

Building Minds...  
Changing Lives

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# United Schools of Indianapolis Presents First Round of VITAL Funding

## HISTORIC \$12.5 MILLION GIFT FROM ANONYMOUS DONOR SUPPORTS STAFF PERFORMANCE

United Schools of Indianapolis (USI) has awarded the first round of merit bonuses from the \$12.5 million VITAL 2023 Charitable Lead Annuity Trust. This inaugural distribution recognized 48 staff members with performance-based awards ranging from \$1,300 to \$40,000, averaging \$10,000 per recipient, for a total of \$500,000.

The VITAL trust, generously provided by an anonymous donor, underscores the importance of excellence in teaching and leadership, as reflected in its name—Vigilance in Teaching and Learning. This multi-million-dollar gift will support USI's performance-based bonuses, disbursing \$500,000 annually over the next 25 years.

In presenting the awards, Kelly Herron, Executive Director of USI, expressed, "I am extremely proud of our entire staff and their commitment to our families. These merit awards represent our appreciation for their hard work and willingness to go above and beyond to meet the evolving needs of our students. We also view this as an opportunity to invest in our staff. When we invest in our staff, we strengthen

our investment in the future of our school and the communities we serve." This merit award opportunity is available to the top 30% of all school-based staff members.

For more information about United Schools of Indianapolis, visit [unitedschoolsindy.org](https://unitedschoolsindy.org).



(L to R) Kelly Herron, USI Executive Director; Mark Roath, Vital Trust Representative; Bill Harris, USI Board Chair

# STAFF PROFILE:

# CHATARRA MORELAND

In 2022, Avondale Meadows Middle School partnered with City Connects to support teachers in addressing the diverse needs of students. Originating at Boston College, City Connects is an evidence-based program aimed at improving educational outcomes by addressing out-of-school factors that impact student success. With a systemic, cost-effective, and multi-year approach, this program enhances students' academic performance, attendance, and graduation rates, making a lasting impact on their educational journey.

At Avondale Meadows Middle School, **Chatarra Moreland** serves as the City Connects Site Coordinator. She assesses each student's strengths and needs and connects them with customized supports and resources to remove any barriers to success. Chatarra assists students and their families with access to mental health care, food, transportation, and housing. Reflecting on her role, she shared, "I just try to figure out where the needs are. I put resources in place for the family to try to eliminate needs or barriers they may have to receiving a great education at Avondale."

City Connects also operates in Avondale Meadows Middle School's sister schools, Avondale Meadows Academy and Vision Academy. According to Boston College, students involved in the program demonstrate improved academic performance, including higher standardized test scores and report card grades, and are less likely to drop out. By linking community resources with student needs, City Connects provides a comprehensive, holistic approach to education that supports students in achieving better academic and life outcomes.



## 50%

of students are less likely to drop out of high school with City Connects support

## 100%

of school principals believe City Connects improves school climate

“ I just try to figure out where the needs are. I put resources in place for the family to try to eliminate needs or barriers they may have to receiving a great education at Avondale. ”

# LILLY ENDOWMENT AWARD

United Schools of Indianapolis recently received a **\$50,000 grant** from the Lilly Endowment to explore innovative ways to boost student academic achievement. This grant supports a planning phase dedicated to identifying high-impact strategies and gaining deeper insights into the challenges that influence student performance.

Throughout the coming year, principals and school leaders will concentrate on pinpointing external barriers that limit student success. USI plans to collaborate with experts to design and implement evidence-based strategies that foster academic growth. As part of this initiative, USI has engaged EdResearch for Action to help bridge the gap between education research and practical decision-making, enhancing the quality and utilization of evidence in education.

In addition to this planning grant, USI has the opportunity to request an implementation grant to support classroom-focused initiatives. This additional funding would be directed towards tackling low reading achievement through paid and volunteer reading tutors, new literacy materials, and professional development aligned with the Science of Reading. The plan includes implementing “high-dosage tutoring” to ensure effective, impactful literacy support for students.





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AVONDALE MEADOWS | VISION ACADEMY

# MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

*Building Minds... Changing Lives*

**2025 CELEBRATION DINNER | THURSDAY, MAY 1, 2025**

United Schools of Indianapolis (USI) is thrilled to present its annual gala, Building Minds...Changing Lives. This inspirational evening will celebrate USI's ongoing commitment to creating transformative educational opportunities for students, fostering academic achievement, and shaping the leaders of tomorrow.

Set on the Avondale Meadows Campus, the event will bring together community leaders, educators, donors, and advocates, all dedicated to empowering Indianapolis students and strengthening their paths to success. During

the event, Mike Mason will be honored with the prestigious Making A Difference Community Service Award in recognition of his exceptional dedication and impact on our community.

Funds raised during the gala will support innovative educational programs, particularly those aimed at improving early literacy skills and enhancing overall student achievement. By investing in students' futures, USI's partners and supporters are building a legacy of opportunity and hope in Indianapolis. Join us in celebrating the power of education and the lives it transforms.