-range facility needs of Michigan's second largest school district."

The bond-funded projects completed this summer include:

- New entryways at six district schools that require all visitors to directly enter the building through the school office area for added security. Currently, all UCS school entrances are locked with a camera-entry system. Visitors must identify themselves to school office personnel prior to entry.

- Infrastructure improvements as identified in the district's long-range improvement plan, including parking lots, roofs and heating and cooling system upgrades at sites across the district. A major renovation effort is also underway at Jeannette Junior High School (see front page photo).

- Replacement of 11 school buses.

The projects were set into motion by the \$155 million bond issue approved by voters in November 2018.

For more bond issue information, please go to www.uticak12.org/2018bond/updates.

www.uticak12.org

Find updates from
Utica Community Schools on:



www.uticak12.org/social

Rebounding, Accelerating and Moving Forward

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what may have been lost and drive toward the goal of higher achievement, the hallmark of Utica Community Schools.

We are proud of our proven academic programs and the success of our graduates, but we are never content. As with every successful organization, we are constantly moving forward. This fall, as part of our improvement efforts, we will begin an intense process of self-reflection and strategic improvement known as *Accelerate UCS!*

We will draw opinions and ideas from a broad base of UCS stakeholders – parents, teachers, staff and students, as well as business leaders and community members – to establish clear direction from which to further build our tradition of excellence. Please take a moment to look over the introduction to our strategic plan beginning on page one. You will hear more about this important initiative as it unfolds over the coming months.

As the new school year accelerates into full speed and we bound ahead, our supportive community is more important than ever. I ask for your help in making this year a successful one for every student.

Together, we will achieve the best for our kids.

Robert S. Monroe
Superintendent of Schools



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