

## Former Students Serve Needs of Home Community

Thousands of St. Louis youth who have been educated in St. Louis County schools have matriculated to college and gone on to make contributions in the workforce. Especially noteworthy are those who serve in their home communities, performing jobs that lift people up and improve their chances for success. The three working professionals spotlighted here are doing just that. Each of them wants to be a force in changing lives for the better, right in their own backyards.

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## Nationally Recognized St. Louis Educator Models Strategy after Lindbergh Faculty

by Peggy Magee

Charlie Bean loved Lindbergh High so much he had to hold back tears at graduation because he didn't want to leave. Now, however, the dropout recruiter for St. Louis Public Schools is all smiles knowing that his education provided him a model by which he has built his professional success. Fashioning the strategy he uses with students after what he observed from his Lindbergh administrators and teachers, he has earned national recognition for his efforts in getting high school dropouts back on track.

That strategy—which in the six years he has held the job, has helped more than 300 students return to high school and earn a diploma—is described by him: “I give the kids a connection to a trusted adult. They know I care and will do everything I can to help them succeed.”

Flashback 28 years ago when Bean, who coined himself the “class clown” because of his antics of not taking school seriously, was being nurtured and nudged by Lindbergh faculty. “They pulled and pulled for me,” the 1988 graduate recalls. His mentors ranged from Principal Don Jones, who “kept me out of trouble by laying down the law” to drama teacher Debra Peppers who he always knew he could seek out for a welcoming smile or listening ear. After high school, he attended Central Missouri State



In his six years as Dropout Recruiter for St. Louis Public Schools, Charlie Bean, Lindbergh High class of 1988, has helped more than 300 students return to high school and earn a diploma. The Nine Network of Public Media (Channel 9 television) recognized him as an American Graduate Champion and he has been spotlighted on the air and on its website. Photo by Peggy Magee

University, graduating in 1991 with a liberal arts degree.

Last year, Bean, 46, was named an American Graduate Champion by the Nine Network of Public Media, the PBS affiliate in St. Louis. He was the first person to be given this award which recognizes individuals who commit their time, skill and resources to making sure young people succeed. He was honored at the Association of Public Television Stations Public Media Summit in Washington D.C.

Bean has acquired a nickname, “the tracker,” for his uncanny ability to find pupils who have dropped out. Armed with

a spreadsheet of students who have not reenrolled, he uses school records, social media and information from past and present students to contact them. If they did indeed drop out, he steers them back to either a regular school, an alternative program or a virtual academy (computer-based learning), such as the one he runs—the downtown location of Acellus Academy, that enrolls 8-10 students each semester.

Acellus pupils attend school daily and learn on computers outside of Bean's office the same coursework offered in

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## Occupational Therapist's Giving Attitude Inspired by Hancock Teacher

by Peggy Magee

You could say that Brittany Conners was the ideal student. Not only did she continually yearn to expand and improve her knowledge and skills, she possessed the determination and work ethic to make it happen.

The Hancock Place district stoked her potential by providing caring, supportive teachers and coaches and plenty of opportunities by which she could stretch herself. She says she benefitted greatly from attending Hancock schools and one take-away in particular guides her in everything she does. It is something her former high school science teacher, Jason Buck, told her, “Every touch has a purpose.”

Buck, who also served as the girls' soccer coach, shared this truth with Conners as a way to help her grasp the fundamentals of soccer, a sport she desired to add to her repertoire which already included varsity basketball and volleyball. Later, he repeated it to stress the importance of being a good influence on others. Conners explains his point this way: “Everything we do affects others and our actions should always have the purpose of making a positive difference.”

She has embraced her teacher's advice. In her profession as a licensed occupational therapist, the 25-year-old has made it her calling to improve the lives of others. A 2014 graduate of St. Louis

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## Rockwood Education Steers Student Toward Teaching

by Peggy Magee

By day, teacher Brittney Cloudy guides, spurs and prepares St. Louis school children. By night, the 26-year-old is studying to become a school counselor. Her years in the Rockwood district helped her know the value of a positive school environment and whetted her interest in the education field.

In her junior year at Marquette High, she served as a cadet teacher, receiving class credits to assist Algebra teacher Julie Furtwengler. The year prior, the pair had become close when Furtwengler taught Cloudy in Algebra and also helped coach the team on the junior varsity basketball team.

As cadet teacher, Cloudy assisted with the administrative side of classroom management, provided one-on-one assistance to students and even taught a few lessons. “I really liked Algebra when I took it my sophomore year and thought that helping out Ms. Furtwengler would be a great experience,” notes the 2008 graduate. “I found that I enjoyed teaching.”

She chose to major in elementary education at St. Louis University, where she was an accomplished member of the Billiken track team. Prior to graduating in December, 2012, she completed her student teaching in the Kirkwood district. After graduating, she was a substitute teacher in the Kirkwood and Ritenour districts before being hired by the St. Louis Public School district to teach at Washington Montessori School. The following year, she transferred to Ames Visual and Performing Arts School (located north of downtown), where she is in her second year of teaching third grade.

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Licensed occupational therapist Brittany Conners, a 2009 graduate of Hancock High School, bustles about midtown St. Louis in her job working with homeless veterans. What she does is teach them functional, how-to skills to maintain permanent lifestyles. What she wants to do is change their lives. Photo by Peggy Magee

## Occupational Therapist's

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University (master's degree in Occupational Therapy), Conner's first job was working with St. Louis Public School students before moving on to help stroke patients in a rehab facility in Topeka, KS. Currently, she works for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs at the Hope Recovery Center in midtown St. Louis. She trains veterans transitioning from homelessness in the everyday skills they need to maintain a permanent lifestyle--everything from identifying housing options to managing money to shopping for groceries.

She has the distinction of being the only occupational therapist in her office to also serve as a case manager. It's an "emerging practice," she says, to assign case management duties not only to social workers, but occupational therapists, "because so much of managing a client's care involves teaching them functional, how-to skills to successfully navigate their lives."

As a case manager, she has dealings with utility companies, landlords, the court system, as well as community resource providers. While her responsibilities are broad, her goal is focused. "I want to change lives," she notes with unflinching sincerity. Given her degree of dedication, it seems appropriate that Conners serves as this year's president of the Missouri Black Occupational Therapy Caucus, a professional mentoring and networking organization.

Conner's positive touch extends beyond her professional life. Her mother became inspired to seek a college degree after seeing Brittany, a first generation college student, earn one and reach her goal of landing a good job and supporting herself. Conners is an example for her eight nieces and nephews as well. "I try to always foster the idea of working harder and shooting higher."

At Hancock High, Conners says she learned "a multitude" of life lessons. Her involvement in four varsity sports (add cross country to aforementioned ones) provided her with great coaches who helped her appreciate the concept of teamwork and apply it to other aspects of her life. She learned that her job as an athlete was to work closely with her

teammates for the success of the team. Additionally, the 2009 grad notes, "It was just as important to help my teammates improve as it was to improve myself." For her that came to mean, "To help others is to help oneself," a philosophy she lives by.

Conners excelled in other areas of school life besides sports. An honor roll student who preferred the sciences, she joined DECA, a business career prep organization "to explore my abilities," she notes. She served as a mentor to underclassmen and was named class president in both her sophomore and senior years.

To illustrate the kind of student Conners was, Hancock Social Studies teacher Steve Kelly reports how she overcame her initial struggles in his advanced placement class. "She dug in, asked questions, came to study sessions and worked her tail off to make sure she understood the material. She had the type of work ethic I wish we could instill in all our students."

Kelly, also the athletic director at Hancock, announced last year that Conners was named to the Hancock Hall of Fame. "The Hall of Fame highlights individuals who demonstrate the qualities we want to preserve in our school culture," he explains. At the ceremony, he cited all of Conners athletic accomplishments and honors, including being a three-time All-Conference selection in basketball (twice a first-team selection), despite her petite five-foot frame. She was also an All-Conference player in volleyball for three years and an Honorable Mention in soccer. In her senior year, when she ran cross country for the first time, she placed 16th in the state meet. That same year, she was named Outstanding Female Athlete.

Conners says all of the teachers and staff at Hancock impacted her in a positive way. "They saw something in me and chose to invest in me."

Steve Kelly returns the compliment. "Brittany made the same impact on us as we made on her."

## Rockwood Education

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Thinking back on her Rockwood education, Cloudy remembers that the "downside" was the long bus rides to school from her home in the west end of St. Louis. But looking at the big picture "with my adult eyes," she reports: "My education in Rockwood was an enriching experience. We had lots of resources." The atmosphere was conducive to learning, she adds. "Most of my peers valued education. They were bright and happy to be in school."

Cloudy has good memories of Crestview Middle School--the double dutch club, basketball club and the annual track meet where she competed in long jump. It was where she developed her love of reading. "I was doing independent reading in Language Arts class and suddenly I was hooked." She credits the particular book she was reading. "It piqued my interest." As a teacher, she knows it's possible to get kids interested in reading. "It just takes finding the right book to pull them in."

At Marquette, besides playing basketball, Cloudy was a member of the track team where she broke school records in long jump and triple jump. Every year she qualified for the state meet and in her junior year she placed second in triple jump. Her coaches, who were near and dear to her heart, were the reason she pushed herself as hard in the classroom as she did in her sports. "They had high expectations for me. I didn't want to let them down."

Many years later, she keeps up with some of them on Facebook and continues to make them proud. Twice a week, at the end of the school day, she heads to Missouri Baptist College where she is enrolled in the master's program for counseling. Her interest in that area dates back to the advanced placement Psychology class she took at Marquette. "I liked the study of human behavior."

From her firsthand experiences in the classroom, Cloudy has formed some theories about teaching. "The more I know about my students, the better I can meet their needs." She draws a direct correlation between parent involvement and student success. "It's been a consistent model in my classroom that the students who do well have parents who are involved with their education." She appreciates parents who share with her their children's interests, strengths and short comings. "It helps me in putting together strategies that best meet their learning styles."

Cloudy is unsure whether she will go into school counseling or private practice so she's on a dual track to prepare for both. Regardless of which area, she is happy the Rockwood district provided her with classes and experiences that have guided her career choices.



Brittney Cloudy, a 2008 graduate of Rockwood's Marquette High School, teaches third grade at Ames Visual and Performing Arts School, located north of downtown, where she personalizes her teaching strategies to meet her students' individual learning styles. Photo by Peggy Magee

## Nationally Recognized

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regular high schools. He builds relationships with them, monitors their progress and talks with them about future plans. Fridays are "college day," a day when students are encouraged to wear a college shirt, another way Bean plants a seed about next steps. Most importantly, Bean develops a rapport with his students and wins their trust. "I don't just take kids in," he points out. "I consider them my kids."

Pictures of past and present students decorate the walls of his office. "No two have the same circumstances but they all need someone in their court, someone who believes in them," he explains. Bean delivers that, but even so, he considers them "heroes" because, despite significant challenges or hardships, they are facing down adversity to make something of themselves. Bean couldn't be prouder of them.

The students think highly of him, as well. Keon, who will graduate in May, notes, "Mr. Bean has been a great mentor, teacher and friend." One recent graduate, Lawrence, noted, "Mr. Bean has shown me he is truly here for me and that he isn't going to give up on me."

Other students talk about their change in attitude and outlook since being under Bean's tutelage. "Mr. Bean has showed me there is a solution for all of my problems that had stopped me from doing what I needed to do," reports Sean. Tyre points out, "Mr. Bean has pushed me to do bigger and better things instead of just being in the streets and fighting."

Bean's entire career has been with the St. Louis school district. He worked as the attendance

specialist for Carnahan School of the Future, where he also served as athletic director, a job he still holds. He admits having a soft spot for inner city youth

with whom he shares a similar background. "I have a special place in my heart for kids from the city."

Lucky for them.



### Message from the CEO David S. Glaser

Because you are a parent involved in making sure your child receives an outstanding education, I know you recognize that one of the greatest gifts we can give our children is a quality education. A quality education provides opportunities and opens doors that were previously closed. It empowers our children to accomplishments that would otherwise not be attainable. Education gives life meaning. We begin our lives with an empty mind which is thirsty. That thirst will cause our mind to absorb what it is fed. Good food and good nutrients stimulate our children's minds and enable them to grow and develop. This growth and development gives them options and choices to make significant differences in the world and in our community.

As someone who has deep roots in the St. Louis community with parents and even grandparents from the area, I am always encouraged to read about others who have chosen to remain in the area and improve the local community. The three graduates of the VICC program spotlighted here have done just that. They were positively affected by their families, teachers, and other school staff and now are having similar positive impacts upon others. As was mentioned by one of them, they recognize that every touch has a purpose and everything we do affects others. They are using that inspiration to make positive differences in the lives of others. I hope that many of you, as well as your children, will choose to make similar decisions.