

Highlights of the St. Louis  
Student Transfer Program

# volunteer

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Michelle Weissenborn, the assistant principal at Parkway's Claymont Elementary School, plays a math card game with then second grader Derrick Covington. Derrick was among the 35 or so VICC students who arrived at school an hour early for a good portion of last school year to receive additional math instruction. This year again, teachers and volunteers will work with the students before school. "We've seen marked improvements in achievement data," reports Principal Aaron Wills.

*Photo by Peggy Magee*

## Students Show Improvements in Math By Putting in Extra Practice

Extra learning time can be a game changer. It is at Parkway's Claymont Elementary School where students in the VICC program arrive an hour early a good portion of the school year for additional math instruction.

"We've seen some exciting gains," reports Principal Aaron Wills. "Our efforts are paying off."

The morning math program began in the 2013/14 school year as an attempt to combat the historical trends in achievement for African-American students, he explains. "Our students were struggling in math and we wanted to change that."

He knew what he wanted to do—allot more time for math instruction—but without sacrificing instructional time in other subjects. The solution was to add on to the school day. That first year, it took a bit of doing, including looking into staffing, transportation logistics, plus getting the blessings of district officials and the VICC Office. With the help and cooperation of all parties, including the VICC transportation office, the morning math program looked promising. That is, if all VICC families would agree to an earlier start time. Wills met with parents at a city library and explained the idea. He picked up the phone to those who were not at the meeting. He got full cooperation or close enough to move the school day up for 35 students, about the same number it will continue to serve this school year, two years later. "We've been doing it long enough now that when we explain the rationale to our parents, they are on board," he points out.

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*Improvements in Math*

# Rockwood Education Opens Student's Eyes to Possibilities



Lafayette High School graduate Aiesha Hinton, class of 2005, works as a personal banker at Bank of America in St. Louis. She holds an undergraduate degree from Mizzou and, this fall, entered the MBA program at Washington University. She believes she can accomplish anything she sets her mind to, having been convinced of that in the Rockwood district.

Photo by Peggy Magee

**Amid all the excitement and hecticness in the weeks prior to college graduation, it's hard to believe that a student would think back on the opportunities in high school that bolstered her aspirations and be so moved as to write a letter of thanks for them.**

But that's exactly what Aiesha Hinton did six years ago. In a note addressed to then VICC CEO Bruce Ellerman, attached with her 2009 graduation announcement from Mizzou, Hinton expressed her gratitude for the VICC program that made it possible for her to attend the Rockwood district. She wrote: "If it wasn't for the program, and the foundation it brought to my life, I don't know where I would be today. The VICC program has aided me in reaching my academic and career goals. It has been a guiding light to me." She concluded: "From the bottom of my heart, I can't tell you how much the program means to me!!"

Raised in the Ville area of St. Louis by a single mom, Aiesha says, "I grew up knowing life's struggles. I came from very humble beginnings." By attending school in Rockwood, "I was exposed to another way of life."

That way of life is attainable for her too, she discovered, thanks to a friendship she formed with another African-American student at Lafayette High. The student lived in Wildwood and Aiesha remembers that both her parents were doctors. "I was amazed by their house, her

parents' accomplishments and that an African-American family could flourish in West County," she notes, adding that they were not celebrities, entertainers or athletes, but had reached their success through education and hard work. "I realized then that African Americans could become doctors, lawyers and CEO's." Even now, many years since her high school days, she feels indebted to the VICC: "Thank you VICC. Knowing I can do anything changed my life!"

She also thanks her mother "for providing me with good morals, great teachings, a stable environment and taking excellent care of me and my sisters." Her mother had always told her she could become whatever she wanted in life and at Lafayette she saw that was truly possible. "The mind is powerful and with hard work, drive and

God, I can achieve anything I desire."

And she has. As a result of her academic status on the National Honor Society at Lafayette and her school involvements (band and DECA club), she was awarded scholarship monies that enabled her to attend Mizzou where she majored in marketing with a minor in textile and apparel management. After graduation, she began her four-year association with Kohl's, working as store operations manager, first in Georgia and then back in back in St. Louis. Last January, she assumed a new position as a personal banker at Bank of America. She also runs her own on-line boutique—becoming self-taught in every aspect of that business.

Aiesha still has lots she wants to accomplish. This fall, she began the MBA program at Washington University, "so I can become proficient enough in marketing and business to be named CEO of a Fortune 500 company," she reports. She says she loves learning and is always willing to move out of her comfort zone.

Aiesha has other goals. "I'd like to live in a big house around a lake out in West County or some other major city and provide for my mother so that she wants for nothing!" She learned from attending Rockwood that there are many families who live large and she plans on being one of them. She's on her way to be sure.



Sean Anderson, a 2013 Clayton High grad and sophomore at the University of Illinois at Carbondale, keeps a look-out on the lifeguard stand at Clayton's Shaw Park pool where he worked again this summer. He believes he has benefitted greatly from the high expectations of Clayton—both the district and the city, which employs him.

Photo by Peggy Magee

## Student Credits Clayton with Putting Him *“in the best position to succeed”*

There's a lot running through Sean Anderson's mind as he sits atop the lifeguard stand at Clayton's Shaw Park pool keeping swimmers safe. Bright and introspective, the 2013 Clayton High grad from downtown St. Louis often contemplates his direction in life--where he'd like to be when he finishes college in three years and what he needs to do to ensure he gets there.

He feels confident that he's on a forward-moving, positive track and he credits his Clayton education for that. “Clayton put me in the best position to succeed,” notes the personable 19-year-old. He enters his sophomore year in the College of Journalism at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale with a 3.1 GPA and resuming his previous-year activities as a member of Alpha Kappa Psi business fraternity and employed part-time at the college rec center. He would like to enter the advertising/marketing field, “because, being a people person, I am interested in the science of understanding what people want and how to give it to them.”

It was the climate that permeated Clayton, one he describes as “a standard of excellence,” that made him want to push himself even though he admits there were times when he thought, “I'm too cool for school.” For nine years, he observed the effort his classmates made and heard about the plans they had for themselves. “I saw what it took and realized I

had to start *doing*. Otherwise, I'd be left behind.” He sums up the level of expectation that existed: “It was a no tolerance zone for slackers.”

The faculty did their part. In fact, he finds it impossible to name just one favorite high school teacher because, “I had too many favorite teachers.” He points out they had one major thing in common: “All of them cared.” So much so, they gladly made time to work with him individually when he needed it. “Every teacher I had was willing to stay after school.”

In addition, both his teachers and parents believed in his ability and continually made that known to him. “I was reassured I could get there.” He reveals that he did: “I learned how to thrive at my own pace.”

From his teachers, he learned an important lesson, one that continues to steer him in all his endeavors. “To reach your dreams, you must make plans and follow through on them.” He adds, “If you want a better outcome, make a better plan.”

There were other areas, outside of academics, that helped him grow and define his purpose. After sampling the violin and trumpet, he settled on the tuba in high school and performed in the symphonic and marching bands. He also was involved athletically, playing both middle school and high school football and also high school baseball. It was a period he describes as, “Me finding myself.”

He not only was a student in Clayton, but he worked for Clayton—the city of Clayton, that is. In his senior year, he was hired as a lifeguard

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*Student Credits Clayton*

# Message from the CEO



As you read the stories included in this issue of the *Volunteer*, I hope you are encouraged and motivated to work diligently with all your students and to make a powerful difference in their lives. I am certain that you will. It is encouraging to me when I read about the extra efforts by educators at an elementary school to help students excel at math and the big difference that it's making, not only in their academic achievement but, more importantly, the relationships that are being developed and strengthened with the staff in the school. Our future rests on providing a great education for all students. Doing our best and believing in our children is so important. I also believe in you, put my trust in you and honor and respect everything you do as educators to change lives and make the world a better place. Each of you brings greatness to the classroom and for that I honor and respect you.

Similarly, it is encouraging to read the stories about two students who graduated from the VICC program and are making great progress in their continuing education and life. One of those students, Sean Anderson, is succeeding at the collegiate level while working part-time. The second student, Aiesha Hinton, has completed college, is already well on her way to a successful career and is now beginning work on her Master's degree. I am sure that several of you reading this newsletter remember these students or similar students you have taught in your classroom. I can't think of anything more rewarding or fulfilling than the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of children and that is exactly what you do every day. You give the students the confidence to know they can do anything they set their mind to. You have exposed them to a new way of life, put them in the best position to succeed and modeled a standard of excellence for them which they have adopted and now emulate in their lives. These students felt cared for and believed in by the teachers, administrators, other educators and parents involved in their lives and that made all the difference in the world! Please keep up the great work and I hope these stories are a good reminder of the importance of caring for children, even when you have a difficult day, as we all do. What you are doing truly is shaping the future by changing the lives of our children.

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### *Improvements in Math*

The program runs every school day from November to April, 8 to 8:45 a.m. There are three classes with 10 to 12 students each, grouped by grades: kindergarten and first grade; second and third; fourth and fifth. Each class has one or two teachers—either a classroom teacher, special education teacher or teacher assistant. Some of the teachers work every morning; others just one or two days a week, depending on their availability. Volunteers also staff the program, most coming from within the building. Principal Wills and Assistant Principal Michelle Weissenborn are regulars.

In each classroom, a visitor might observe one-on-one instruction, small group lessons, children playing math games or at the computer working on the Dream Box math

program which tracks their progress and allows them to advance after mastering a level.

“Each day I try to spend time with a different student and it's their chance to shine,” points out Nancy Beultmann, a Claymont teacher assistant. She refers to the daily doses of extra math time as “baby steps,” that over time result in improved skills. MAP scores and other indicators attest to that. “We've seen marked improvements in achievement data,” confirms Principal Wills.

In addition to academic progress, the children are building relationships with staff they might not otherwise get to know. “The kids have more adults with whom they can have a connection and that's always a good thing,” notes Wills, adding that the program is “a win-win situation” for his students.

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### *Student Credits Clayton*

at Clayton Center, a state-of-the-art recreation facility (with two indoor pools) connected to Clayton High that is shared by the school district and city. On college breaks, he returns to the lifeguard chair, feeling certain that his job has aided him in developing a level of professionalism. He explains that the Center has the same “mentality” as the schools: “It exudes excellence.”

Sean refers to the Clayton community as “the Clayton bubble,” because with the quality

of services that exist, there is no reason to venture elsewhere. But because he hails from the city, he also views the bubble from the outside. It's like being in two different worlds and he's learned to function well in both, he says. “I can adapt to any scenario.”

Sean is plowing forward in a professional manner with a plan for himself, making needed adjustments as he navigates it all. Deep in thought on the lifeguard stand, he can just taste success.