



Educate. Inspire. Empower.

December 2018 INSIDE CLAYTON

claytonschools.net

Open Houses FOCUS on Our Students' Future

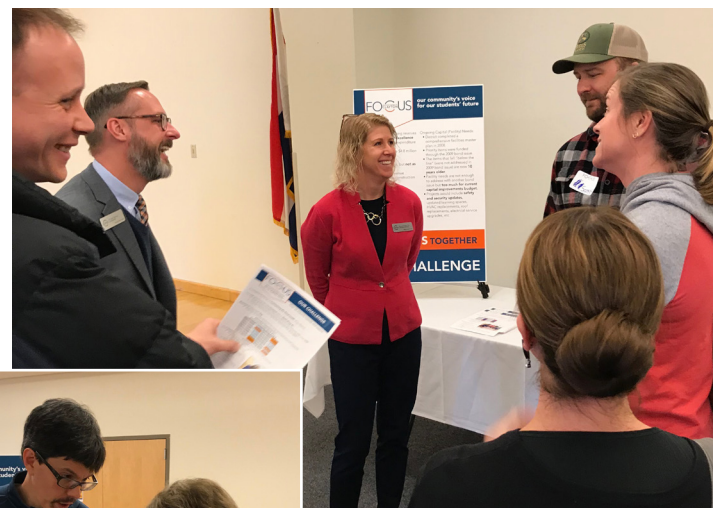
In early November, the School District of Clayton hosted a series of Open Houses as part of its FOCUS community engagement program. The Open House events were designed to gather feedback from parents, students, staff and community members about important decisions that will be made this school year, including the possibility of asking voters for a tax increase in April 2019 and establishing community priorities for our students' future.

More than 110 participants attended one of the Open Houses, with about that same number taking the time to provide feedback online. The format for the events was developed with the help of an Advisory Team of parents, staff and community members.

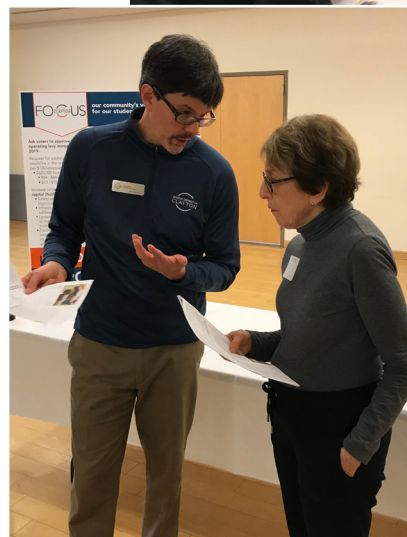
"The District is doing a great job of creating opportunities to hear direct feedback from their community in a variety of ways," explained FOCUS Advisory Team member and Clayton resident **Chip Casteel**. "I believe the breadth and transparency of their efforts will also go a long way in helping the community understand, and then work together to address, the District's greatest challenge: maintaining both fiscal responsibility and academic excellence at the same time."

Each Open House provided participants with the opportunity to learn at each of the three stations. You can still review the materials presented at the stations online at claytonschools.net/focus.

- **Maintaining Our Excellence** - Participants learned about the many aspects that make Clayton one of the state's highest performing school districts.
- **Our Challenge** - Attendees reviewed information about our District's fiscal challenges and ongoing facility needs.
- **A Potential Solution** - Participants reviewed ideas for what steps could be taken in order to maintain academic excellence for our students.



District administrators and Board of Education members spoke with more than 110 parents, staff and community members at the District's three FOCUS Open Houses in November.



After working through the stations at their own pace, attendees visited with Board of Education members and administrators to share their thoughts.

"Providing the community with a firsthand opportunity to learn about key decisions that need to be made this year is so important," explained Superintendent **Dr. Sean Doherty**. "Putting all of this information out there as transparently as possible creates the best environment for us to listen and learn."

District parent **Beth Deutsch**, who attended the Nov. 6 Open House, noted, "The Open House made me feel grateful for the leadership in the School District of Clayton. I truly appreciated having school board members, the chief financial officer and the superintendent all available to educate the public and answer my questions. Clearly, it's time to invest in our school district."

You can read the full report submitted to the Board of Education by the FOCUS Advisory Team at claytonschools.net/focusreport. •



The District also used the FOCUS process to allow the Clayton community to provide input that will be used as building blocks to develop the District's next strategic plan. More than 700 people engaged with a platform called ThoughtExchange to provide their thoughts on priorities for our students and to evaluate others' thoughts in a transparent, online conversation. Explore the results at claytonschools.net/thoughtexchange.

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Inside Clayton is published by the Office of Communications for School District of Clayton residents, businesses and families. Its purpose is to foster open communication, build understanding and promote accountability between the District and our stakeholders. Please submit comments, letters and questions to:

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DR. SEAN DOHERTY
SUPERINTENDENTFrom the District's
Lead Learner...

I am purposeful about spending time in classrooms across the District. It is an opportunity to interact with our students and observe them engaged in our curricula. I also see firsthand the effective pedagogical strategies of our teachers. I appreciate how our teachers consistently work to make learning relevant. Students are asked to apply their understanding of the content and their learned skills in different contexts. An example is the Professional Writing Partnerships we have at Clayton High School (see Page 5). Students are using their writing skills to support the work of local nonprofit organizations. This is a direct application of their learning that is having an impact on the broader community.

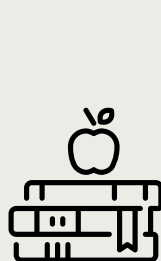
The District is consistently looking at innovative ways to leverage learning. We are fortunate to have the Clayton Education Foundation to support these efforts through their teacher grants. This year, the Foundation funded \$57,000 worth of ideas that will positively impact our students' learning. On Page 7 of this publication, you can learn more about the scope of the grants that were awarded to our teachers.

Excellence is a hallmark of our District. In order to maintain that excellence and to respond to the ever-changing

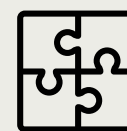
needs of our students, we need to have a fiscally healthy school district. We have been utilizing our finances in a prudent way by investing in the very best teachers and resources for our students. The type of education we provide is evident in our rankings (Page 7) and the learning opportunities available within our schools. Please see the article on Page 6 to learn more about our current financial reality and what steps we are taking to remain a fiscally healthy District that sets the standard for learning in our region.

We are constantly working to move forward as a learning community. I never want us to become complacent in our excellence or avoid change because we are already great. We will continually focus on how we can be even greater by evolving and being responsive to what our students need. I genuinely appreciate the continual support of the Clayton community. It allows us to make a difference for every student who walks through our doors.

The School District of Clayton's strategic plan, approved in 2013, guides the work of the District's teachers, administrators and staff members every day. Throughout this newsletter, the icons below indicate the strategic themes highlighted in each article.



Academic Excellence

Teacher and Administrator
ExcellenceGrowth and Development
of the Whole Child

Resource Management



Stay, Play and Learn Provides Safe Space for Families to Connect

For more than 25 years, the Family Center's Stay, Play and Learn (SPL) program has provided a safe space for young families to share their joys, seek support in their challenges and make lasting connections with other families in their community - all while their children learn and grow through play. With an open structure and few rules to follow, SPL not only gives children the freedom and resources to explore new activities while letting their imaginations run wild, but it also helps them to develop social skills as they play alongside their peers.

"This program really gives kids an opportunity to branch out. They learn so much from other children. It's sort of like a first step to preschool - only less scary



Katie Hoffman helps her daughter, Sophia, paint during the Family Center's Stay, Play and Learn program.

because your mom or dad is still in the room with you," said SPL facilitator **Sue Weiss**.

The fee-based, drop-in program is not just limited to School District of Clayton residents; all families with children from birth to kindergarten entry are welcome to join. Over the

years, SPL has become a gathering place both for families who have deep roots in St. Louis and those who have just moved here - sometimes from across the country or around the world. While their children are busy building block towers, digging in the sand table or creating clay masterpieces, parents, grandparents and full-time childcare providers are making connections (both in English and in their native languages), learning about resources within the community such as Parents As Teachers and discussing their children's development with a parent educator.

"We're often a family's first introduction to the District," said SPL facilitator **Cathy Glaser**. "Families learn about the early childhood program and the District's schools while they're taking part in our program. We've had families move to the District because they want their children to continue on through our schools."

SPL is currently open on Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings from 9:15-11:30 a.m., and on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons from 3:30-5 p.m. The program also has select weekend hours. Twice each month, families can participate in "Fun Friday" activities, which include storytime, exploring big motors, cooking lessons or a walk on the nature trail. A library of books for children and parents is also available to SPL members.

"We really work on helping families make connections while providing a safe, comfortable space for children to learn," added Glaser. "This program creates a wonderful sense of community - if you've been to our program, you know there's just a great feeling in the room."

Visit claytonschoools.net/spl to learn more about the program. •



Internship Program Benefits Glenridge Students, Future Teachers

Five of the best and brightest education students from Missouri State University (MSU) are lending their talents to classrooms at Glenridge Elementary this school year through a new partnership between the School District of Clayton and the university. The students have traded the traditional semester-long student teaching placement for a yearlong position teaching alongside a master teacher at Glenridge Elementary.

"I have always wanted to be a teacher, so the idea of spending an entire year in a classroom over just a typical semester of student teaching seemed amazing," said MSU intern **Grace Schroeder**. "I have been learning teaching skills, strategies and techniques from some pretty amazing people."

The MSU internship program is similar to the District's long-standing partnership with Truman State University. The five MSU interns will spend the school

year improving their craft by learning from their colleagues while also making connections with their students.

While the interns are not paid for the experience, they gain valuable teaching opportunities typically not afforded to student-teachers, such as participation in the District's New Teacher Orientation and professional development days. Additionally, they have a deeper teaching experience by seeing the school year from start to finish.

"This program will help them feel so much more prepared to have their own classroom. To see the entire school year is a benefit to them and a benefit for us," said Glenridge Instructional Coordinator **Janet Crews**, who is the liaison between MSU, the interns and Glenridge.



Missouri State University Intern **Grace Schroeder** works with Glenridge Elementary fourth-graders **Ave' March** (right) and **Jackson Medley** during a math lesson.

See **INTERNSHIP**, Page 7



Fist Bumps and High-Fives Abound for Captain Students

Fist bumps and high-fives have become the new norm on Friday mornings at Captain Elementary. Thanks to a character education-based community collaboration, students have a lesson on one of the five brain-growing

stances - optimism, empathy, flexibility, persistence and resilience - before they even walk through the school doors.

Fist Bump Fridays are part of a new initiative at Captain this school year to help students get to know the school's many community partners - from police officers to local librarians - and how the five stances play a role in their day-to-day work.

"We've really been working to build our character education program," said Captain Counselor **Crystal Taylor**. "We wanted to develop a component of the program that would be fun for the students while also bringing in the community. The more you can involve your parents and community partners, the stronger your character education program will be."

After a few staff brainstorming sessions, Fist Bump Fridays were born. Every Friday at 8:20 a.m., students line up on the playground. Before entering the building, they hear from one of the school's community partners about their job and how one of the five stances plays a key role in their work.

"Our intended purpose, besides having a little fun on Friday mornings, is to help bring the core values we are teaching our students to life by showing that these five stances really are used in many areas of life," added Taylor. "We also want to help members of the larger community become aware and have a chance to be supportive and actively involved in our character building initiatives."

After the brief presentation, members from the community organization, which have included the Clayton Fire and Police Departments, local veterans, the Girl Scouts and District administrators, stand at each building entrance to give fist bumps, high-fives, waves and smiles to students as they enter the building.

Students then head to their classrooms like any other day, ready to start learning at 8:40 a.m. But according to Taylor, the Fist Bump Fridays seem to have an energizing effect on students.

"The time commitment for our community partners is short, but it's a powerful 20 minutes for our students." •



Clayton High School junior Emily Bober high-fives a Captain Elementary student during the CHS band's participation in Captain's Fist Bump Fridays.



International Night Celebrates Meramec's Diversity

Meramec Elementary's diverse student population is an important part of the school's cultural fabric. It brings together students with different perspectives and ideas to enhance the learning experience for all students. The school community places significant value on its diversity and the dynamic it brings to the classroom, which is why students, parents and staff gather on one night each year for the sole purpose of celebrating this diversity.

"International Night celebrates the cultural diversity we have in our school by bringing families together to celebrate their home countries," said Meramec parent **Elisa Suarez**, who has organized the event on behalf of the Meramec PTO for the past six years.

The event gives families from all backgrounds an opportunity to showcase their native countries through food, music and cultural artifacts. At the event, families host a table representing a country from their heritage. Multiple families from the same

country will host a table together, giving them the opportunity to meet and get to know other Meramec families with the same background.



The Suarez family celebrated their Spanish heritage at Meramec Elementary's annual International Night in October.

Each table is marked by the country's flag, which students use to identify the country on the "passport" they have stamped throughout the evening. As they travel from table to table, students and their parents learn about each country by looking at cultural artifacts, listening to music and, of course, enjoying delicious food.

International Night historically has been held in January, but this year, the PTO moved the event to early October. This change was made, in part, to help families make connections with one another earlier in the school year.

"Families are so proud of their country, culture and heritage, and they want to share it with other families at Meramec," added Suarez. "International Night is always one of the Meramec community's favorite nights. We're such a small school - it's amazing to know how much diversity we have." •





Wydown Educator Named Middle School Health Teacher of the Year

Wydown Middle School Health Teacher **Jill Warner** has been named the Missouri Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance's (MOAHPERD) 2018 Missouri Middle School Health Education Teacher of the Year. This award recognizes Warner as a leader in health education within the School District of Clayton and across the state.

"I am honored to have been selected as the Teacher of the Year for the state of Missouri," said Warner. "Our health curriculum in Clayton is vast and covers many sensitive and intense topics. I have always felt supported in what I do and am lucky to be a part of a district that acknowledges the vital importance of the knowledge and skills that are taught in our health classes. I hope to use this honor as a way to advocate for quality health education courses, not only within our district but statewide as well."

Warner has been teaching in the District for the past 18 years. During that time, she has served on several committees, including her current role as a member of a leadership team at WMS. Outside of the District, Warner is a member of MOAHPERD, SHAPE America, Eta Sigma Gamma (national health education honorary) and the American School Health Association (ASHA). Additionally, she has shared her expertise as a presenter at local, state and national conferences.

"Raising healthy kids is not an easy job and I am only one part of that process," Warner added. "My job is made easier given the fact that we have supportive and involved families, community members and District leaders. Working together we can help to guide Clayton students toward positive, healthy choices, both now and in their future." •



Wydown Middle School Health Teacher **Jill Warner** has been named the 2018 Missouri Middle School Health Education Teacher of the Year.



Nonprofit Writing Partnerships Provide Students with Real World Experience

Clayton High School students are learning firsthand how they can use their words to make a difference in their community, the broader St. Louis region and across the country. Through a partnership with six local nonprofits, Advanced Placement (AP) English Language and Composition students are gaining real world writing experience this school year while helping the nonprofits engage their key audiences.

"Our Professional Writing Partnerships program is helping students become more informed citizens by

gaining a deeper understanding of the social issues within their community and region and using this knowledge to inform or persuade other people about these important issues," said AP English Language and Composition Teacher **Eric Turley**.

The program kicked off with a visit from the nonprofits to teach students about the causes they support, which range from fighting childhood cancer to improving air quality. Students ranked the nonprofits with which they preferred to work, and Turley matched students with a nonprofit for the project.

In September, students met with a representative from their selected nonprofit to discuss the writing project they would be working on this semester. The projects require students to branch out from the writing style they typically use in English class in order to successfully write a press release, blog post or fundraising appeal letter.

Seniors **Lenny Chen** and **Jake Sher** have been working on a press release for the Jewish Federation of St. Louis, which is a writing style that neither student has previously used. According to Lenny, "I like the concision of [the press release]. It's a good

way to express what you need to without having to read through a lot."

In November and December, each group met with their respective nonprofits to gain feedback on their project and discuss next steps. While the nonprofits may make additional edits to the students' work, some form of the students' writing will be used to benefit the organizations. In exchange, the students gain a more well-rounded writing experience this year that will help them in their future careers.

"I really like the concept of learning by doing. It gets you out of the books and into a practical application of what you're learning," said **Rick Jackoway** of the Jewish Federation of St. Louis. **Sarah Melinger** of the Gateway Arch Park Foundation added, "There is a big difference between writing for school and writing in the real world."

Next semester, the students will continue working with the nonprofits but will take on a new project that requires a different style of writing. With two real world writing projects under their belts, they will be even more prepared for college and beyond. •



Places for People Communications Coordinator **Chris Stalter** provides feedback to Clayton High School students on the blog post they have written for his organization.



FOCUS-ing on Our Financial Future

The School District of Clayton Board of Education is studying the possibility of asking voters to approve a tax levy increase in April 2019. This was a major topic of discussion during the recent FOCUS Open Houses. Here are a few of the more frequently asked questions, and answers, we heard during the Open Houses:

How can the School District of Clayton be in need of additional financial support?

School districts often do not have the means to increase revenue at a rate sufficient to meet rising costs. Clayton is no different. The District's last voter-approved tax increase was in April 2003. However, because of a state law (the Hancock Amendment) that limits the growth of a school district's tax revenue, the District has seen expenses grow at a considerably faster rate than revenues over time. This growth in expenses resulted in annual budget shortfalls beginning with the 2015-2016 school year. **The District has been prudently using its reserves to maintain academic excellence and close the gap between revenues and expenses for the past three years.** While the new construction around Clayton has created some additional new revenue for the District, it will not be enough to close the revenue/expenditure gap.

How has the District been controlling its expenses?

Since 2004, **the District has held its average increase in expenses to just 2.29%.**

Beginning with the 2012-2013 school year, the District has made permanent reductions in its expenses by more than \$2.8 million by taking the following steps:

- Reducing staffing expenses
- Restructuring health benefits
- Re-bidding a number of vendor contracts
- Reducing utilities costs through rebates and the use of solar photovoltaic arrays

How does Missouri law limit growth of the District's tax revenue?

As assessed value of property within the District goes up, Missouri law (the Hancock Amendment) requires the District to roll back (reduce) its tax rate so that revenues from existing property can only increase at the lesser of the following three scenarios:

- 5%
- Consumer Price Index – just 1.36% annually on average for the past five years

Allowable Operating Tax Revenue Increases Since Last Tax Levy in 2003

2003-2004	2.20%	2011-2012	0.00%
2004-2005	0.00%	2012-2013	0.00%
2005-2006	3.02%	2013-2014	1.21%
2006-2007	0.19%	2014-2015	0.18%
2007-2008	2.60%	2015-2016	0.80%
2008-2009	0.27%	2016-2017	0.00%
2009-2010	0.00%	2017-2018	2.10%
2010-2011	0.00%	2018-2019	0.00%

- The change in assessed valuation, which, if negative, causes the District's revenue to be flat due to the fact that the Hancock Amendment protects school districts from collecting less tax revenue than they did the year before, regardless of a decrease in assessed valuations.

Consequently, the District does not benefit significantly from increases in assessed value. Revenue has remained relatively flat over the past 15 years since the last voter-approved tax increase, with an average allowable revenue increase of just 0.78%.



Wydown Health Teacher Earns Emerson Award

Wydown Middle School Health Teacher **Rachel Gasawski** is described by her colleagues as an unbelievably passionate and enthusiastic health educator who builds a strong rapport with her



Wydown Middle School Health Teacher **Rachel Gasawski** has earned the District's 2018 Emerson Excellence in Teaching Award.

students. Gasawski creates a welcoming and productive learning environment by easily building relationships with her students, who enjoy her positive attitude and energy. For these qualities and many more, Gasawski has been named the District's recipient of the 2018 Emerson Excellence in Teaching Award.

"I am honored and incredibly grateful for all of the recognition, praise and support that I have received from so many people" said Gasawski, who has been teaching Health at WMS for the past 12 years. "My enthusiasm for teaching Health Education just comes naturally from the passion I have about the relevant and relatable topics we have the freedom to teach."

During her 12 years at WMS, Gasawski has established herself as an educator

who is committed to her students' academic success and social-emotional well-being. Her classroom is a place where her students are confident in their ability to meaningfully participate in discussions and to ask questions, even regarding sensitive curricular topics. Outside of class, Gasawski will always meet with students who need to talk to a trusted adult, even if it means giving up her own planning periods or lunch. Gasawski is also an exceptional advocate for health education in the community, collaborating regularly with local organizations including the All In Clayton Coalition.

According to her colleagues, Gasawski is easily one of the most selfless teachers at Wydown Middle School. She is a shining example of an educator who has a passion and commitment to her craft; no other candidate deserves to be recognized with the Emerson Excellence in Teaching Award more than Rachel Gasawski.



Clayton Education Foundation Awards \$57,000 in Grants to District Teachers

The Clayton Education Foundation’s “Prize Patrol” surprised teachers across the District with balloons and oversized checks on Oct. 26 when they distributed \$57,000 in grants to fund innovative learning experiences for District students.

Since 2009, the Foundation has helped advance the District’s culture of educational excellence by providing \$176,841 to Clayton teachers to fund unique educational opportunities for students that go beyond what tax dollars cover.

Individual donors, as well as generous gifts from Centene Charitable Foundation and the Crawford Taylor Foundation, made these grants possible.

“The Centene Charitable Foundation is proud to support some of the most innovative programs in our community. Partnering with the Clayton Education Foundation was a natural choice,” said **Marcela Manjarrez-Hawn**, Senior Vice President and Chief Communications Officer for Centene. “I’m impressed with the scope of all 18 initiatives, encompassing artistic endeavors, STEM-based projects and community betterment.”



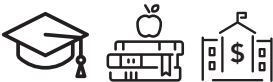
Family Center students and teachers **Kath Poppe** (left) and **Katie Graham** pose with Superintendent **Dr. Sean Doherty** after being surprised by the Clayton Education Foundation’s Grant Prize Patrol.

The 18 grants span all six schools and range in topic from virtual reality to a Shakespeare drama residency to a collaborative outdoor classroom.

“The forward-thinking programs put forth by our teachers demonstrate their commitment to our District’s vision of developing leaders who shape the world through independence, creativity and critical thinking,” said Assistant Superintendent of Teacher and Learning **Dr. Milena Garganigo**. “I know that the Foundation’s 18 grant recipients will empower our students to explore our curriculum in new and creative ways.”

To view the full list of grants and descriptions, visit claytoneducationfoundation.org. While you’re there, check out the photos from the Foundation’s recent gala featuring **Andy Cohen** (’86) and see how you can help the Foundation transform CHS’

Adzick Field into a premier, multi-sport facility for District students and community members to enjoy. •



Clayton Ranked First in Missouri, 13th in U.S.

The School District of Clayton has been ranked as the 13th best school district in the nation and the top district in Missouri in the 2019 rankings from Niche K-12, a website that provides reviews and insights from students, parents and professionals about neighborhoods, cities and K-12 and higher education institutions. The District received an overall grade of A+ based on the site’s methodology, which includes factors such as academics, faculty, extracurricular activities, and health and safety.



Additionally, Clayton High School and Wydown Middle School were ranked first in Missouri in their respective “best schools” rankings. Glenridge Elementary, Captain Elementary and Meramec Elementary also ranked near the top in the state, taking the fifth, sixth and eighth spots in the elementary category, respectively. Clayton ranks first in the state for the being the best place to teach, and second in Missouri for having the best teachers.

Visit niche.com/k12 to learn more about the rankings and methodology. •



INTERNSHIP, Continued from Page 3

The internship program is in its third year at MSU, but this year is the first time St. Louis districts - Clayton and Webster Groves - have participated.

“We decided to participate in the MSU internship program in part because of the success of our Truman partnership and because of Missouri State’s long tradition of producing high-quality teaching candidates,” said Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources **Dr. Tim Dilg**. “The program gives us the opportunity to support the professional growth of these students while also gaining a pipeline for high-quality future teachers.”

Clayton is piloting the MSU internship program at Glenridge this year due to a spike in the school’s enrollment. The MSU interns are supporting second- through fifth-grade classes, while additional elementary interns mostly support students in kindergarten and first-grade. The added classroom support not only aids the classroom teachers, but it also gives students another trusted adult from whom they can learn and establish a connection.

“The best part about the program has been getting to know my students,” added Schroeder. “They have taught me so much in just my first semester and I would not have learned as much if it wasn’t for them. They keep me on my toes, but each day I strive to learn more to help them all succeed.” •



Important Dates

More information on School District of Clayton events is available at claytonschools.net.

January	
1	PK-12 No School: Winter Break
2	PK-12 No School: Grading and PD
9	BOE Meeting, 7 p.m.
11	Early Release Day: PD
15	CHS Pre-MMEA Percussion Concert, 7:30 p.m.
18	PK-12 No School: Grading and PD
21	PK-12 No School: Martin Luther King Jr. Day
23	BOE Meeting, 7 p.m.
31-2	CHS Musical, 7 p.m.

February	
1	Early Release Day: PD
3	CHS Musical, Noon
4	BOE Retreat, 6 p.m.
5	Elementary Strings, ViBravo and Chamber Orchestra Concert, 7 p.m.
6	BOE Meeting, 7 p.m.
11	WMS/CHS Pre-Festival Band Concert, 7 p.m.
13	CHS Jazz Band/Show Choir Concert, 7:30 p.m.
15	Early Release Day: PD
18	PK-12 No School: Presidents Day
20	BOE Meeting, 7 p.m.
24	CHS Solo/Ensemble Recital, 2 p.m.
26	MER Black History Night, 6:30 p.m.
28	CHS/WMS Orchestra Pre-Festival Concert, 7 p.m.

KEY	
BOE	– Board of Education
CHS	– Clayton High School
CPT	– Captain Elementary
FC	– Family Center
GLN	– Glenridge Elementary
MER	– Meramec Elementary
PD	– Professional Development
WMS	– Wydown Middle School

The School District of Clayton does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, gender, age or disability.

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Stay up to date on the latest District happenings by connecting with @ClaytonSchools on Facebook and Twitter.

And don't forget to check the District's website and mobile app for other important news and events. Visit us at claytonschools.net or download the app in the App Store or on Google Play.

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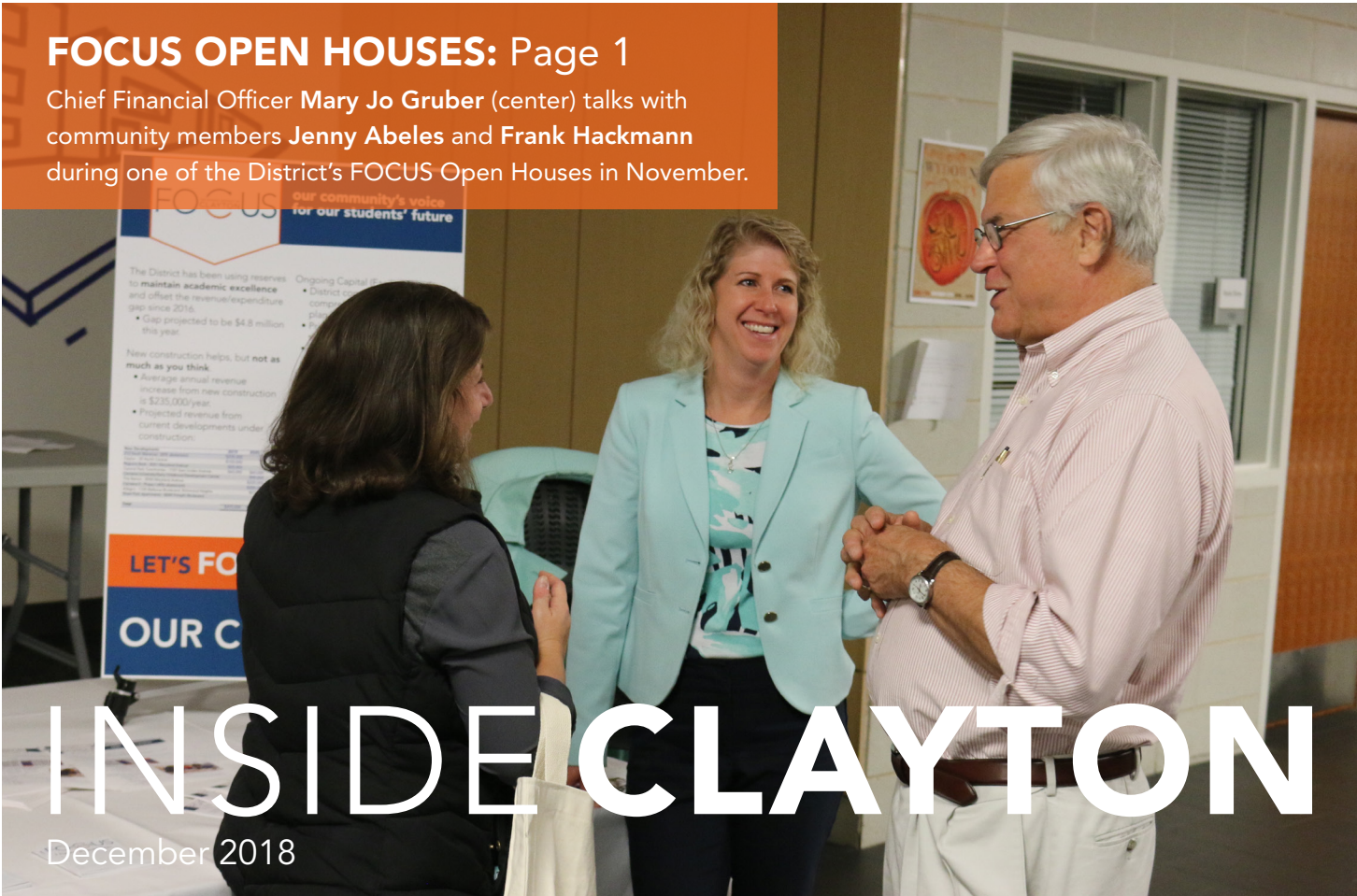
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Clayton, MO 63105

FOCUS OPEN HOUSES: Page 1

Chief Financial Officer **Mary Jo Gruber** (center) talks with community members **Jenny Abeles** and **Frank Hackmann** during one of the District's FOCUS Open Houses in November.



INSIDE CLAYTON

December 2018



Educate. Inspire. Empower.

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