



Building Minds... Changing Lives

VISION ACADEMY RECEIVES STEM PROGRAMMING GRANT

Vision Academy received a \$15,000 grant from 16 Tech to provide STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Math) programming during the summer and after-school. 16 Tech is an “innovation district” located in the Riverside Community and strives to bring together entrepreneurs, academics, startups, corporations, and community members in a single place dedicated to collaboration and creative problem-solving. 16 Tech established an investment fund to ensure access, opportunity, and revitalization of neighborhoods near 16 Tech Innovation District.

Because of this grant, Vision Academy plans to expand its out-of-school programming during the school year and summer to include unique STEM classes like “Code Black Coding and Creators Camp: Experimental STEAM Learning” for 3rd through 8th grade students. The goal of this project is to introduce new science, technology, engineering and math concepts to our students and empower them with the skills to succeed and adapt to this increasingly complex, changing, technological world.

The benefits of these classes include:

- Preparing students for high school: equipping our children with the strongest possible preparation for success in Indianapolis’s most demanding, college-preparatory high schools;
- Developing a passion for STEM by providing opportunities to explore STEM-related concepts as students develop a passion for it and hopefully pursue jobs in a STEM field;
- Helping children succeed: developing the ability to think critically, solve complex problems, and drive advancements in science and technology;
- Developing problem solving skills: teach students computational thinking and focus on the real world applications of problem solving.





STUDENTS SERVING OTHERS IN THEIR COMMUNITY

Each day, the scholars of Avondale Meadows Middle School work diligently to live out the core values of scholarship, character and service never forgetting their motto Ubuntu, which translates to mean “I am who I am because of who we all are.” Each month a group of student leaders, called the Eagle Ambassadors, plan and execute a community service project to help embody the value of service. Activities this year include:

- Students correctly matched 1 million vocabulary words through the website “Free Rice”, who then **donated in excess of 10 million grains of rice to communities in need across the globe.**
- **More than 480 bags of candy (like Reese’s Peanut Butter Cups, Snickers and Sour Patch Kids) were collected and donated to a local community center** (Edna Martin) to pass out at their annual trunk or treat community event. Organizers were expecting 1 or 2 boxes of candy, but our students brought so many boxes that there was no room left in the office for anyone to work.
- **Nearly 4,000 non-perishable food items were collected and donated** to four different pantries in our community including a shelter for women who suffer from domestic violence, which one of our scholars found and passionately advocated to donate to.
- Lastly, each year our Eagle Ambassadors host a “Coin War” to raise money to purchase holiday gifts for a family in need. This year, the family selected was one of the founding graduating scholars from the class of 2019 who lost his parents right before the holidays. **Over \$1,500 was raised which was enough to provide gifts for him, his twin siblings and baby sister.** With funds left over, another family was adopted and a donation was made to a Giving tree at a local church.

BILEN MULUGETA

Many know Bilen Mulugeta is the Principal at Vision Academy’s Middle School, but did you know that she was born and lived in Ethiopia until she was 15? Bilen primarily spoke Ethiopia’s native language Amharic and attended full immersion Italian primary school.



Due to political unrest and warfare, Bilen’s mother immigrated to the United States and settled in Indianapolis where she had many relatives. In 1995, Bilen, her two siblings and father followed their mother to Indianapolis. Bilen said about arriving in Indianapolis:

“I was 15 years old and within two weeks of arriving in Indianapolis, I started my freshman year at North Central High School. Talk about culture shock, I went from being the ‘big fish in a very small pond’ to not completely understanding what my teachers were saying.”

Bilen adapted quickly and by her senior year, there was no question that she would be attending college. Her parents expected her to study engineering, medicine or law and she chose Indiana University for its strong pre-med program. By her junior year, she realized that she wasn’t passionate about medicine and switched her major to Italian Literature. After graduating, she completed a masters in Italian Literature at Middlebury College in Vermont which included spending time at Florence University in Italy. She planned to study for a Ph.D. at Indiana University but realized that while she really enjoyed teaching she didn’t want to spend a career doing research as a college professor.

After deciding that teaching was her passion, Bilen and her husband Martin moved to Memphis, TN, where she taught Spanish and Martin taught music in an elementary school for ten years. After having two children, the pull to be surrounded by extended family led them back to Indianapolis. Bilen was hired as an Instructional Coach at Vision Academy in 2016. She enjoyed the transition from teaching to helping impact other teachers through mentoring. In the spring of 2019, Bilen was named Vision Academy Middle School Principal. The school benefits in many ways from Bilen’s leadership as well as her ability to speak Italian, Spanish, English and Amharic.



AMA MATHEMATICS PENTATHLON TEAM COMPETES IN TOURNAMENT

Mathematics Pentathlon is a program of interactive problem-solving games, instructional activities, and assessment tools for students in grades K-7. By using specially designed games and activities that differentiate instruction, students of varying abilities and learning styles are motivated to enjoy math and spend more time learning this subject matter.

Avondale Meadow Academy (AMA) students have participated in Mathematics Pentathlon since 2012. Rob Johnson, a Special Education Teacher, has coached students for the past six years and coordinated the program for the past two years.

This year's team consists of six 3rd through 5th grade students. 3rd grade students compete in a tournament at Southport High School on April 30th and grades 4/5 compete at Ben Davis High School on April 23rd.

At tournaments, pentathletes play five games against other students from more than 100 schools from Indiana, Ohio, and Michigan. They have the opportunity to win certificates, medals, t-shirts, or be part of the Hall of Fame (winners of all five games.)

To prepare for the tournament, Mr. Johnson holds ten after-school practices in the fall and twelve more practices in the spring. Students meet once a week on Thursdays and have an hour of practice in which they learn a game a week until they have been introduced to all five games. After that, students practice game strategies and practice playing against each other. AMA has had a number of Hall of Famers and won team awards in 2013 (2nd place), 2014 (3rd place), 2015 (2nd place).

Flanner Buchanan Funeral & Memorial Services has graciously sponsored AMA's Mathematics Pentathlon team for the past several years. This sponsorship helps to defray instructional, travel and other expenses associated with the program. Maureen Lindley, Flanner Buchanan Vice President for Marketing, said about the program,

“We are proud to partner with Avondale Meadows Academy and support their math pentathlon. It’s important for local businesses to invest in today’s youth.”

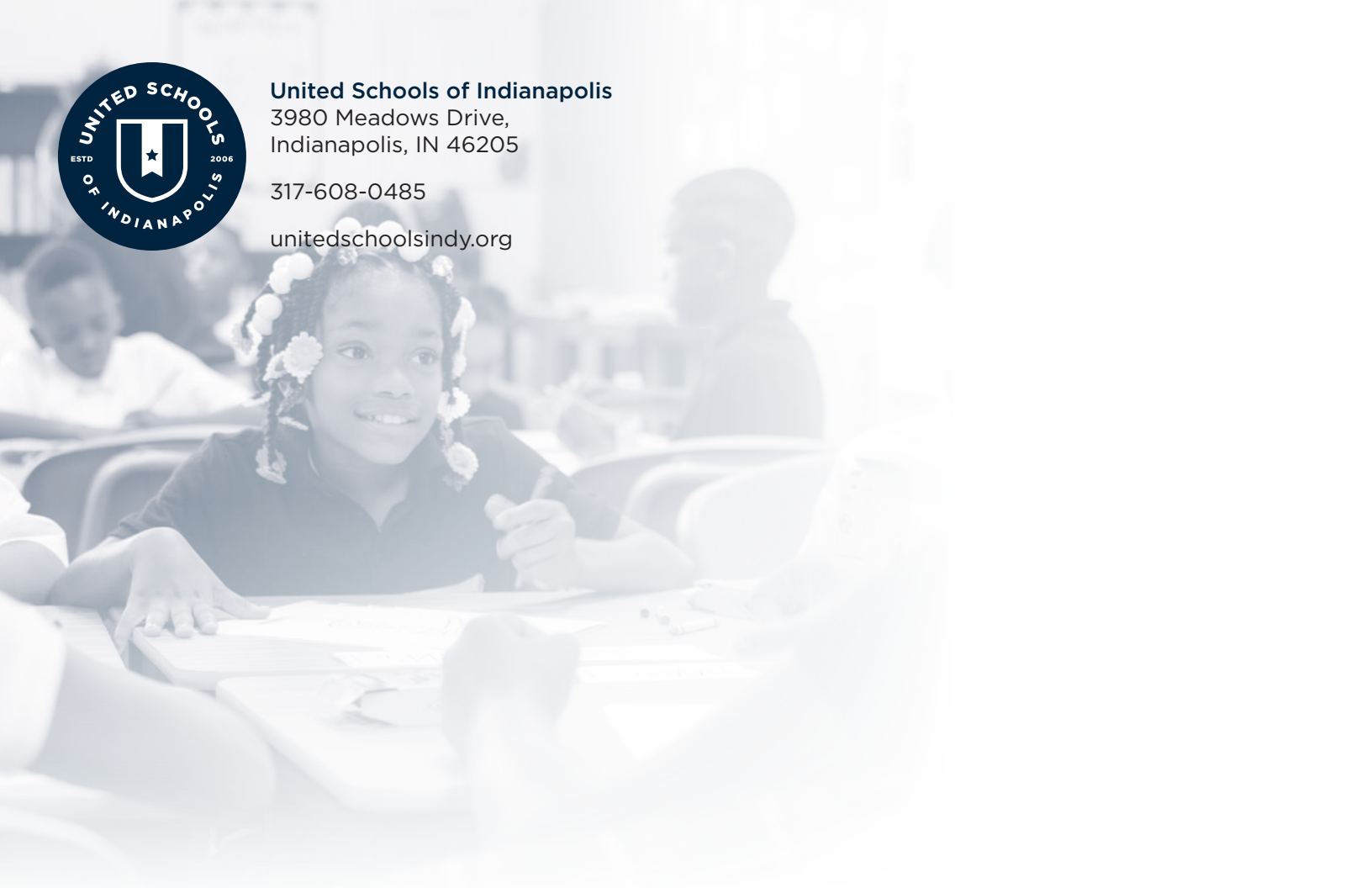


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AVONDALE MEADOWS | VISION ACADEMY

BUILDING MINDS CHANGING LIVES UPDATE

Join us on Thursday, May 12th

Join us for our Building Minds...Changing Lives Gala at Vision Academy @ Riverside. This exciting evening celebrates our incredible teachers and amazing students, and honors Rose Mays with the USI "Making a Difference" Community Service Award. To register or for more event information, please go to: unitedschoolsindy.org/usi-recognitionevent.

Much appreciation goes to the events Presenting Sponsor, Gene Zink and his family. Gene is 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, thanks to Katz, Sapper & Miller, the Cocktail Party Sponsor.

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

