
The Truth about BAMN & The Ferndale Schools

Background Information

The civil rights organization known as By Any Means Necessary (BAMN) is taking a position alleging the Ferndale Schools have established a separate, but unequal education system by creating University High School. They began their actions in Fall 2008 by distributing petitions that allege the school district practices segregation and offers an inferior curriculum at UHS compared to Ferndale High School. The following information clarifies the Ferndale Schools' position on this matter, and the inaccuracies in the BAMN documents and allegations.

BAMN has informed the Ferndale Schools they plan to demand that the district begin a process of regionalizing public education by opening enrollment at Ferndale High School to Detroit resident students. They point out that University High School has open enrollment regionwide. It is important to note the distinction between UHS and FHS enrollment policies. UHS was created as a regional magnet school offering a unique university/public school partnership as a high school redesign model. By contrast, Ferndale High School, along with all the core K-12 schools in the district, is a traditional district high school open to Ferndale district residents, and a small proportion of new Schools of Choice enrollees each year.

BAMN made allegations about the Ferndale Schools beginning in Fall 2008. They hosted a press conference in Ferndale in early October. They have posted their claims and demands on their website <http://www.bamn.com/kingsdream/index.asp>. Their claims are not accurate and the Ferndale Schools is providing the following facts to clarify regarding:

1) University High School, its purpose and mission, and student population, 2) Ferndale High School enrollment options and student population, and 3) the Ferndale Schools' mission to ensure all students receive a quality education in a diverse and equitable environment.

1. University High School was created in 2005 as a magnet school with a mission to be a model for reform and redesign of secondary education. In providing a rigorous college-prep curriculum focused on ensuring students graduate from college well-prepared for successful careers, UHS offers students unique opportunities to take classes on a college campus through its partnership with Lawrence Technological University, interact with automotive industry leaders, and complete real-world projects. Designed to be a regional high school, UHS enrollment is open to new 9th and 10th Grade students from across the metropolitan Detroit area through the state's Schools of Choice program. Marketing and recruiting has focused on the tri-county area - Oakland, Wayne, Macomb Counties. The current student body is 418 students in Grades 9-12, of whom 78% are Detroit residents, and 15 students are Ferndale district residents. The racial population is 98% African-American students. This is a non-traditional theme high school, and students are informed throughout the recruiting process that the unique opportunities they will have are different, with a clear focus on every student achieving college success, from the broader focus demanded of a large, traditional school.
2. Ferndale High School was built in 1958 and offers a traditional high school program (with performing arts, visual art, athletics, for example). Enrollment at Ferndale High School is open to district residents, which includes parts of Ferndale, Oak Park, Royal Oak Township, and all of the City of Pleasant Ridge. In addition, the Ferndale Board of Education annually assesses district resident enrollment to determine whether there is the capacity to permit

participation in the state's Schools of Choice program to offer limited openings to new students (in Grades K-9) who reside in Oakland County. This enrollment structure allows the district to maximize enrollment and minimize overhead costs. Ferndale High School currently serves 1069 students in Grades 9-12, with a diverse population of African-American, White, Chaldean (Iraqi Christian) and Asian students. Approximately 10% of the district's student body are enrolled through the Schools of Choice program and are residents of area communities in Oakland County. New Schools of Choice students are only accepted in Grade 9 at Ferndale High School; totaling 23 new students in 2008-2009. The current program provides a modest number of openings, and receives requests equal to the number of students who enroll. However, any change that would recruit greater numbers of Schools of Choice applicants, whether from Oakland County or from Detroit, or elsewhere, would not be practical at Ferndale High School. The enrollment department would experience the impact of such a change with a significantly larger lottery program that would be time-consuming and costly without a need, when the district currently enrolls the total number of students to match available openings.

3. The mission of the Ferndale Public Schools is to provide a quality education program in an environment that values diversity. The unique diversity of the Ferndale Schools is highly valued and the district is committed to retaining the balance of students who represent all four municipalities served by the school district, as has been done for decades. In 2002, the Ferndale Schools implemented a comprehensive restructuring plan to establish grade-level schools which eliminated instructional and resource inequities. The result was a structure that provides educational equity and long-term financial stability. As an example of the goal of providing equitable education for all students, elementary literacy was the first targeted area for curricular and instructional reform. Over the past six years, Ferndale's elementary literacy program has successfully narrowed the achievement gap between at-risk, African-American, and the aggregate population of students.

School Choice: BAMN inaccurately alleges that the Ferndale Schools are engaging in segregation by establishing University High School, and setting up two, separate, but unequal high school programs. The intention of the Ferndale Schools in establishing University High School is to provide an innovative high school redesign model open to students from anywhere. UHS is designed to be different from a traditional high school, but in no way is its design educationally deficient. Students and their parents choose UHS based on their academic needs and goals.

In addition, UHS is similar to new high schools nationwide which have been created to provide alternatives to traditional high school experiences, including small student body, nurturing school culture, hand-picked dedicated teaching staff, and innovate, project-based, rigorous college-prep curriculum. Every student who attends a non-traditional high school also has a choice to attend their neighborhood/home school, or to reach out to alternative experiences. UHS is part of a national movement to reform high school education, supported by prominent organizations including the Gates Foundation.

The BAMN Petition and Website are publicizing inaccurate information.

BAMN is operating in partnership with high school and college student volunteers, and adult organizers, under the leadership of attorneys Shanta Driver and George B. Washington, of the firm Scheff, Washington & Driver, PC in Detroit. They allege the Ferndale Schools created a “discriminatory two-tiered system” by establishing University High School. On the contrary, UHS is a non-traditional, rigorous **college-prep theme school open to anyone** in Oakland, Wayne, Macomb, Livingston counties (including all seven counties that touch Oakland) through the Schools of Choice Program. UHS was created as the vision of many supporters of public education whose goal is to make extraordinary educational opportunities available to any student interested in enrolling.

Ferndale Schools Superintendent Gary W. Meier says, “This school was created to reform and redesign public education opportunities for college-bound students. There’s an important distinction to make here that different is not deficient. High achievement and, ultimately, college success, is our primary goal.”

University High School’s first priority is college preparation and college success. The courses and curriculum have been carefully structured to ensure all students enter college prepared for academic success without the need for remediation. The highly qualified, hand-picked staff is extraordinary in their talent and dedication to their students. Principal George Tomey says, “We define our success by how many of our students graduate from college – we go four years beyond high school in our support.”

The partnership with Lawrence Technological University and the support of funding organizations and industry partners has expanded the opportunities that would be available in a traditional public high school to ensure student success.

BAMN makes inaccurate claims, often based on incomplete information.

Facilities: BAMN describes UHS as being in an “old converted elementary school building,” compared to FHS as a “modern high school campus with large library, tennis courts and full football field.” University High School is located in the former Wilson School which, along with all school district buildings, was modernized with updated windows, flooring, and heating during the 1995 bond improvements. Although the building was designed for elementary age students, today’s high school students have made the building their own. The building is considered a hub for UHS; juniors and seniors attend many of their classes off-site at Lawrence Tech, CASA, Oakland Technical Campus, and at industry partner sites. Principal George Tomey acknowledges the building was not constructed as a traditional high school, but emphasizes that “the teaching and learning that goes on within our walls is more important than the bricks and mortar.”

Staff to Student Ratio: BAMN claims there is a 35:1 ratio at UHS. This is not true: there are 418 students to 32 staff at UHS, making the ratio 13:1.

Student Population: In addition, BAMN claims the school is all Detroit students; although 78% of our students are residents of Detroit, the other 22% reside in the Ferndale School District (15), Oak Park, Southfield, Warren, Pontiac, Redford, Westland, Farmington, and Highland Park.

Extracurricular Activities: BAMN claims there is a disparity among extracurricular activities at FHS and UHS. This is also not true. Extracurricular opportunities exist at both schools. Like many theme schools, UHS students have opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities aligned with the automotive career pathway focus of the school. Parents and students choose UHS for the college-prep non-traditional nature of the school which provides them with nontraditional college-

prep extracurricular opportunities such as the Innovative Vehicle Design, Girls in Engineering-Get IT!, DECA, Digital Career Roadmap, etc. They have other extra activities such as student government, National Honor Society, School Store, MHSAA-endorsed league basketball and intramural volleyball, with opportunities to expand based on student interest. Students know when they enroll that their experience is focused on the college-prep nature of the school, and there will not be a marching band, theatre program, or football team. This information is shared at every Information Session throughout the recruiting/enrollment process, to help parents and students make the best choice for their student's success.

Dress Code: BAMN alleges that UHS students are required to wear uniforms, while FHS students are not. Both schools have dress codes, but because students at UHS interact with the public, industry partners, university professors, and other visitors on a regular basis, they maintain a standard of business casual, but youthful, dress code. They are also frequently out of the home school setting, visiting or taking courses at Lawrence Tech and at industry partner sites. The dress code is a black or white polo or collared shirt, tucked in to black or khaki chino pants or skirts. Dress-down days are scheduled throughout the year as scholarship fundraisers.

Closed Campus for Lunch: BAMN claims a discrepancy exists between the schools because UHS has a closed campus for lunch. Ferndale High School has a closed campus for 9th and 10th grade students, and is only open for students to leave campus in 11th and 12th Grade. UHS students eat lunch at school because few UHS students drive to school and their opportunity to leave campus, get lunch and return in time for their next class is very limited. Both principals agree closed lunch is more effective, and the FHS principal prefers closed lunch, and would do so if he had space in the lunchroom.

Academic Offerings: BAMN says there are few AP (advanced placement) course offerings, only Spanish for foreign language, “Only 1 Career Pathway” and “next to no electives.” **This is also not true.**

All courses offered at both Ferndale High School and University High School are aligned with the State of Michigan standards and benchmarks in the core content areas. All courses required by the state are taught at University High School.

In direct response to BAMN’s allegations:

- **AP Courses:** In 2009, UHS is offering four AP courses in-house, FHS is offering three AP courses in-house. At both schools, 11th and 12th grade students may elect to take the expanded AP offerings at CASA (Center for Advanced Studies and the Arts).
- **Dual Enrollment in College Courses:** In addition, in 2007-2008, 20% of the UHS Class of 2008 was dual enrolled in college courses at Lawrence Tech. UHS and FHS students also have opportunities to take classes at the Oakland Technical Campus program operated by Oakland Schools.
- **Foreign Language:** Because of the small size of University High School, it was decided to start by offering Spanish for all students, with an option to expand in the future depending on student requests. Additional languages offerings, such as Chinese and Japanese, are available to both FHS and UHS students at CASA.
- **Career Pathways:** University High School is a theme school designed to provide rigorous college-prep curriculum organized around three career pathways related to the automotive industry: 1. Engineering, Design and Planning; 2. Manufacturing, Purchasing, and Logistics; and 3. Marketing, Sales & Service. Students complete project-based course work related to these career pathways, but it is important to note that students know they are not locked into a career based on their high school projects.

- **Electives:** Because of the rigorous curriculum focused on preparing students for college success without the need for remedial courses, the students at UHS take a full schedule including four years of mathematics, science, social studies, and language arts. They also have special seminar opportunities in project-based classes that give them opportunities to explore other interests, while remaining focused on the school's primary college-prep mission. Their electives are relevant to their core academics, and include finance and multimedia courses, for example.
- **College Opportunities:** Despite their unique differences, success of Ferndale Schools' graduates is a priority and point of pride at both Ferndale High School and University High School. The 213 FHS Class of 2008 graduates were accepted to top universities across the countries with over \$1.1-million in scholarships with a wide range of career goals, including filmmaking, mechanical engineering, environmental science, political science, geology, theatre, physics, and pre-dentistry. University High School's Class of 2008 represented the first graduating class of 37 students. Many of these students chose careers aligned with the Career Pathways of the automotive industry, and received engineering scholarships and acceptance to the University of Michigan College of Engineering, Michigan State University Marketing & Communications, Oakland University International Business, Lawrence Technological University Computer Engineering. UHS students also chose career tracks outside the automotive industry, including journalism at Michigan State University and nursing at Saginaw Valley State University. Students at UHS are fortunate to have a unique staff position, College Success Advisory, who follows them through their first years on the college campus to ensure they are academically, socially, and financially successful. With his oversight, UHS can verify that 92% (34 of 37) of the graduates of the Class of 2008 are enrolled in college for their fall semester.