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Spring 2021 INSIDE CLAYTON

claytonschools.net

New Superintendent Selected for Clayton Schools

Dr. Nisha Patel has been selected to serve as the next superintendent of the School District of Clayton. The Board of Education voted unanimously to offer the position to Dr. Patel after a national search that drew 22 applicants from across the country. The Board, along with groups of students, parents, teachers, staff and administrators, interviewed three finalists.

"Dr. Patel understands the power of establishing strong student, staff, and community relationships, which are the ultimate foundation for student success," explained Board of Education President Joe Miller. "Even though our next superintendent is coming to us from only 20 miles away, our national search allowed the Board to connect with a number of talented administrators as we worked to find the best person to lead us here in Clayton. We are confident we have found that person in Dr. Patel."

Dr. Patel spent the last five years of her 21-year educational career with the Fox C-6 School District as the Assistant Superintendent of Secondary Schools and, most recently, as superintendent. She began her career in education teaching science in the Kansas City area in 1999. After relocating to St. Louis, she spent nine years with the Rockwood School District, teaching high school science before moving on to serve as an assistant and associate high school principal before becoming principal at Crestview Middle School in 2013. She was named the Exemplary New Principal of the Year in 2014 by the St. Louis Association of Secondary School Principals.

"I am incredibly humbled to be chosen to lead this district as its next superintendent," Patel said. "I look forward to leveraging my passion for learning



WELCOME

"I am honored to partner with our students, staff and parents to ensure that Clayton is a place for everyone to grow as learners in head and heart."

Dr. Nisha Patel
INCOMING
SUPERINTENDENT

and growth mindset to collaboratively strengthen the learning focus and high standards of excellence that are already deeply embedded with the Clayton community."

After attending high school in the Kansas City area, Dr. Patel attended the University of Kansas where she received her bachelor's degree in cellular biology as well as her master's degree in science education. She holds a Master of Science in Administration from Missouri Baptist University and received her doctoral degree in administrative leadership from Maryville University.

Look for opportunities to learn more about Dr. Patel in the coming months as she works to transition into her new role. She begins her tenure as Superintendent of the School District of Clayton on July 1, 2021. She will replace Dr. Sean Doherty, who last September announced his plans to retire at the end of the 2020-2021 school year after more than a decade of service in Clayton, including the last five years as superintendent.

Visit claytonschools.net/nishapatel to learn more about Dr. Patel and to read her letter to the Clayton community. •

Rubin and Wilson Run Unopposed for Board of Education

Filing for the Board of Education Election closed in January with only two candidates filing for two open positions.



Incumbents **Amy Rubin** and **Jason Wilson** filed for the two open positions. Missouri statutes (RSMo 115.124) do not require a school district to hold a Board of Education election if the number of candidates who file is equal

to the number of positions to be filled by the election.

No election will be held and Rubin and Wilson will be sworn in for their new terms in April 2021. •



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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
Lead Learner...

Dear Clayton Community,

One of the attributes of our Profile of a Graduate, which is the cornerstone of our strategic plan, is being a Creative Thinker. We want to develop individuals who know how to design and implement solutions to complex problems, who can explore multiple possibilities, who challenge the status quo and who can express thoughts, ideas and emotions in varied ways – design, arts, writing and speaking. Over the last year, we have had to face problems we never considered in the past and have been able to adapt in order to have meaningful learning experiences for our students.

Our students and staff have demonstrated their creativity in approaching learning in new ways. In this edition of *Inside Clayton*, we have highlighted how we adapted, thought differently and maintained our excellence. Our articles on Black History Month, the Smile Selfie Project and the Dream Project serve as excellent examples of being a creative thinker in our District.

So much has changed in our learning community since last spring, yet our focus on excellence in education has remained a constant. We have been working tirelessly to serve the varied learning needs of our students in new ways. It is incredible how far we have evolved throughout this entire pandemic, how much we have learned and the number of times we have had to pivot.

As a learning community, it is our responsibility to maximize our instructional time with students. When we had to go into emergency remote learning last spring, our goal has always been to bring our students back to in-person learning when possible, while also offering a high-quality Learning@Home model for those who chose to learn remotely.

We have been able to implement effective risk mitigation measures, which is evidenced in the data we are collecting about in-school transmissions. With collective efforts of the entire community, we have students learning inside our schools every day. We will take what we learned from this experience and determine how it will influence change for the future.



We are moving forward - even during this difficult time. We are not allowing the pandemic to consume all of our focus. We are continuing to dedicate energy to the goals and objectives of our strategic plan. We have moved forward with our equity initiatives, our work with more personalized learning approaches and addressing the social/emotional well-being of our students. We are striving to make institutional, curricular and instructional changes within our District that positively impact the learning and growth of our students - and ultimately who they are once they graduate. Please take time to review our current strategic plan on the District website at claytonschools.net/strategicplan.

Lastly, my heart and mind has been dedicated to Clayton since I started here in 2010. I want to assure you that I will do everything possible to make the most of these final months in my tenure as superintendent. I will also do everything possible to help Dr. Nisha Patel with her transition into this position. As you probably already read in the article on page one, she is a dedicated leader who has had great experiences. Her leadership will take the District to new heights.

Best,
Sean

Sean N. Doherty, Ed.D.
Superintendent

Glenridge Students Take a Playful Approach to Their Learning

On Feb. 3, students at Glenridge Elementary participated in a global play event called Global School Play Day all the while staying safe and socially-distanced.



This effort was created by educators in support of structured playtime for students around the world - even through the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Play-based learning is one of the main ways children learn and develop," said Nicole Miller, Physical Education teacher at Glenridge and

coordinator of this event. "As educators we wanted to take a different approach to learning by involving both child-initiated and teacher-supported activities."

The first annual Global School Play Day occurred around the world on Feb. 4, 2015. In just the first year over 65,000 students across the nation participated and since then, many more followed suit.



Some of the games for Global School Play Day included:

- Sidewalk Chalk games and activities
- Charades
- Pictionary
- Scavenger Hunts
- Virtual BINGO
- Red Light, Green Light
- Trivia
- Twenty Questions

Students were given the opportunity to just play. No screens and no structure.

Other than taking a few pictures/videos, educators tried to be invisible and just let the kids enjoy some unstructured play, instead of playful, teacher-led lessons.



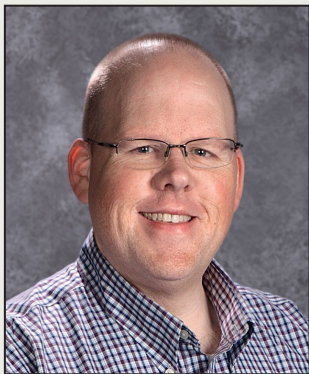
"Play can challenge our students' thinking and creativity while supporting a positive attitude towards learning," added Miller. "And it was so refreshing to see our students learning while they were doing something they simply love to do: play." •

Three Teachers Honored with Major Teaching Awards



Captain Elementary Science Specialist **Chris Hwande**, was honored with The Inspiring Teacher Award. Each year, the Challenger Learning Center-St. Louis recognizes current teachers who inspire future generations of explorers and innovators.

"I was extremely honored to receive this type of recognition," Hwande said. "I have a deep love for Science that I am proud to share in shaping the next generation of scientists in this District."



District Orchestra Director **Daniel Henderson** was named the Missouri American String Teachers Association (MoASTA) Outstanding Secondary Educator of the Year for the 2020-2021 school year. Henderson's coworkers refer to him as "truly one of the best!"

"I am humbled to have been selected for this award. MoASTA is an organization that is very dear to my heart and to be recognized by them is a true honor," Henderson said. "I feel



extremely fortunate to have the opportunity to do this work with my wonderful students and colleagues in Clayton."

Special School District (SSD) Paraprofessional **Dee Pliakos** won the SSD Building Block Award for her outstanding skill and dedication to students. She was nominated by four of her fellow coworkers within the District for her contributions to the lives of her SSD students.

"It is an honor to serve the students in this District and to help them grow as learners," said Pliakos. "Being with them is the best part of my day and I look forward to the daily adventures."

Inspiring students to love learning and embrace challenge within a rich and rigorous academic culture is a commitment the School District of Clayton makes to its student-body.

"When our educators receive awards like these, it makes me immensely proud of their work as individuals and our work as a District," said Superintendent Sean Doherty. "It's critical that the interactions we have with our students model and promote high expectations, mutual respect and academic excellence to develop them into contributing members of society." •

Code Isn't Just for Secret Agents...

Elementary students across the District learned a few things about the language of computers during the Hour of Code, an annual event that



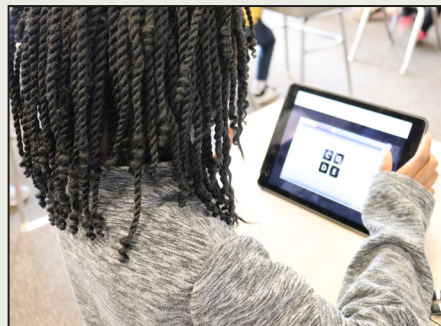
takes place during Computer Science Education Week. This is the sixth year that Clayton elementary schools have participated.

The Hour of Code started as a one-hour introduction to Computer Science, designed to demystify "code" to show that anybody can learn the basics and to broaden participation in the

field of Computer Science.

Activities include games and lessons that teach students simple computer science concepts which is a great way to prepare students for career opportunities in Computer Science.

Alicia Schuh, a first grade teacher at Glenridge Elementary, always looks forward to this annual event. "I love having access to a simple, hands-on approach with learning something as complex as Computer Science," said Schuh. "Over the years I've watched my students easily engage in Hour of Code activities they absolutely love."



The organization that hosts the Hour of Code, Code.org, also has something essential and unique in common with the School District of Clayton - the importance of diversity, equity and inclusion. It has a committed approach to expanding diversity and equity in the field of Computer Science, therefore all courses are designed to enable every student to participate - no prerequisite knowledge or background in technology necessary.

"It's amazing to see every single student of mine, regardless of their knowledge, have the ability to participate in this learning," Schuh added. "I love that the Hour of Code activities are designed for all children, so regardless of where my students are in their skill-level, they can and do excel in this subject matter."

Code.org notes that Computer Science is now a foundational subject for all 21st century careers, making access to this knowledge for all K-12 students an equity matter that must be addressed. With the District's commitment to participating in this event, students of all backgrounds are reached where they are - at their skill-level, in their schools and in ways that inspire them to keep learning.

"Witnessing this kind of academic success with my students makes a world of difference to me as an educator," Schuh said.



Hour of Code supports a deep-dive learning approach in Computer Science that Clayton students can take advantage of. And studies show that children who study Computer Science perform better in other subjects, excel at problem-solving and are 17 percent more likely to enroll in college.



To see photos and a video of this learning experience visit claytonschools.net/hourofcode2020.

Fifth Graders Help Lead Learning About Black History

While the School District of Clayton strives to celebrate Black History throughout the year, a special emphasis is placed on learning about and celebrating Black History throughout the month of February.

In addition to what teachers roll out in their classrooms, this year the three Clayton elementary schools collaborated to create a video series to educate and inspire the Clayton community. This series is called "Black History is Essential" and focused on the importance of Black History as well as the influence of African Americans in essential fields.

During the month of February, a different video series was published each week showcasing these black history categories:

- Feb. 1 - 5: Healthcare Workers
- Feb. 8 - 12: Essential Community Workers
- Feb. 15 - 19: Community Leaders
- Feb. 22 - 26: Educators

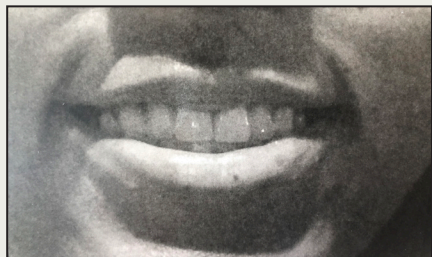
Students were also empowered to find ways of supporting the already amazing people and events happening in the Clayton community. Part of this included the elementary schools partnering with the Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis and collecting hygiene products and/or non-perishable food items for people of color in the surrounding area.



Visit claytonschools.net/blackhistoryisessential to check out the Black History Month video series.

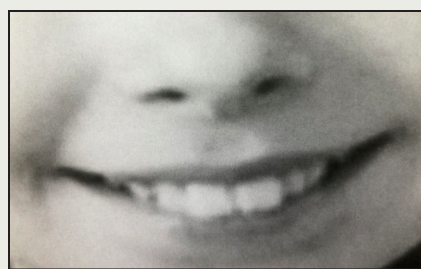
Even with Masks, CHS Art Students Find Ways to Share their Smiles

CHS Art teacher, Rebecca Hare, recently had a conversation with her students about how strange it is to have gone so long without seeing people's faces, smiles and expressions. "It's really been taking a toll on all of us as an educational community and in Clayton as a whole," Hare said.



In the not so distant past, students and teachers could walk down the halls and say hi and smile at each other. "This lack of smiles and expression has created a huge disconnect to our usual engagement, so as an educator I thought of an artistic way to do something about it," added Hare.

Photo students of Hare's submitted "smile selfies" - photos of their



own smiles, their friends or family. They were printed, cut out and pasted around CHS with the idea to cover the entire school with smiles. "Once we got started, we thought it would be fun to extend them to the District Administrative Building since they haven't seen student smiles either," said Hare.

Students had a good time with this one-of-a-kind project and in distributing their smiles. Not only did they receive a unique photo/art opportunity but they were able to express themselves as creative thinkers while demonstrating compassion, kindness and empathy - which are characteristics of the District's Profile of a Graduate. •

The Show Goes On for Strings Students at Captain



Both masked and socially-distanced, Captain Elementary's fourth- and fifth grade strings students performed their Winter Orchestra Concert as they would have pre-pandemic.

This year has been particularly unique for the strings students because they all started their learning experience over Zoom. For the fourth graders, the majority of them had never touched an instrument before and the beginning stages of how to hold their instrument, bow and put it all together was taught over Zoom.

In an ordinary year, starting in-person, the beginning stages are very hands-on with the help of the teacher and very difficult to grasp. For fifth graders, some of them switched instruments altogether - from violin to cello or viola. They had to learn everything new over Zoom.

"It is quite remarkable that these students were able to achieve so much in one year considering the circumstances," said Monica Holy, Instrumental/Strings teacher for the District. "And honestly, we didn't hold back very much this year. These students were driven and determined to achieve just as much as in any other orchestra year - and they certainly did!"

Visit claytonschoools.net/strings2021 to view the photo gallery and performances. •

Wydown Drama Students Showcase Their Voices and Their Dreams

Drama students at Wydown Middle School put together a one-of-a-kind performance called **The Dream Project**. Its purpose was for students to build a sense of ensemble and community by sharing their hopes and dreams.

This project taught students how to tell stories through the use of an art form called Tableaux, also known as a living picture that tells a story.

"This unique theatrical performance project provided drama students an opportunity to showcase their voices



and dreams," said Brian Engelmeyer Theatre Teacher and Director at Wydown. "Theatre isn't possible without an ensemble of performers who work together and support one another in a unified setting to create something that will be shared with the world. Our objective with this project was to share the hopes and dreams of Clayton students while at the same time inspiring change in the world."

To view the performances and video gallery, visit claytonschoools.net/wmsdreamproject. •



Clayton Alumni Hall of Fame/Distinguished Educator Nominations Due April 20

Help the District find CHS graduates from in, or before, the Class of 2011 who represent the diversity of the entire CHS community and have accomplishments in one (or more) of the following areas:

- Excellence in service to a recognized profession such as law, education, medicine, engineering, science or journalism.
- Outstanding success in a trade, business or industry.
- Demonstrated high achievement in one or more recognized fields of cultural endeavor such as music, theater, dance or literature.
- Significant contributions to the community at large through volunteering or charitable contributions.

The District is also seeking nominations of outstanding teachers for the **Distinguished Educator Award**.

Nominations are due by April 20.

For more details visit, claytoneducationfoundation.org.



CLAYTON ALUMNI
 HALL OF FAME

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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DR. NISHA PATEL SELECTED AS NEXT SUPERINTENDENT: Page 1

The Board of Education voted unanimously to select Dr. Patel after a search drew 22 applicants from across the country.



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