



November 3, 2023

Dear UCS Staff,

Conferences, playoff runs, fall plays, holiday charity drives and Halloween. It must be the start of the second quarter in Utica Community Schools.

In the blink of an eye, we are now in the tenth week of school. From day one, we recognized quickly that this was going to be a different kind of year in UCS. This year the celebrations have been greater, the annual Back to School traditions were more meaningful, and our focus is on remarkable student achievement.

This positive learning environment is our goal for today and well into the future. Even as we focus on the day-to-day pace that is Utica Community Schools, we are working through our UCS Empowered Strategic Plan to take our district to an even higher level.

Already, we are moving toward that future by focusing on the three key areas of our plan – a culture of empowerment; a culture of caring; and a culture of transformation.

Culture of Empowerment – Ensuring all students are engaged in experiences leading to the academic growth and achievement enabling them to prepare for the careers of their choosing.

The district's newest high school specialty program – the Utica Academy for Health and Human Services (UAHHS) – was dedicated by district and health community leaders last month. UAHHS joins our five existing secondary specialty programs and comprehensive high schools to give our students the opportunities and experiences to follow their passions.

From a wider teaching and learning standpoint, our Board of Education has approved an extensive and comprehensive series of improvements on the programs and services offered in our district – the most comprehensive approach I have seen in my 20 plus years in the district.

Planning continues for Teaching and Learning initiatives in early literacy, mathematical fluency, Career and Technical Education (CTE), expanded wellness services and support, expanded AVID, AP and IB opportunities and an upgraded and deepened elementary science curriculum.

Culture of Caring – Ensuring a sense of belonging and inclusion to foster engagement in a safe and respectful community.

Recently, Eppler Junior High School counselors brought together students who were new to the building. The event was about building relationships, engaging them and reminding their newest students that they belong and are wanted at the school. In a nutshell, it captured what we mean when we say a culture of caring.

Utica Community Schools Board of Education

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Through this focus area, we are creating an extensive network of services and proactive wellness tools to support the mental health and well-being of our students, families and staff.

Every school has a wellness group that is having conversations about how to create this sense of belonging. At a district level, we have created a position focused on mental health needs of our students and staff.

Our focus is on the relationships that allow children and adults to thrive. When we work together, there is a sense of belonging in school with a place they can go in times of stress or discomfort. For everyone, this is an issue that eliminates inhibitors to student success but also is critical to a safe learning environment.

Culture of Transformation - Ensuring programming, resources and facilities support reimagining UCS.

With the passing of the Safety and Success bond issue last year, we began a multi-year process to show how we can better use our facilities to support remarkable student achievement.

This process began last spring as our Enrollment Distribution Advisory Committee (EDAC) met to address the future of shared use at Heritage Junior High School and the Gene L. Klida Utica Academy for International Studies. Their input will help guide us later this month in determining the building's future use. We have posted information on this building use study on our [website](#).

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

I truly believe that the past several years held a series of defining moments for our district – the pandemic and the transition to where we are today; the development of our strategic plan, and the overwhelming community support for our safety and success proposals.

We are now in a position to take the next step. With this continued energy, we are creating an environment that allows us to appreciate and celebrate the successes we are achieving today, and position ourselves for inspiring remarkable achievement for the next generations of our students.

Sincerely,



Robert S. Monroe
Superintendent of Schools