



Building Minds... Changing Lives

BUILDING MINDS CHANGING LIVES UPDATE

WHAT'S ON YOUR CALENDAR FOR THURSDAY, MAY 20TH?

Join us for our *Building Minds...Changing Lives* virtual event! This exciting evening celebrates our incredible teachers and amazing students, and honors John Ackerman with the USI "Making a Difference" Community Service Award.

Much appreciation goes to the presenting sponsor **Strategic Capital Partners**. Gene Zink, founder of Strategic Capital Partners is a long-time education advocate and led the effort to start our first school with the belief that every child deserves to learn in a safe, positive and structured environment. In addition to the presenting sponsor, Katz, Sapper & Miller has underwritten the production costs for the event.

Proceeds will enhance USI's academic programming, and attendees have an opportunity to help our students by supporting specific projects at our schools.

To register or for more event information, please go to:
unitedschoolsindy.org/usi-recognition-event





RECOGNIZING OUR OUTSTANDING TEACHERS

Teachers are the heart of our schools – educators who are committed to the academic growth of our students. Each year, the Excellence in Teaching Awards honor teachers who go the extra mile each and every day. Their actions and positive attitudes result in academic growth and proficiency in our students. Our nominated candidates spend extra hours at school functions and make family connectedness a priority.

The Excellence in Teaching Award was started as a result of a \$250,000 contribution from Anne and David Knall in 2010. The Knalls wanted to recognize and reward teachers that show passion for the education and demonstrate a deep commitment to our schools' mission. This gift was put into an endowment fund that allows USI to distribute \$2,500 to each recipient.

Throughout the year, teachers in each of our schools are nominated by their colleagues. This year, we received a record number of nominations and the selection committees had a difficult decision to make.

The 2021 Excellence in Teaching Awards recipients are:

Chloe White, School Counselor, Avondale Meadows Academy

Ariennette Banks, Intervention Teacher, Avondale Meadows Academy

Dania Hayes, 6th Grade Humanities Teacher, Avondale Meadows Middle School

Marcy Laub, Second Grade Teacher, Vision Academy

Samantha Moore, 5th & 6th Grade Math Teacher, Vision Academy

In truth, all of our teachers and staff deserve recognition this year. Since the beginning of the pandemic, teachers have been on the frontlines, faced with the difficult task of maintaining normalcy in the lives of school age children in a world where almost nothing is as it was before. Despite incredibly difficult circumstances and endless questions about what the future of traditional schooling looks like, our teachers are prepared and ready to overcome any obstacles COVID-19 brings. Each day, these teachers go above and beyond to provide high-quality learning in a safe and stable environment for their students. Thank you to all of our teachers and staff.

STAFF SPOTLIGHT: KANDIS PEARSON

Kandis Pearson is in her first year as Principal of Avondale Meadows Academy (AMA). Kandis grew up in Indianapolis and graduated from Warren Central High School. During her freshman year at IUPUI, she set a goal of becoming a registered nurse. But after her freshman year, Kandis discovered a passion for education and switched majors. After graduating in 2009, she was hired by Avondale Meadows Academy as an instructional assistant working with kindergarteners on math and reading skills. In her second year at AMA, she began teaching her own kindergarten class and continued in this role for five years.



Starting in 2015, Kandis began working as a mentor and instructional coach to help her fellow teachers improve their teaching skills. Kandis said, **“The growth opportunities at AMA have allowed me to make a bigger impact on more students!”**

In 2020, Kandis was named AMA’s Assistant Principal and in this position, she continued to help coach and mentor teachers, but her duties expanded to supporting behavior management, and interacting with school families. At the end of the 2020 school year and after working at AMA for 11 years in a number of different roles, Kandis was named AMA’s Principal. Kelly Herron, Executive Director of United Schools of Indianapolis said about this appointment: **“It has been incredible to watch Kandis grow over the years, as a teacher and a leader. Her unwavering commitment to our mission and focus on continuous improvement will lead AMA to continued success.”**

Kandis resides in Avon with her husband and three children. Her daughter Kailyn is a senior in high school and plans to study nursing at Xavier University. What are the odds that Kailyn will change her major from nursing to education and then be named AMA Principal in the year 2036?

AT&T INVESTS IN USI

AT&T recently announced its Connected Nation K-12 Homework Gap program—a \$10 million initiative to provide free mobile Wi-Fi hotspots, wireless internet access, and content filtering services for one year to schools and nonprofits that serve at-risk youth. Many organizations from across the country sought support from AT&T. In 2020, more than 1500 organizations applied to this program but only 100 organizations and school districts received an award.



Support from AT&T became a critical opportunity for USI when Indiana Governor Eric Holcomb mandated in March 2020 that all Indiana schools were to remain closed for the rest of school year. In response, our teachers’ contacted families and determined that 30% of our students didn’t have access to the technology required for home learning. As a result, 300 Chromebooks and hotspots were lent to students to use for the remainder of the school year. The total cost to purchase Chromebooks and hotspots was \$106,000.

At the start of the 2021 school year, our school leadership teams worked diligently to plan for a safe return to in-person instruction and a high quality E-learning option for families. Approximately half of our students chose to attend in person while the other half chose the E-Learning from home option. Because many still students lack access to the connectivity and devices required for remote learning, we felt it necessary to find the funding to purchase this technology so that any of our students could study from home.

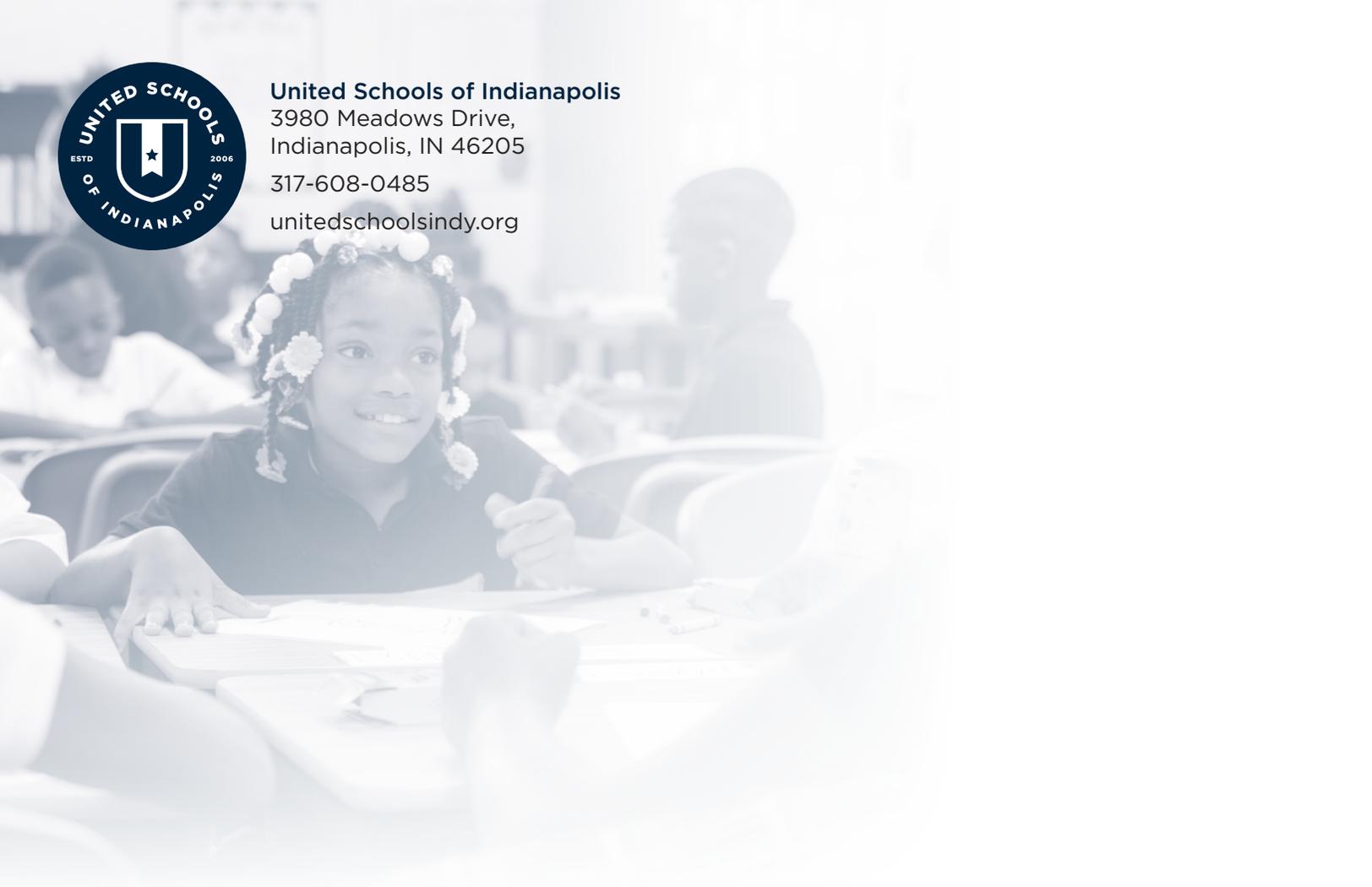
AT&T recently announced that United Schools of Indianapolis will receive 301 free mobile Wi-Fi hotspots, wireless internet access, and content filtering services for one year starting in July 2021 valued at \$72,000. United Schools of Indianapolis was the only Indiana based organization to receive a K-12 Homework Gap program award.

Chrystal Westerhaus, Principal of Avondale Meadows Middle School said: **“Transitioning from a traditional classroom - with paper and pencil - to the use of devices, was a whole new ballgame for our teachers and our students. Whether students are learning remotely or in the classroom, having access to affordable high-speed internet and devices helps ensure successful learning outcomes.”**





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HOW YOU CAN HELP A STUDENT SUCCEED:

To make a donation online, visit
www.unitedschoolsindy.org and click
on the donate button at the top of the page.

Checks can be made out to “United Schools of
Indianapolis” and sent to the USI Development Office
at **3980 Meadows Drive, Indianapolis, IN 46205.**

