



**For Immediate Release**

## **Urbandale Students Step UP To Develop The Number One Skill College Grads Need**

*Students in sixth through twelfth grades take advantage of an exceptional opportunity to strengthen their communication and presentation skills by participating in an innovative pilot program*

**URBANDALE, Iowa – March 11, 2014** – The [Urbandale Community School District](#) has applied feedback received from business leaders regarding essential skills for a 21<sup>st</sup> Century education in order to create the forward-thinking Step UP initiative. Step UP (UP stands for Urbandale Presentations) focuses on providing the tools, knowledge and experience necessary for students to deliver effective and engaging presentations as well as develop strong communication skills. Students participating in Step UP attended sessions focused on learning six universal constructs regarding effective communication and presentation skills. Following the completion of the sessions, students developed online portfolios and recently demonstrated their learning by delivering presentations to Urbandale peers, staff and families.

“Step UP has been a boost to communication on a higher level. It gives an opportunity for students to not only present, but be heard by their teachers, which I find to be very unique and valuable,” said Elizabeth Erickson, Urbandale High School junior. “This kind of opportunity forces us to think critically and plan our expositions to the best of our ability. This is the first time in my educational career where I have been asked to talk about my work. In my ensuing year of high school I will be expected to present myself and give higher educational schools a reason to want me. This is a good door opener for when I am faced with future endeavors that will demand presentation skills. Practice and repetition are the things that build skills and confidence. Presentation skills and the confidence to deliver a presentation are essential for the world I will go in to as an adult. Step UP is one of many building blocks that will make up my future job interviews. Preparation is key to success, and I'm glad that our school is trying to prepare us for what's to come.”



Emina Dzafic, UHS Junior, presenting on March 6, 2014 to Kelly Lindaman, UHS Special Education Teacher and Tim Carver, UHS Associate Principal.

“As a student, I strongly encourage this program,” said Emina Dzafic, Urbandale High School junior. “In the beginning I didn’t like it, but after I presented, it made me feel good about myself and made another step closer to being able to talk about yourself or discuss things in front of others. Also, I think that after doing this presentation it gave me motivation that I can do more with my life, and this really will help me in my future.”

The Step UP initiative is led by a team of Urbandale High School administrators and teachers who collaborate with the Urbandale Middle School Step UP team to ensure the rubric is consistent for grades six through twelve. Step UP is unique to Urbandale as the combination of creating and organizing portfolios with an emphasis on developing presentation skills is revolutionary in secondary education, and is precisely what the experts mean by 21st Century education.

“Step UP is an initiative that students at both the middle school and the high school are benefitting from,” said Jackie King, Urbandale High School English Teacher and a Step UP Teacher Leader. “It provides them the opportunity to not only practice their presentation skills, but to also reflect on their own learning from over the course of the year, centered on the six Universal Constructs: critical thinking, complex communication, creativity, collaboration, flexibility and adaptability, and productivity and accountability. Unlike a class presentation, these are solely focused on the students and their poise as they talk about themselves. Knowing that presentation skills are so important to succeed in the job market, Urbandale staff members are eager to give our students an upper hand in order to help them stand out in an increasingly competitive workforce. Together, students and teachers alike are focused on helping students become as successful as they can be both inside and outside the classroom.”

Effective communication and presentations skills are routinely considered important, if not the most important, skills all college graduates must acquire. Urbandale students have a distinct advantage by developing this critical skillset throughout their secondary education. The Step UP program aligns with the district’s focus on transforming education in order to make it more meaningful, relevant and applicable for success in college and career. To learn more about how Urbandale is transforming education, download the [district brochure](#) and visit <http://showcase.urbandaleschools.com/>

### **About Urbandale Community School District**

The Urbandale Community School District includes portions of Des Moines and Urbandale, Iowa. The district serves over 3,900 students in six elementary schools, one middle school and one comprehensive high school. The Urbandale district supports an increasingly diverse student population where 50 languages are spoken. Building on the existing foundation of excellence in education, Urbandale is transforming education throughout the district. By implementing innovative [Quality/Continual Improvement](#) strategies that create learning environments that more fully engage, challenge and motivate students, Urbandale is taking transformation from theory into practice. Urbandale prepares students for becoming lifelong learners and is a school district that brings learning to life for everyone. To learn more, visit: [www.urbandaleschools.com](http://www.urbandaleschools.com)

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