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“Every Student – Every Day”



Union Township Update

DOING WHAT’S BEST FOR KIDS!

Spring 2023

Three New School Board Members Begin Their Work



Christie Kostbade

chose to run for the School Board for several reasons. “I am going to be involved for a while in school since my youngest is in 2nd grade,” said

Mrs. Kostbade. “I want to be a voice for the parents. I have always had good relationships with teachers, coaches, and school administrators through my work with the Booster Clubs. My fellow Board members feel like friends. It is a nice dynamic. We all are focused on making the best decisions for students.”



Leah Pagone

and her family have lived in Union Township for 8 years. She taught dual credit English at WHS until she resigned in 2020 to spend more time with her two

young daughters. “I am excited to be on the School Board,” Mrs. Pagone said. “I know the classroom and evaluation side of education and can contribute to our discussions about educating our students. When I quit teaching, I needed to contribute to the schools in some way. Each Board member has a different strength to contribute.”



Kevin Ribordy

is a graduate of WHS and Purdue and works at Merrill Lynch. “Union Township is a great place to live,” Mr. Ribordy smiled. “I had a great

educational experience here. I want to maintain that quality of our education for future generations of kids. I bring the perspective of a WHS graduate. On the Board, we have people with different backgrounds, but we all seem to be focused on making the best decisions and doing what is best for kids.”

UTMS School Counselor Aims to Encourage the Whole Child

UTMS Counselor Annmarie Sims actively pursues ways to interact with UTMS students so that everyone realizes that her services help students grow and mature positively. Some of her ideas this trimester include the following:

Compliment Cards: Mrs. Sims invites students, staff, and parents to write a brief compliment to a middle school student. Once a week, she gathers them all and hangs them inside of the lockers of the students receiving the compliments. “We started this during ‘Random Acts of Kindness Week’ (February 13-17), explained Mrs. Sims. “It was so successful that we have now continued it each week. Kids certainly like receiving a compliment, but it also shows them how others perceive them positively.”

Take What You Need: “With the help of Media Aide Mrs. Parrish, we cut colorful stars, wrote inspiring messages, and put them up in the Commons area of the middle school,” said Mrs. Sims. A sign on the board invites anyone to take the star and put it in their folders or lockers. “They are an unspoken comfort for all who do not want to be singled out, but who need a little emotional support,” Mrs. Sims explained. “There were so many stars taken the first day! I replace them with new stars as they disappear.”

Conversation Starters: This activity will start in April. Once a week during Advisory Period, Mrs. Sims will explain a topic to the students through a video broadcast to all classrooms asking them to discuss that topic in small groups – ‘What was your biggest struggle in middle school?’ ‘What is on your bucket list now?’ and similar topics. “Students can share about themselves and connect with others in their class, as well as their teacher,” she said.

Middle school is being made a richer experience through efforts to help students grow and mature on the inside, too.

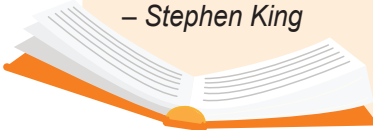


“Reading one book is like eating one potato chip.”
– Diane Duane



They Love Coming to the Media Center

“Books are a uniquely portable magic.”
– Stephen King



The Media Centers at John Simatovich Elementary (JSE) and Union Center Elementary (UCE) are humming with activity. “They love coming to the Media Center,” said 2nd grade teacher Shelby Sullivan watching her students listen as **JSE Media Aide Alexis Kegebein** read to her students. “Reading to students inspires them to read.”

Alexis Kegebein has been at JSE for four years after doing her student teaching at UCE. “The love of reading starts early,” Mrs. Kegebein observed. “I like to find books of interest and read to the students to get them started. My greatest joy is seeing them get excited over a book and watch them hunt for another one. I like to put books with unfamiliar authors next to books with familiar authors so they can find the next, great adventure.”

“Children are made readers on the laps of their parents.”
– Emilie Buchwald



The JSE Media Center has two book fairs per year and reading challenges at school breaks. “I challenge them to read for 20 minutes each day of their school breaks,” said Mrs. Kegebein. “They should read for fun to family members, a pet, or a stuffed animal. Practicing reading increases their skill and fluency. We also have two literacy events, ‘Brownies & Books’ and ‘Dr. Seuss Night’ with parents. Students, and even some parents, come dressed

up like Seuss characters, which makes it exciting for everyone. This summer,

JSE will host both JSE & UCE students and families since there will be construction at UCE. Each Wednesday from June 7-July 26 the JSE library will be open with story time and crafts at 11 am.”

UCE Media Aide Amber Welch started work on January 4, 2023. However, she is not new

to teaching having taught in Portage before deciding to be at home with her four children. All four children are now in UTSC schools.

The UCE Media Center is a spacious room in the new wing recently added to the school. Mrs. Welch is in the process of making it “welcoming, open, and ‘homey’.” “I have had amazing community support for our Media Center,” she said. “I had my Amazon Wish-List which I made public. School families proceeded to purchase all I needed. I asked for volunteers for a Book Fair. Ten minutes later, I had 20 responses after posting the request online.”

Mrs. Welch agrees with Mrs. Kegebein that “the love reading needs to start early.” “My main joy is being back with kids again and encouraging them to read,” Mrs. Welch said. “I am trying different ideas to make it

fun for them. I have started to group the books by genre and reading level so that it is easier for them to find the next book in the type of reading they like. During Reading Across America last week, I introduced ‘flashlight’ reading. Each student curls up with a pillow and a book. We turn out the overhead lights and read by flashlight. When I read to them as a group, I have an app called ‘Novel Effect’ and a speaker. The app provides sound effects that go along with many books I read to them. We are continuing the summer reading program. JSE welcomes the UCE students and families to the summer reading program. (UCE Principal) Mr. Gabriel has been very supportive of the UCE Media Center. Coming back to teaching after raising a family has been smooth for me. Teaching is just like being a mother to more kids. If I make a difference to a child, I am doing my job.”



“A beggar’s book out-works a noble’s blood.”
– Wm. Shakespeare



The Superintendent's Corner

By John Hunter, Superintendent of Schools



As spring begins, we are excited about all the ways we continue to improve in Union Township School Corporation. We have recently completed our IREAD 3 assessments for all students in grades two and three. IREAD 3 measures the foundational reading skills based on the Indiana Academic Standards. Our students also demonstrate continuous improvement as measured by NWEA, an assessment that measures growth and proficiencies which is correlated with our Indiana assessment, ILEARN. The fall, winter, and spring assessments identify learning, strengths and gaps. These assessments are utilized by our teachers to address individual and small group needs.

Many of our students have demonstrated improvement through their involvement in competitions. Our middle school music students participated in "Circle the State in Song." Thirty-four of our high school choir students returned from the Indiana State School Music Association (ISSMA) contest with either a high distinction gold or gold rating. We are proud of our high school academic teams which recently competed at Purdue Northwest and placed third (English), second (Math) and first (Science). Wheeler High School is scheduled to host another competition later in April for our academic teams. These are just a few of our students' many accomplishments.

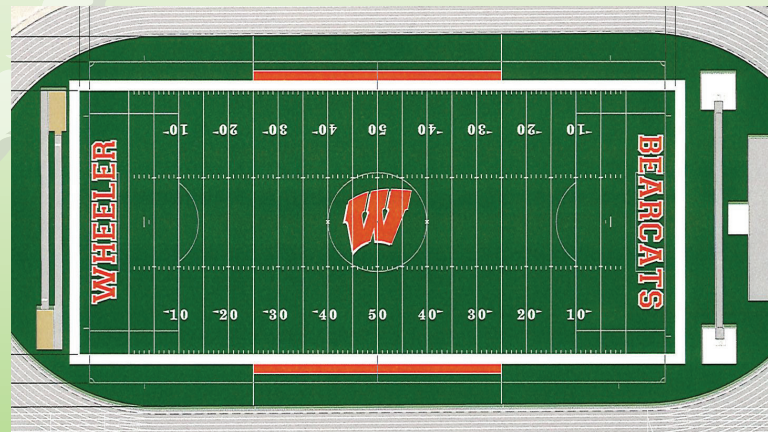
UTSC also continues to improve and care for our facilities in order to enhance opportunities and programs for our students. Our fieldhouse expansion is complete. This project provides a health classroom, a multipurpose room, three family use restrooms, two additional locker rooms and some much-needed storage.

Our new transportation facility is about 90% complete. This facility provides space for twelve buses, as well as space for maintenance equipment and a couple special purpose vehicles. An office and restroom are also included.

At the end of March, we anticipate further renovations at UCE to begin. Improvements to two remaining classrooms, the cafeteria, kitchen, and gymnasium will be part of this project. One additional classroom and a new entrance/reception area will complete the office project.

Renovations and improvements have also been started at our high school athletic venue. Installation of a turf field for use by football and soccer teams, a new track, and other improvements to the stadium are underway.

This project is scheduled for completion to start our fall season. Overall, the school construction projects demonstrate our community's and school district's commitment to providing safe, up-to-date, and effective learning environments for our students. We look forward to seeing the positive impact these projects will have on our students and our community as a whole. Our main goal continues to be to provide an engaging and relevant education for **'Every Student-Every Day!'**



Health Classroom



Transportation Center



UCE New West Wing
existing building (left)

The **Union Township Update** is a communication tool from the Union Township School Corporation to the taxpayers of Union Township. It presents topics of importance about the schools for the Union Township taxpayers so they may gain insight into how their public schools are being effective and efficient.

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Improving Student Outcomes through Teacher Teams

By Leigh Barnes, Assistant Superintendent



Assistant Superintendent Barnes discusses test results with the UTMS 8th grade team.

I am humbled by my new opportunity this year to team with teachers and staff, Board members, and Bearcat families, all of whom are focused on student growth. Recently, I reviewed our joint mission and values. I have identified two overarching goals for my first year as Assistant Superintendent: **1) to foster strong relationships with all staff, and 2) to positively impact student growth across all buildings.**

I believe that every student has the potential to achieve their highest levels of personal success every day. One way we accommodate individual learning styles is through teacher teams focused on student outcome data. I work with administrative teams, grade level building teams, and department teams to analyze student growth data and make data-driven decisions that support each student's learning. NWEA, IREAD-3, ILEARN, PSAT, and SAT are assessments that measure our student achievement, growth, and learning readiness, especially in the areas of reading and math. Using this data, teams are able to set achievement goals and tailor our instruction to meet the needs of individual students. By working with these teams, I build relationships with staff, and together we make an impact on student achievement.

We are proud that our efforts have yielded exceptional results with our student body. **UTSC students perform far above the state average.** They rank among the top two school districts in Porter County in many subject areas and grade levels. I am honored to be part of building this excellence in student performance – **Every Student, Every Day!**

Bearcat Café A Pathway to Graduation

In recent years, Indiana High School Graduation Requirements have changed dramatically. One of those changes requires students to not only pass academic classes, but to "learn and demonstrate employability skills." Therefore, it is important for WHS to provide graduation opportunities for students within the scope of the school day.

School counselor Amanda Gibson recognized the need for a graduation pathway for some students and set out to find a solution. After researching ideas from other area schools, she decided that starting the 'Bearcat Café' was the best answer.

In November, 2022, the Bearcat Café opened, serving coffee, tea, and hot chocolate from 7:45-8:15 am to school staff at first, and then to students as the program began to develop. "Students learn many things at the Bearcat Café – being on time, effective communication



Joshua, Quante, Julissa, Goldie, Liam, and Hannah are able to demonstrate their skills.

with people, the importance of quality, money handling skills, and inventory control; basically, the typical range of first job experiences," said Mrs. Gibson. "Staff and students must pre-order their drink the day before on special order slips. Our baristas then prepare the drink orders to be ready for pick up the following morning. Our operation must be self-sustaining so watching what is ordered, making correct change, and keeping inventory is essential. Our students now are able to show what they have learned. They are able to gain the credit and the skills necessary to gain the pathway to graduation."

Accreditation for WHS

Indiana high schools may choose to become accredited. It is a voluntary choice. "I am glad we have used a process called *Cognia*," said WHS Principal Dan Klimczak. "In my first year as principal, I used our previous *Cognia* report to direct our path toward becoming a more effective school. This past year, we went through the process again through a self-evaluation and evaluations by outside educators."

Cognia uses a set of rigorous protocols and research-based standards. The accreditation process examines the whole school — the programs, the cultural context, the community of stakeholders — to determine how well the parts work together to meet the needs of learners. It is not the outcome, but the process of accreditation that yields the greatest return on investment. "The internal evaluation was the most valuable to us," said Mr. Klimczak. "We did very well in the overall evaluation of WHS. I am proud of our hard working teachers. They get to see through the *Cognia* evaluation that we are doing great things. Our SAT scores improved and our college readiness pathway completion went up. Our dual credit participation by students is remarkable. More than 77% of our seniors have gained 3 or more college credits. The best of our kids have always been able to compete with the best. Now, we are strengthening the performance of all students. We have added dual credit classes which are not all for the highly able students. The *Cognia* process was very reassuring to me. It lets me know that we are recognized for doing well. It also helps to show us where we can go from here." Official results of the *Cognia* evaluation will be shared in the fall issue of the *Union Township Update*.



WHS Principal Klimczak shares Cognia results with school counselors Michael Rosta & Amanda Gibson.