

# volunteer

## Crestwood P.E. teacher named 2021 Missouri Teacher of the Year

Darrion Cockrell, a VICC alumnus and a physical education teacher at Crestwood Elementary School in the Lindbergh School District, has been named 2021 Missouri Teacher of the Year. He will represent Missouri in the final leg of the national Teacher of the Year program, which will award the winner in May.

The Missouri Teacher of the Year program recognizes the efforts of effective teachers working tirelessly to provide a high-quality education to their students.

“We are so proud to have ‘Mr. DC’ represent our district and teachers across the state as the 2021 Missouri Teacher of the Year!” said a Lindbergh School District spokesperson.

Cockrell accepted the award during a virtual Teacher of the Year Recognition Ceremony, held on Oct. 15. “When I changed the way I looked at things, the things I looked at changed,” said Cockrell in his acceptance speech. Crestwood School staff and students surprised Cockrell, known as Mr. DC, with the news of his win by holding a socially distanced parade and celebration Sept. 4.

In announcing the award that day, Lindbergh Superintendent Tony Lake told Cockrell, “All these people are here to celebrate what I would say is just an exemplary educator. [Mr. DC] gives back to his kids. I can’t think of a better ambassador for our school district, our state, than you.”

Cockrell spent his early years in a world of violence and was in foster care by age 6. He was enrolled in the VICC program from second through seventh grade. He spent some time in a gang before being moved toward the end of seventh grade to the General Protestant Children’s Home with the help of his principal, teacher and counselor Maureen Huneke, who picked

him up and dropped him off every school day. After about a year, Dennis and Sherry Kaeser adopted Cockrell from the boys home. They lived about 10 minutes from Parkway Central Middle School, so at that time Cockrell left the VICC program and became a resident Parkway student.

The VICC program had a “huge impact” on him, Cockrell said, adding that it was a pivotal point in his life. His Parkway teachers supported and pushed him to succeed.

Cockrell graduated from Parkway Central High School in 2005. A December 2013 graduate of University of Missouri–St. Louis, he began his career as a paraprofessional through the Special School District of St. Louis County and worked in the Parkway School District in the 2014 spring semester. He then spent one year at Lafayette High School in Rockwood before starting his current role at Crestwood in August 2015.

Cockrell created the Crest-Fit physical fitness program and started the “Dads’ Club Open Gym,” a weekly event for local fathers to play basketball in the evening. One of his workouts, styled after a popular dance, spread to multiple schools throughout the community and became a social media sensation. Cockrell is an active member of Crestwood’s diversity committee and the Lindbergh district’s strategic planning team.

“Everything we do as educators should be in an effort to make connections, build trust and make sure all students find the success that lives within them,” Cockrell said. “Students are extremely diverse in the way they learn, but all it takes is one person to make sure their educational experience is great!”

“As a physical educator, I have the unique opportunity



To watch Darrion Cockrell’s acceptance speech  
for the Missouri Teacher of the Year award,  
please visit:

[https://www.facebook.com/LindberghSchools/videos/1181539598913541/?so\\_\\_=permalink&\\_\\_rv\\_\\_=related\\_videos](https://www.facebook.com/LindberghSchools/videos/1181539598913541/?so__=permalink&__rv__=related_videos)

# Clayton District celebrates end of 2019-20 year with parade

The School District of Clayton finished the 2019-20 school year, interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, with a May parade of teachers making drive-by visits to the district's VICC students living in St. Louis City and Normandy.

District officials worked with VICC's transportation office to develop a route that ran through Zone 1. The parade of teachers' cars drove past many students' homes.

Top Right - St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department officers, who escorted the Clayton District parade, join a Clayton administrator and teacher and a student family in overlooking the parade in front of the Missouri History Museum.

Below Left - Clayton High School students show their school spirit as the parade passes through their neighborhood.

Below Right - Glenridge School students wear their school spirit as the parade passes through their neighborhood.



## Clayton appoints new director of equity and inclusion

The School District of Clayton has appointed Cameron Poole to the new position of Director of Equity and Inclusion beginning with the 2020-21 school year. The position will allow the district to grow its work and further its commitment to becoming an equitable and anti-racist community.

"Equity has always been the cornerstone of why I came into education," Poole said. "I am ready to start building systems that will stand the test of time. It's a process, but I am committed — to the students, community, staff — to bringing true equity to Clayton. I've done a lot of this type of work from a grassroots level, and I will work diligently to put the correct systems and measures in place."

Poole served for the past two years as assistant principal at Rockwood Summit High School in the Rockwood School District, where he helped lead orientation and transitioning programs as well as student equity groups. Poole spent the first six years

of his education career as a high school history teacher in both the Wright City R-II and Parkway school districts. He is working toward his doctorate in educational leadership and holds a master of educational administration degree, a master of arts degree in teaching and education and a bachelor of science degree in history.

"Cameron is a leader who has the knowledge, passion and insight to truly move the District in developing the goals, strategies and metrics needed to become an anti-racist and diverse, equitable and inclusive learning community," said Clayton Superintendent Sean Doherty. "He will strengthen the collective efficacy of this important work. I am looking forward to working and learning together and having Cameron as part of our leadership team."

Poole officially began his tenure as Director of Equity and Inclusion on Aug. 10.



Cameron Poole



Superintendent Dr. Mark Miles (left) records his reading of "All Are Welcome" for the Read Like Me series.

## Rockwood administrators and staff make Read Aloud videos for students

### Rockwood School District's Read Like Me program has expanded into a staff Read-Aloud series after one parent complaint caused a stir.

The new read-aloud program features diverse district leaders reading books centered on people of color. The readings are recorded and made available for use by any teacher in the district. Each video includes that person talking about what the book means to them.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic caused the district to shift into virtual learning, Read Like Me was a small-group book club for middle school students.

Brittany Hogan, Rockwood's director of Educational Equity and Diversity, expanded the program after a parent complained on social media about a book read to her second-grader's class. The book, "Ron's Big Mission," is a chapter book by Rose Blue and Corinne Naden for grades one to three, relating the early life of NASA astronaut Ronald McNair, who died in the 1986 Space Shuttle Challenger explosion. The story describes 9-year-old McNair's mission to get a library card in segregated South Carolina so he could check out books about airplanes and flight.

Rockwood's K-2 English Language Learners coach Kristen Forth recommended the book to teach

students about equity, persistence and history. "At heart, the book provides a window into our history, carries a larger message of speaking up when things are unfair and introduces students to Ron McNair," Forth said.

After the parent complained on a Facebook group about the choice of the book, Pond Elementary Principal Dr. Carlos Diaz-Granados read the book on Zoom to his entire student body.

Hogan decided to follow Diaz-Granados' lead, by coordinating a series of similar reading events featuring other Rockwood principals and leaders. Administrators, including Superintendent Dr. Mark Miles, read to elementary students similar books that emphasize equity issues. Readings take place once a week.

Some of the books scheduled for video readings include "Mae Among The Stars," "The Girl With a Mind for Math: The Story of Raye Montague," "All Are Welcome," "The Day You Begin," "Skin Like Mine," "Festival of Colors" and "Carmela Full of Wishes."

"My hope is that we continue to provide access to books that provide mirrors and windows," Hogan said. "I want all of our students to see themselves and learn about others through books."



Tyrone Dennis, Rockwood's Director of Security/District Safety Officer, records a Read-Aloud session for the Read Like Me series.



# Message from the CEO

## 2020!

**David S. Glaser**

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A new year, a new decade, filled with promise and adventure. Webster's dictionary defines those two words by saying it is "marked by ... accurate discernment, judgment or assessment." But with this new year came many disappointments and life filled with fear and changes.

We have dealt with not only the pandemic, the election, canceled graduations, weddings and family gatherings but also quarantines, family and friends' illnesses and even many deaths, but also an unprecedented new way of teaching and learning for our students, teachers, parents, guardians and babysitters.

From my point of view, I could not be more proud of the efforts shown by everyone involved from the students who have had to learn to be a student in a virtual community to the teachers who have spent countless hours of their own time learning and preparing a whole new way of teaching through a virtual format.

In addition, parents, grandparents, guardians and babysitters have had to learn quickly how to interpret the frequent memos and sudden adjustments of where and when the students had to go within the portal for special classes or to switch subjects, and how to handle last-minute modifications in schedules.

Our Transportation Department, along with the bus drivers, was on board from the beginning, delivering to our students not only food but also Chrome books, school supplies, Hot Spots and

anything else needed to facilitate this new virtual learning for our students. It was without a doubt a village pulling together to make this new way of educating our students work.

Thanks to all of our districts for creating special activities and for including our VICC students in end-of-year celebrations as much as possible with social distancing. For instance, in May, the Clayton School District organized a parade of teachers making drive-by visits to the VICC students living in the City in order to say good-bye and wish them a happy and safe summer.

At the end of October, Parkway's Riverbend Elementary teachers organized a parade so the parents of all the students could drive through the parking lot to wave to their teachers in anticipation of school starting back full-time in November. Unfortunately, because of the increasing numbers of COVID-19 cases, those plans were changed back to the hybrid mix of virtual and in-person education.

Soon we will be embarking on a new year, 2021. We can look back at 2020 with hindsight and hopefully know that we did the best we could under the unprecedented circumstances and be proud of every decision carefully and thoughtfully made with the best interest of every student, teacher and staff member at heart. 2020 was a rough year, but we all survived it and look forward to a new year.

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to prepare my students both mentally and physically by teaching them the building blocks of fitness and health," Cockrell said. "Combining a fun atmosphere with music, fitness and healthy life skills has truly become a recipe for success in my classroom."

When the COVID-19 pandemic shut down schools in March, Cockrell moved his Crest-fit program to the virtual realm by creating fun, instructional, high-energy videos from his basement to help students stay motivated and active during remote learning. In addition to providing 5- to 30-minute exercise sessions for his students, he shared inspiring messages, incorporated his family, including wife Kimberly and son Dawson, into his live sessions and provided opportunities for families to work out together.

"Mr. DC is loved by all," said Dr. Jodi Oliver, Cockrell's principal from August 2015 through June 2020. "Students look up to him and see him as a facilitator to their learning in physical education and as someone who will guide them to make the best possible personal decisions. He naturally builds relationships by showing his fun and

silly demeanor, which makes him such a relatable person."

"Missouri is fortunate to have so many high-quality educators, and Darrion will be a wonderful representative as our state's Teacher of the Year," said Margie Vandeven, Missouri Commissioner of Education.

Cockrell also was one of 10 educators to receive a 2020 National Box Tops for Education Twilight Award, presented in a May live broadcast by Grammy-award winning rapper, singer/songwriter and activist Chance the Rapper.

Cockrell credits Ms. Huneke for starting to turn his life around. During middle school, he spent a lot of time in the counselor's office. "She knew my struggles and knew that something major had to change," he said. He later learned that Huneke and other school officials had gone to court to get him moved to the children's home.

"It's been crazy," Cockrell says of his unusual life. "But I wouldn't change it for anything. It helped shape me into who I am today."

A newsletter published by the Voluntary Interdistrict Choice Corporation to spread the word about the positive things happening in the voluntary transfer program and to offer educators a glimpse at innovative programs helping students succeed at area schools.

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