

Building Minds...  
Changing Lives

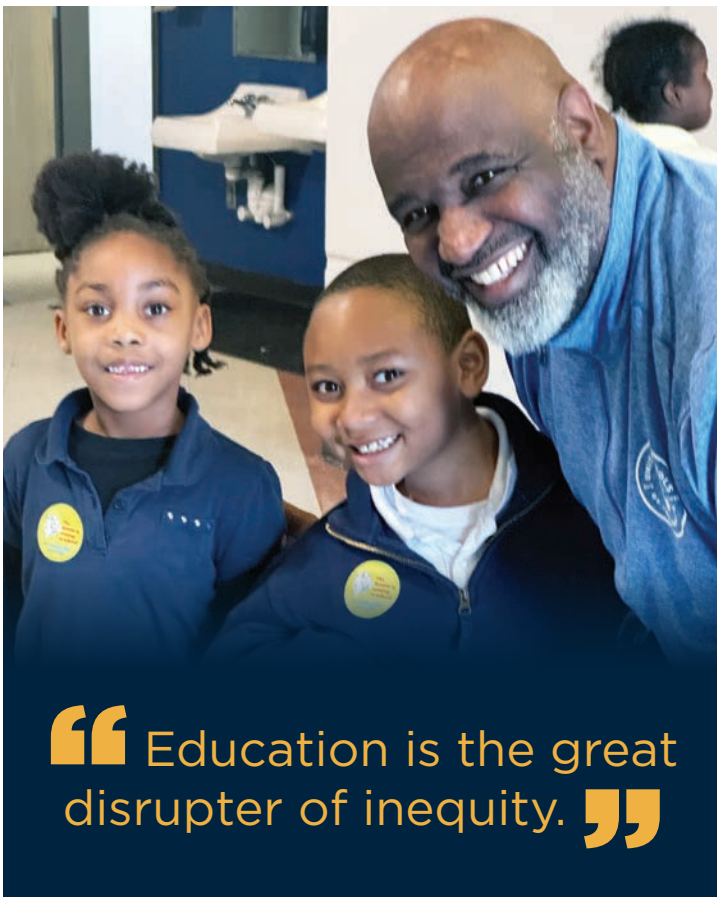
ADVANCEMENT JOURNAL

APRIL 2025



# Introducing Darius Adamson Sr.

## NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF UNITED SCHOOLS OF INDIANAPOLIS



“ Education is the great  
disrupter of inequity. ”

Darius Adamson was appointed Executive Director of United Schools of Indianapolis in February 2025. In a press release announcing his arrival, Darius stated, “Education is the great disrupter of inequity. Our schools serve as a launchpad for students to receive the access and opportunities needed for their post-secondary success.”

Originally from a small town in South Carolina, Darius pursued a history degree at the University of South Carolina with aspirations of becoming a historian or researcher. During his junior year, a transformative experience working at a camp for children with autism ignited his passion for teaching. He promptly added a second major in secondary education.

Following graduation, Darius taught at a middle school for three years before transitioning into school administration. His career trajectory led him to various administrative roles, culminating in his appointment as Executive Director of the Achievement Zone in Charlotte, North Carolina. Darius has also worked extensively within the charter school landscape and served as an assistant superintendent and regional superintendent with various organizations.

We are privileged to have Darius at the helm of our organization, bringing his wealth of experience and commitment to educational excellence.

# STUDENTS BUILD OUTDOOR GARDENS

Avondale Meadows Middle School and Vision Academy Middle School received grants of **\$2,500 from the Indiana Thriving Schools Challenge** to build outdoor gardens. The Indiana Thriving Schools Challenge is a project-based learning grants program for Indiana K-12 schools. The aim of the program is to support Indiana schools and students in their work towards a sustainable future, following the principles of the Earth Charter.

Each school plans to **build and sustain two 4 x 8 ft. raised bed gardens** as part of its commitment to hands-on learning and environmental stewardship. These gardens will serve as outdoor classrooms where students can engage in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) learning through the practical experience of growing plants. The project will teach students about plant biology, ecosystems, and sustainable gardening practices, such as composting and water conservation, while promoting healthy eating habits by growing fresh produce. The schools started planning and preparation in January and building and installing the beds in March, planting in April and cultivating at the end of the growing season.

Dr. Mark Simon, Principal of Avondale Meadows Middle School said about the project:

**“The raised bed gardens will foster a sense of responsibility and teamwork, with students taking on leadership roles to care for the garden throughout the school year. By partnering with local organizations and involving the broader community, our school aims to create a lasting, sustainable garden that not only enriches the academic experience but also strengthens ties with the local community through food donations, workshops, and environmental education.”**

The raised bed gardens will provide a platform for involving the local community. Families, volunteers, and local organizations will have opportunities to participate in garden events, workshops, and workdays, strengthening community ties and promoting environmental awareness. The garden's produce could be used to support the school's food programs or be donated to local food banks, helping to address food insecurity in the community while teaching students about giving back.





# READING PROFICIENCY GRANT

In the summer of 2024, **the Lilly Endowment contributed \$50,000** to USI to study ways that our schools can dramatically improve reading scores among kindergarten through third grade students. This gift provided the funding to collaborate with leading educational organizations to identify best practices in early literacy instruction and interventions.

To facilitate this process, USI partnered with the **Education Elements** consulting firm, which supported a strategic planning process to define USI's long-term direction, set clear goals and objectives and develop a roadmap to achieve them. Through surveys, focus groups, and community meetings, USI sought to understand the unique challenges facing early learners, particularly those in underserved areas, as well as the external barriers that limit student academic achievement. Families and local residents provided valuable insights into tailoring literacy interventions to meet their children's needs, emphasizing the importance of culturally responsive practices and community-driven support systems.

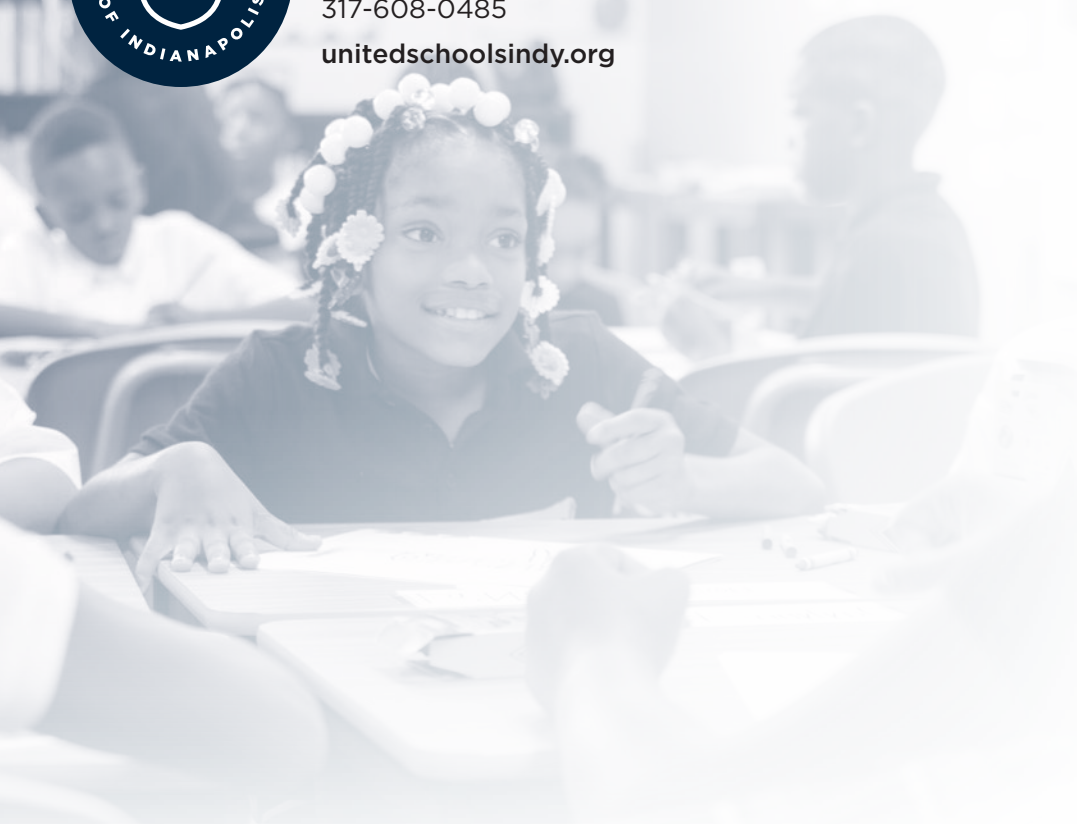
In December 2024, the Lilly Endowment gave another grant of **\$456,000** to initiate a program

that can dramatically improve reading scores among our younger students. As a result, our schools aim to implement a multi-faceted plan to address low reading achievement among kindergarten through third grade students using evidence-based practices grounded in the science of reading. The program integrates intensive teacher training, targeted interventions for struggling readers, and the use of data-driven assessments to track progress and tailor instruction. Through strong collaborations with school leaders, educators, and families, this initiative is designed to close achievement gaps and create sustainable improvements in early literacy outcomes, particularly for students in our underserved communities.

The program will target those students who are struggling to reach grade-level reading proficiency as well as students who are on track but can benefit from additional enrichment. Special attention will be given to students with dyslexia or other reading-related challenges through structured literacy approaches. Families will benefit from increased access to resources, such as reading workshops, family literacy nights, and take-home reading materials.



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## AVONDALE MEADOWS | VISION ACADEMY

# YOU'RE INVITED!

*Building Minds...Changing Lives*

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



The United Schools of Indianapolis *Building Minds...Changing Lives* event on May 1, 2025 will celebrate the successes of our students and faculty. Proceeds from the event enhance USI's academic programming that effectively combines college preparatory rigor with a strong, positive school culture. We hope you will consider supporting our mission by attending this event. At the event, **Mike Mason** will be honored with the "Community Service Award" for

his distinguished leadership and service to numerous organizations in Central Indiana. Mike is recently retired as a Senior Vice President at Eli Lilly and Company and served on the USI Board of Directors from 2018 to 2024. Mike not only served with great professionalism, dedication, and distinction, but continues to volunteer his time to help our schools maintain the mission of providing a high-quality education to families in underserved communities in Indianapolis.

For information about sponsorship or attending the event, call 317.608.0485, **visit [unitedschoolsindy.org/celebration-event](https://unitedschoolsindy.org/celebration-event)**, or scan the QR code above.

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