

# Specialty Programs Provide Choices Unique to Students

By Jane Peterson  
Special to The Oakland Press

**M**aking sure every child maximizes his or her potential requires a strong core curriculum coupled with exposure to enrichment opportunities, career preparation activities and unique educational experiences. The state's economic downturn doesn't change this goal; it simply challenges district leaders to find alternative avenues to reach it.

While committed to exercising sound fiscal principles, Utica Community Schools has discovered ways to not only maintain some of its most unique offerings, but bring in new ones as well. UCS parents enroll their children in schools that are recognized in the state and nation for academic excellence. UCS students can also take advantage of specialized programs designed to support their unique learning needs.

Below are some of the specialized programs available in UCS:

## Mandarin Chinese program

Two years ago, UCS introduced an innovative partial immersion Mandarin Chinese program. Thanks to the Project CLIME (Critical Language Initiative in Mandarin Education) federal grant, the district enhanced its K-12 foreign language program by offering kindergarten parents the opportunity to enroll their child in a full day immersion program.

What this means is that half of a student's day is spent learning a traditional kindergarten curriculum in English and the other half dedicated to mastering content through the use of Mandarin Chinese language and culture.

Available at Oakbrook Elementary School, but open to all UCS resident and Schools of Choice students, the program attracted 43 students its first year and another 46 students this year, said Brian Shepard, Oakbrook principal. "The district is always looking for innovative ways to give parents choices," he said.

While Mandarin Chinese is a rigorous program, research shows that students are able to learn new languages more quickly at younger ages. "The kids are like little sponges," said Shepard. Their being taught by a native speaker

and immersed in the culture promotes fluency and understanding as well.

The goal is a comprehensive K-12 language program where Oakbrook's Mandarin Chinese students can continue their studies at Heritage Junior High School and then Stevenson High School or the Utica Academy for International Studies. The latter is an International Baccalaureate school and the Mandarin curriculum fits right in with the IB program and its focus on global study, said Shepard.

The immersion program is receiving positive feedback from parents, students and staff. Shepard said it is exciting to hear students conversing with each other in Chinese, watching families grow together in their understanding of the culture and observing staff members take a team approach to successfully implementing the program. "This is a big opportunity for our students," he added.

## Montessori Education

UCS parents have the option of a K-6 Montessori-based education at Messmore Elementary.

Montessori education is both a philosophy of child growth and a rationale for guiding such growth. It is based on the child's developmental needs for freedom within limits, as well as the fact that children learn most effectively through direct experience and the process of investigation and discovery.

A carefully prepared environment guarantees exposure to materials and experiences that develop intelligence as well as physical and psychological abilities. It is designed to take full advantage of the self-motivation and unique ability of children to develop their own capabilities.

## Utica Center for Science and Industry

Through the Utica Center for Science and Industry (UCSI), the district has partnered with local business, industry and higher education leaders to equip students with the knowledge they need to be successful in today's global society.

Students receive work-based learning experiences through job shadowing, mentoring and on-the-job internships. Learning from those in the field, students receive a real sense of how what they

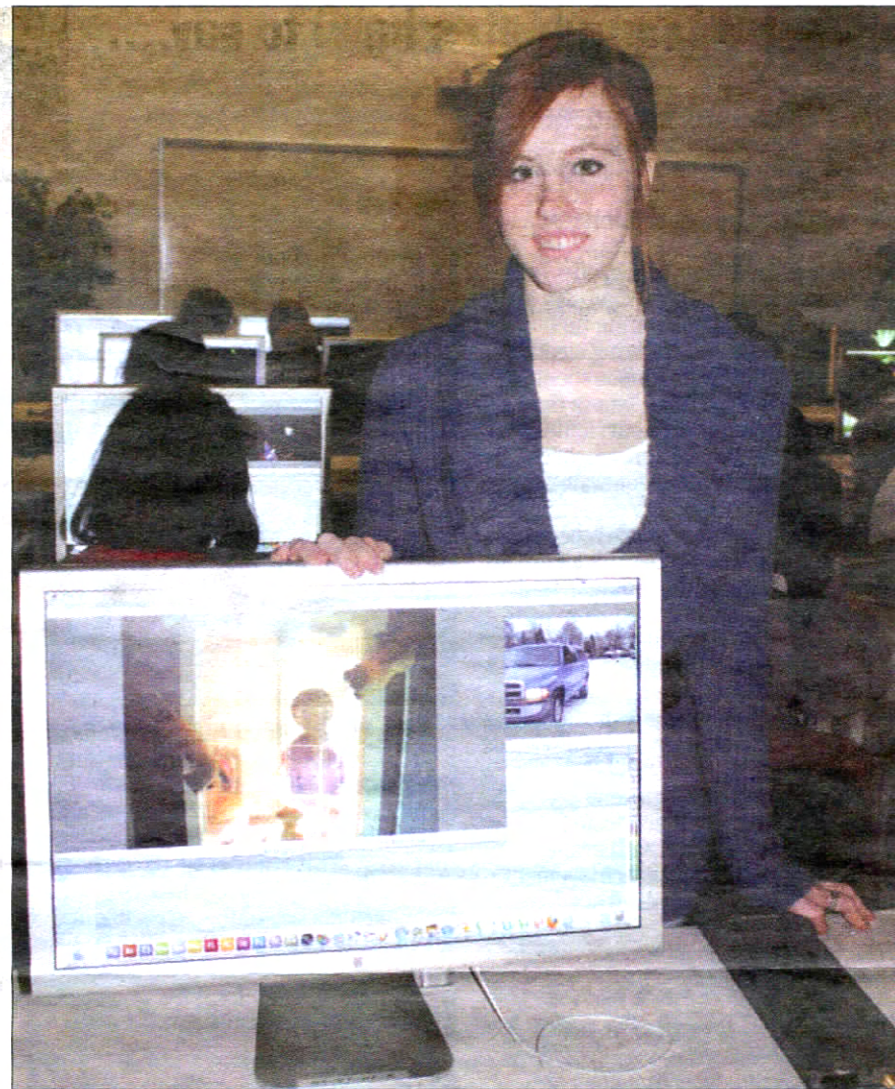


Photo courtesy of Utica Community Schools

**UCS student Morgan Lawrence earned an American Visions award for her animation work "Emma." She created the nationally-recognized project in her Visual and Technology course housed at the district's Instructional Resource Center.**

learn now will be relevant to them in their future careers.

While learning core curriculum objectives in math, language arts and sciences, students also immerse themselves in career study. UCSI is a four-year program with curriculum emphasis in three areas: Engineering Technology, Mechatronics and Multi-Media Technology. These areas encompass some of the most in-demand career choices and emerging technologies.

Engineering Technology, for example, covers topics like renewable energy and environmental sciences. By pairing their science and math training with tools the professionals use, like 3D models, computer simulation and prototypes, students can begin to prepare themselves for careers in biotechnology, robotics, nanotechnology and other related fields while still in high school.

Learning engineering principles can help students lay the groundwork for a future in Mechatronics, the study of pneumatic, hydraulic robotic and mechanical technology. This rapidly growing industry focuses on the design

of "smart" devices that will meet the needs of manufacturers around the globe and revolutionize countless industries.

Multi-Media Technology revolves around the fast-paced and ever-changing world of media, including video and television production, digital design, 3D animation, cinematic special effects and video game creation. This topic appeals to many students who are part of a generation known for embracing digital media. They will learn practical applications that will develop their knowledge in careers such as producer/director, screen writer, graphic designer, video editor and many more.

To learn more about UCSI, call 586.797.6800 or visit <http://csi.uticak12.org/>.

## Utica Center for Math, Science and Technology

Utica Center for Math, Science and Technology (UCMST) offers qualifying



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students rigorous instruction in advanced math and science concepts and prepares them for careers that utilize their individual knowledge, interest and talents.

Developed for students in grades 9-12, participants spend half of their day at their home high school honing their core curriculum skills and studying electives. The remainder of their time is spent in intensive study at UCMST, where they take part in an integrated curriculum that encourages innovation, research and independent student-generated study. Students conduct lab experiments, complete projects targeted to a specific field of study and use technology to problem-solve.

Subjects include chemistry, biochemistry and foundations of research, advanced biology, physics, advanced placement sciences, advanced algebra and geometry, analysis, calculus, statistics, computer science and advanced computer science.

Students are invited to attend the program based on their scores in accelerated seventh or eighth grade Algebra I, performance on achievement and aptitude tests and overall academic record.

The teaching atmosphere is dynamic and rich in technology.

To learn more about UCMST, call UCMST 586-797-6800 or visit [http://www.uticak12.org/instruction/ins\\_ucmst.asp](http://www.uticak12.org/instruction/ins_ucmst.asp).

## Utica Academy for International Studies

As Macomb County's first authorized International Baccalaureate (IB) high school, the Utica Academy for International Studies (UAIS) equips students with the knowledge and skills needed to compete anywhere in the world.

Rather than learning in a teacher-directed lecture format, students are encouraged to become critical thinkers



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and ask thought-provoking questions that lead to classroom discussions. Through this process, they become effective communicators, reflective learners and aware of the wide array of perspectives that exist. This study is based on the IB curriculum which covers English, world languages, social studies, experimental sciences, math and the arts. Each of these

subject areas offer specialization and all include a uniquely international focus. The rigors of the IB diploma program are recognized by universities around the world. Students who complete the two-year diploma program – grades 11 and 12 – are well prepared to handle the challenges of university study and the workplace environment. Similar

to AP curriculum, students have the opportunity to earn credits through IB exit assessments. They will perfect their research skills, time management abilities and enthusiasm for learning. This gives students the foundation they need to excel in any area of post-secondary study they choose.

To learn more about UAIS, contact Thomas.Lietz@uticak12.org, call 586.797.3190 or 586-797-3190, visit <http://uais.uticak12.org>.



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