University of Hartford President Walter Harrison signed an affiliation agreement in June 2011 to establish a framework for research, education, and innovation between the University and Hartford Public Schools (HPS). The first-ever, system-wide affiliation between HPS and a Connecticut university will increase educational and research opportunities that benefit both University and HPS students and faculty.

One of the primary goals of the affiliation is to encourage research that informs education reform in Hartford, the region, and beyond. The agreement recognizes the University’s Institute for Translational Research—part of the Center for Learning and Professional Education within the College of Education, Nursing and Health Professions (ENHP)—as the key unit to initiate and facilitate collaborative research that is truly relevant to citizens of Hartford.

Ralph O. Mueller, dean of ENHP, remarked that day, “Today’s event is a milestone in our college’s history. Together, we are demonstrating our commitment to enhancing educational opportunities for Hartford’s children through coordinated, research-based, and relevant education reform.”

The following section includes articles on University High School of Science and Engineering students who take classes for college credit at the University, University students and faculty in Hartford Public Schools, and education majors from ENHP and The Hartt School working with students in the University of Hartford Magnet School.

University of Hartford student teacher Jacqueline Lamenzo ’12 works with a student in Patty Cassella’s kindergarten class at the University of Hartford Magnet School (see story, p. 24).
“You look in their eyes and see that they’re getting it. That’s really exciting,” says University of Hartford senior Nicole Mester about her experience as a student teacher of fourth-graders at Annie Fisher STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) Magnet School in Hartford, Conn. Mester, who is from Hamden, Conn., is an integrated elementary and special education major in the College of Education, Nursing, and Health Professions (ENHP). She and her young students are benefiting from ENHP’s development and implementation of teaching practices to enhance teacher quality, especially in urban schools.

In June the University signed the first-ever, system-wide affiliation between the Hartford Public Schools (HPS) and a Connecticut university. The agreement is designed to increase educational and research opportunities that benefit University faculty and students and HPS teachers and students. “Working together, we can make Hartford a national leader in education reform,” President Walter Harrison said when announcing the agreement. “We can be a leader in quality education within an urban environment.”

ENHP faculty members Theresa Abodeeb-Gentile and John Tapper agree. They’ve already begun to develop research-based, innovative techniques to facilitate education reform. “The research we are doing can actually be used in classrooms, as opposed to research for research’s sake,” says Tapper. Abodeeb-Gentile adds, “[T]he goal is to create an ever-evolving educational circle.” In this circle, University education professors teach aspiring teachers. While doing fieldwork or student teaching, the aspiring teachers bring that knowledge into the Hartford Public Schools classrooms. The University students evaluate and are evaluated on what works and why. That information is brought back to the University to inform professors and colleagues. Enhancements in the University’s education curriculum are made, the circle is completed, and the process continues.

One of the features in teacher preparation at ENHP is the professional core, which requires two full semesters of fieldwork at a Hartford school (usually in the junior year) and a full semester of student teaching, preferably in a Hartford public school. The fieldwork and student-teaching experiences are under the supervision of University faculty and student-teaching supervisors.

Mester did her junior-year fieldwork at Betances Early Reading Lab School in Hartford. Tapper and Abodeeb-Gentile have already seen the impact that urban school assignments can have on University education majors. “When they finish [their junior-year fieldwork in Hartford], these students really do feel like they can change the world. They want to carry the torch,” says Tapper. “It transforms these students. They really understand their responsibilities [as teachers],” adds Abodeeb-Gentile.
Teachers and University faculty also are working together on an intensive teacher professional-development project at Betances as part of the affiliation agreement. Nonintrusive cameras placed in classrooms record teachers as they instruct students. University faculty then review the taped sessions with the classroom teachers to identify teaching strategies that work and those that may need to be enhanced or changed. “We want to help the teachers think about all [the] ways that learning goes on in a classroom,” says Abodeeb-Gentile.

Kindergarten teacher Rebecca Caplinger has been at Betances for two years of her seven-year teaching career. Every available space in her cheery classroom bears letters, numbers, and colorful images with associated words. Even the carpet in one area of the room displays colored squares containing the letters of the alphabet. Caplinger has been working with Tapper and Abodeeb-Gentile since September 2010. She says the professional-development sessions have been helpful and that as a relatively new teacher, she has enjoyed the opportunity to hone her teaching skills.

“Video review conferencing is a chance for me to consult about lessons I have given. Through conferencing with more seasoned teachers, I am able to find more strategies to assist my students to achieve more success. The coaching is in a friendly, collaborative environment that allows me to grow as a teacher. We share ideas, songs, and techniques, and the reflection time has improved my teaching along with reinforcing some practices I was already using.”

The affiliation agreement also benefits HPS students and faculty who want to enroll in University courses while possibly providing priority placement for University education majors in internships, teaching positions, clinical placements, and other training opportunities in Hartford schools.

Meanwhile, Mester hopes she will be offered a teaching position in Hartford after graduation. “One of the reasons I came [to the University of Hartford] was because I wanted that city experience,” she says. This semester, she spends her days as a student teacher in Erin Wilson’s fourth-grade class at Annie Fisher. Much of class time focuses on developing students’ reading and writing skills, and Mester relies heavily on her education course work as she develops her lesson plans. “We’ve been working a lot on writing exercises, and I use the exercises that I was taught in my education classes. It’s exciting to see the lessons work.”

That excitement about learning is felt at the University level as well, says Abodeeb-Gentile. “When you can develop and implement new teaching practices that make a difference in students’ lives, when you can see students [both in the elementary schools and in the University] getting it and getting excited about it, that’s what teachers at all levels live for.”

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Working together, we can make Hartford a national leader . . . in quality education within an urban environment.

— President Walter Harrison
University and Magnet School share ‘powerful partnership’

It’s 4:30 on a Monday afternoon at the University of Hartford Magnet School (UHMS), but a visitor can still feel the energy and hear the sounds of excited children making new discoveries.

In one classroom music education majors from the University’s Hartt School work with fourth- and fifth-grade students in groups of two, teaching them how to blow into mouthpieces for the clarinet, flute, trumpet, and trombone. The children giggle as they create strange, new sounds. When they’re done, they each choose an instrument for after-school lessons that will be taught by the Hartt students.

In another room children play musical games in large groups as more Hartt School students pull them aside one by one and fit them with string instruments in their size. In two other rooms dance pedagogy students from Hartt lead their high-energy charges into mouthpieces for the clarinet, flute, trumpet, and trombone. The children giggle as they create strange, new sounds. When they’re done, they each choose an instrument for after-school lessons that will be taught by the Hartt students.

This day and its activities are just one example of how UHMS students enjoy the rich resources of the University, while University students get hands-on experience at a “learning laboratory” right on their campus.

The University of Hartford Magnet School is celebrating a decade of successful collaborations between the pre-kindergarten through grade 5 school and the University. These collaborations involve many areas of the University and provide enriching experiences for students and faculty of both institutions.

“IT’S SUCH A POWERFUL PARTNERSHIP,” SAYS Patty Cassella, who has taught kindergarten at the magnet school since it opened 10 years ago. “Our whole kindergarten team really cherishes the partnership with the University.”

Jacqueline Lamenzo ’12, who is student teaching this fall in Cassella’s kindergarten class, said the magnet school played a significant role in her decision to attend the University of Hartford.

“If you’re here for four years as an education major, you’re going to be at the magnet school at some point,” Lamenzo said, whether for observation, tutoring, class projects, or student teaching. “It’s such a special place. The teachers are just so welcoming.”

When the University of Hartford Magnet School opened its doors on Sept. 4, 2001, it became the nation’s first public elementary school built on a private university campus. The school’s innovative curriculum is based on the theory of multiple intelligences, developed by Harvard University psychologist Howard E. Gardner. The theory recognizes that children have a variety of innate learning styles, which Gardner defines as linguistic, visual-spatial, naturalistic, logical-mathematical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and musical. The UHMS building was the first in the country designed and built specifically to employ the theory of multiple intelligences. Teachers present curricula in ways that support each learning style.

The magnet school’s construction was funded by the State of Connecticut, and the school is operated by the Capitol Region Education Council. Students, who participate in a lottery to gain admission, come from 17 surrounding communities. Faculty in the University’s College of Education, Nursing and Health Professions (ENHP) provided significant input to the curriculum and school design.

This initial involvement by ENHP faculty was just the start of a continuously evolving partnership between the University and the magnet school (see p. 25, “Cross-campus Connections,” for some examples of collaborations).

And it’s not just students of the two institutions who benefit from the partnership. Faculty from the University and the magnet school regularly work together on innovative research and other joint projects. Suzi D’Annolfo, assistant professor and coordinator of school partnerships in ENHP, brought the entire faculties of ENHP and the magnet school together last year for what she called a “Community of Practice” to discuss ways that the two institutions could strengthen their partnership. The program was so successful that a second Community of Practice was held this fall.

D’Annolfo also has taken her ENHP students to the magnet school for guest lectures by magnet school faculty members. The partnership, she said, “really brings their learning to life.”

Jacqueline Lamenzo, a senior majoring in early childhood education, is student-teaching this fall in Patty Cassella’s kindergarten class at the University of Hartford Magnet School. Cassella is pictured in the background in the green shirt.

President Walter Harrison, far left, joins Howie and student-athletes in welcoming students to the first day of school at the University of Hartford Magnet School.
Danielle Etta, a senior communication major, is a defensive specialist on the University of Hartford women's volleyball team.

On Aug. 31, the first day of classes for both the University and the University of Hartford Magnet School, Etta was among nearly 40 University student-athletes who lined the path to the magnet school's front door, giving high-fives and clapping for the entering students.

One young girl broke from the crowd and rushed over to give Etta a big hug. The two are part of a “buddies” program that matches University student-athletes—including all members of the volleyball team—with magnet school students selected for one-on-one mentoring.

“The goal is to give them something consistent in their lives, someone who’s always there for them,” Etta says. “My buddy and I are very close.”

Etta’s buddy is typically very shy, but she has gradually opened up since spending time with her University friend. By teaching her buddy to play basketball, Etta has given the young girl a vehicle for interacting with other children. Etta first began meeting with her fifth-grade magnet school buddy in the 2011 spring semester. They usually meet two or three times a week at lunchtime. On one weekend last spring, student-athletes, their buddies, and the children’s families planted flowers together at the magnet school.

Cross-campus Connections

Over the past 10 years the University of Hartford and the elementary magnet school that bears its name have engaged in a broad variety of partnerships and collaborations. Following are just a few examples.

Bringing Classroom Lessons to Life
The magnet school provides students throughout the University with opportunities to apply their classroom lessons in real-world settings. For example, physical therapy students have conducted assessments of magnet school children in such areas as bilateral coordination and running speed and agility. Architecture students designing a play space interviewed magnet school kindergartners for their input and invited the children to attend their final presentations. Education majors annually conduct literacy assessments and exchange “pen pal” letters with pupils at the magnet school, allowing the University students to study children’s literacy development firsthand.

Faculty Partnerships
Faculty from the two institutions have held joint workshops and worked together on a wide range of innovative research projects. For example, ENHP faculty member Theresa Abodeeb-Gentile and Stacey McCorison, a first-grade teacher at the magnet school, conducted a research project on reading-comprehension strategies that included the use of blogging in first grade to enhance children’s reading skills. Other collaborative research projects currently under way involve the relationship between music and literacy and mathematics teaching strategies at the kindergarten level.

Campus Field Trips
The University of Hartford campus provides endless opportunities for magnet school students. Kindergarten students go on field trips throughout the campus, in order to expand their vocabulary and broaden their horizons. Their visits include the President’s Office, the University television studio, architecture studio, WWUH radio studio, Hartt Costume Shop, Mortensen Library, and other locations across campus. The students learn about healthy choices and exercise at the Sports Center, as well as see how different tools work in the Facilities Department.

Older students see plays at Lincoln Theater, attend drumming demonstrations at The Hartt School, and go to basketball games at the Sports Center. In fact, magnet school third-, fourth-, and fifth- graders are invited each year to attend a game at the America East Men’s and Women’s Basketball Tournament on campus.
Late nights on campus, constant studying, earning enough credits—that may sound like the life of a college student, but it’s also the life of some high school students at the University High School of Science and Engineering (UHSSE). By challenging students intellectually, fostering excitement for learning, and supporting students’ personal goals, UHSSE infuses the expectation of a collegiate education into the high school experience.

UHSSE’s early-college focus prepares its graduates to further their education and pursue challenging careers in science, engineering, math, and technology. For the second year in a row, the high school was selected by U.S. News & World Report as one of America’s Best High Schools, one of 16 high schools in the state that made the list. Selection is based on criteria that measure a school’s better-than-expected achievement gains within the income levels and racial groups it serves.

The school’s location on the University of Hartford campus draws students, teachers, and administrators into the University community. The convenient site facilitates students’ access to college courses while they simultaneously fulfill their high school requirements.

Qualified UHSSE students can take college courses for credit—without paying tuition. Students who wish to enroll in University courses must be recommended by a UHSSE teacher and meet other requirements, such as grade point average and national test scores. Applications go before a University committee composed of faculty members and Alan Hadad, associate vice president and dean of magnet schools.

There’s easy access from the high school to campus classrooms, although some University classes are even held at the high school after the regular school day. UHSSE students begin taking college courses as early as their sophomore year; a few have earned enough credits to enter college as sophomores or juniors. The number of students allowed to take courses is limited only by the students’ ability to qualify.

UHSSE senior Caitlin Callaghan from Marlborough, Conn., began taking University classes in her sophomore year when Jean McGivney-Burelle, associate professor of mathematics in the College of Arts and Sciences, taught a college-level course at the high school. Callaghan feels lucky to have McGivney-Burelle as a professor and has taken several more of her classes since.

"She’s great, and she made transitioning from taking high school classes to college classes easier for me. She made the classes fun and she welcomed questions," says Callaghan.

The biggest challenge for Callaghan has been the realization that in college classes no one holds your hand. “In college they assign
reading but may never go over it in class, yet it is still on your exam, so it pays to be well prepared,” she explains. She dreams of going to Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), and her college credits will give her a boost toward acceptance.

But it’s not just seniors at UHSSE who have their sights set on college.

Sophomore Nicholas Wollman of Burlington, Conn., has dreams of becoming a computer programmer. By enrolling in University courses, he hopes to earn 60 college credits while still in high school, which will allow him to skip prerequisites in college and focus on his major.

“Being a programmer, I love the labs at the University. The equipment is great, and it allows me to do more work and experience more,” says Wollman, who not only takes college courses this fall and last spring but also took a six-week summer calculus course.

Junior Connie Ky of Hartford, Conn., whose sister graduated from UHSSE in 2010 and received early acceptance to MIT and both Harvard and Yale universities, has plans to be a biology major in college and a doctor one day. “I like biology because it is happening to us,” she says. “It is in our bodies, and that just makes it so much more real for me.”

University professors have good things to say about the high school students who take their classes. Laurence Gould, a physics professor in the College of Arts and Sciences, has taught several UHSSE students and says he is always amazed by both their ability and their drive.

“In general,” says Gould, “all the high school students I’ve had in my classes are curious, have a love for the subject, and, sometimes, bring things to my attention that I have never thought of before.”

In each of UHSSE’s four graduation classes thus far, 98 to 100 percent of graduates have continued their education at two- or four-year colleges or have entered the military. UHSSE is a public magnet school with 27 participating districts, where attendance is decided by application and lottery. It opened on campus in 2004, making the University of Hartford the only private university in the nation to have two public magnet schools on its campus. UHSSE shares the distinction with the University of Hartford Magnet School.

“Since fall 2008, UHSSE students have been enrolled in more than 650 student credit hours at the University of Hartford, and have achieved a median GPA of 4.00 in courses taken at the University. This is an extraordinary level of performance, a tribute to the faculty of University High School who recommended them, the members of the committee who approved their applications, the faculty of the University of Hartford who taught them, and of course the students themselves,” says Hadad.

Above, left to right: Caitlin Callaghan, UHSSE senior, Marlborough, Conn.; Nicholas Wollman, UHSSE sophomore, Burlington, Conn.; and Connie Ky, UHSSE junior, of Hartford, Conn., have all taken courses at the University and say their experiences will help them transition into college.

Below: Alan Hadad (left), associate vice president of University magnet schools, with Tenell G. Rhodes Jr., now a freshman at Worcester Polytechnic Institute in Massachusetts. Rhodes graduated both from University of Hartford Magnet School and UHSSE. He also took two calculus classes at the University while a student at UHSSE.