

March 2026

Peer Power: HSD Student Tutors are Lighting the Way for Young Learners

Across the Hazelwood School District, a quiet transformation is underway, one Google Meet session, one math problem, and one meaningful connection at a time. Through the Student Tutoring Program, high school students are stepping into leadership roles, mentoring elementary learners while discovering their own voices as teachers, role models, and changemakers.

The district's comprehensive program includes approximately 26 student tutors from Central, East, and West High Schools. These juniors and seniors completed a competitive application process and are officially hired as part-time employees through the district. Tutors meet with 3rd through 5th grade students online twice a week, providing nearly two hours of targeted academic support.

At Hazelwood West, juniors Kaylee Robinson and Tyler Florea help students tackle math concepts that once felt overwhelming. "I'll start teaching something like equivalent fractions, and suddenly they've got it," Kaylee says. "It's really rewarding to see their growth."

For Tyler, the experience goes beyond math skills. "Sometimes they ask for help on things they already know," he explains. "They just want reassurance, and that shows they care about learning." Both tutors note that being close in age creates a comfortable learning environment. "They respect us," Tyler adds. "There's a level of trust you don't always see."

Tutors from Hazelwood East, including Jayla Wilburn, Aleenah Abdurrauf, and Imani Evans, bring creativity and

connection into every session. Jayla makes lessons memorable with engaging strategies like the "rainbow method" for multiplying larger numbers. "If it's fun, they remember it," she says.

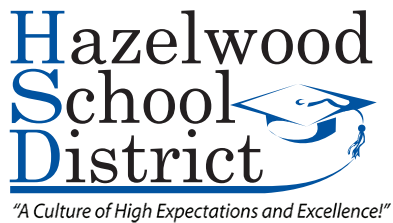


Aleenah focuses on balance and trust. "I build in a short break so they can reset," she explains. "They come back more focused and ready to learn." Imani emphasizes the importance of personal connection. "Something as small as bonding over a favorite game helps them open up," she shares.

For many tutors, the program offers perspective as much as experience. "I've been tutored most of my life," Aleenah says. "I want to help students who may be afraid to ask for help." Jayla proudly recalls a student who is now on track for honors-level math, calling her "smart and motivated."

Across the district, these student tutors are proving that leadership, empathy, and impact know no age. They aren't just teaching. They're making a difference.





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- Florissant
- Hazelwood
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Hazelwood School District

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To the Hazelwood School District Faculty, Staff, and School Community,

We began this school year with the theme “*Moving in the Right Direction,*” and Hazelwood School District truly is doing just that. We are in a good place, and it is important that we *continue the momentum* to ensure our District remains strong and successful moving forward.

Through collaboration and shared commitment, Hazelwood has made significant progress across many areas. Allow me to share a few highlights.

Our educational programming continues to expand and evolve, offering students access to pre-kindergarten in every elementary school, innovative instructional technologies, gifted and virtual learning programs, extended summer learning, internships and apprenticeships, and unique opportunities such as e-sports, drone certification, and sports officiating credentials.

Student achievement is rising across multiple measures. ACT and AP scores continue to improve, graduation rates and scholarship awards are increasing, and our Annual Performance Report reflects substantial gains.

Our thematic schools provide distinctive learning pathways, including elementary Spanish, Montessori, accelerated graduation options, dual enrollment leading to both a high school diploma and an associate degree, and hands-on, real-world learning experiences through initiatives such as Real World Friday and Mindset Monday.

From the Desk of the Superintendent

Strong community support and partnerships remain a hallmark of Hazelwood School District. Collaborations with organizations such as the St. Louis Zoo, Christian Hospital, St. Louis Community College, HSD Hero Readers, and the Hazelwood PTA Council enhance opportunities for students and families alike.

We remain committed to supporting the whole child by fostering a resource-rich environment that addresses both academic and social-emotional needs. Initiatives such as our alternative education programs, *Time Out to Talk Tuesdays*, *Manners Matter*, *Best on the Test*, *the No Guns in Our Schools Campaign*, the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Solutions Group, and the Community Family Coalition ensure comprehensive support for students and families.

Extracurricular opportunities and safety measures continue to grow, with upgraded facilities, enhanced security, improved transportation fleets, upgraded athletic programs, a new marching band, and increased access to elementary music education.

The overwhelming majority of our classrooms are staffed by highly qualified, certified teachers, supported by knowledgeable building and district leaders.

The District remains financially stable with an A+ credit rating and steady enrollment.

None of this would be possible without the strong support of our parents, who entrust us with their most precious asset—their children. I am deeply grateful for their partnership and pride in our schools, as well as for the dedication of our faculty, staff, and students.

We are also fortunate to have a highly effective Board of Education that understands governance and champions excellence throughout the District. I thank the Board and the entire Hazelwood school community for allowing me the honor of serving as superintendent for the past ten years.

At the January 20 Board meeting, I shared my intention to retire at the end of the 2025–2026 school year, with my final day being June 30, 2026. While this is a bittersweet moment, Hazelwood School District will always hold a special place in my heart. I will remain a proud supporter, cheering you on from the sidelines.

Hazelwood School District is in a good place. Let’s continue the momentum.

Sincerely,

Dr. Nettie Collins-Hart

Hazelwood School District Superintendent



East High Senior Steps Into the Operating Room: A Future Surgeon in the Making

When Hazelwood East High School senior Marlescia Marshall raised her hand to volunteer during a medical demonstration at Saint Louis University, she didn't expect to find herself assisting in an aortic aneurysm repair—but that's exactly what happened. Through St. Louis University's Adventures in Medicine and Science (AIMS) program, Marlescia had the rare opportunity to step inside the world of surgery under the guidance of Dr. Michael Williams, a top-rated vascular surgeon.

The experience was part of HSD's Center for Advanced Professional Studies (CAPS) program, which provides students with hands-on exposure to real-world careers and professional opportunities. For Marlescia, it was nothing short of a transformative experience.

"I was nervous at first," she admitted with a smile. "There were a lot of kids in the auditorium, but when Dr. Williams asked for volunteers, something told me to just go for it. So I jumped up and said, 'Me, me, me!'"

Once selected, Marlescia joined Dr. Williams to explore the abdominal region during the procedure, examining organs like the liver and gallbladder while learning how surgeons identify and resolve complex medical issues.

"He taught me step-by-step," she recalled. "He didn't just tell me what to do—he explained why we were doing it. That made the experience even better."

Even though she felt a little squeamish inside, Marlescia said

she kept her composure by focusing on the task at hand. "In my head I was nervous, but I told myself, 'Don't show it—just stay focused and do it.'"

That mindset delivered results. The procedure gave her a deeper appreciation for the human body and the people who dedicate their lives to the field of medicine.

"It made me see why people love their jobs in healthcare," she said. "You're helping someone who's sick and using your knowledge to make them better. That's amazing!" HSD's CAPS program, she added, has helped her find direction and confidence in her career goals.

"It put my foot in the door," Marlesha explained. "Now I know what I want to do after high school and how to get there." She plans to start as a traveling nurse, gaining real-world experience while seeing different parts of the country, and later return to school to become an orthopedic surgeon.

When asked what advice she would give to other students considering the CAPS program, Marlesha's answer came easily: "Do it! If you want to be in the medical field, this program is perfect. We've already learned so much and it's only the beginning of the semester."

Marlesha's passion and poise in the operating room make it clear: she's already well on her way to a promising career in medicine.

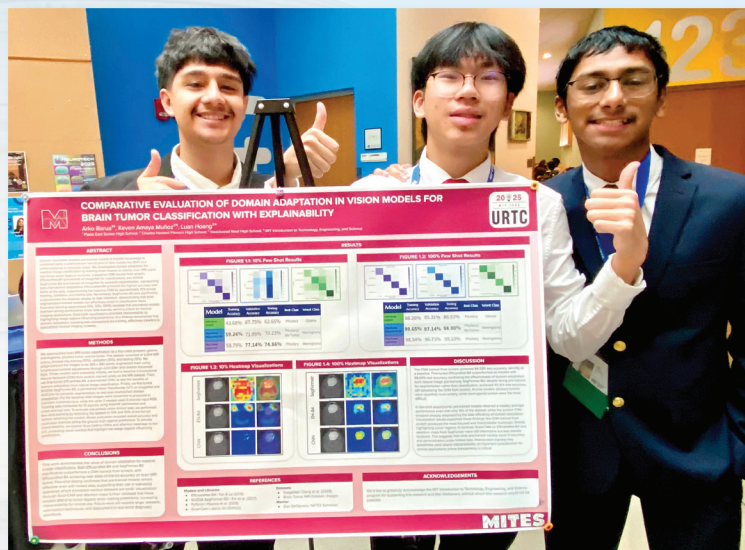
Mind, Heart, and Leadership: A West High Senior's Journey to MIT and Beyond

West High senior Luan Hoang is making headlines for his extraordinary academic achievements, groundbreaking research, and leadership both inside and outside the classroom. During the summer before his senior year, Hong attended the MITES (Minority Introduction to Engineering and Science) program at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), where he conducted advanced research in machine learning for medical imaging. His project compared the performance of various artificial intelligence architectures, including Convolutional Neural Networks (CNN) and vision transformers, in detecting brain tumors from MRI scans. Hong's findings revealed that general-purpose AI models outperformed specialized ones, an unexpected result that impressed his mentors and peers alike.

Hong's participation earned him an invitation to present his research at an undergraduate research conference, where he was one of the few high school students in attendance. Following his summer at MIT, Hong was one of only 50 students nationwide selected to attend the Columbia Engineering Preview Fly-In Program in New York City. "It was incredible," Hong said. "Being surrounded by so many bright minds was inspiring—and a little humbling. MIT and Columbia both showed me the kind of brilliance I want to be part of."

Adding to his achievements, Hong was recently accepted into the prestigious QuestBridge National College Match Program, which connects high-achieving students with full-ride scholarships to top universities valued at up to \$400,000. He plans to apply to both MIT and Columbia for potential matches.

Back at Hazelwood West, Hong continues to make an impact as the senior class president and co-founder of the school's first



American Mathematics Competitions team. Despite his busy schedule, Hong remains grounded and motivated by his family. "My parents have given me so many opportunities," he said. "I just don't want to throw away my shot."

"We are incredibly proud of Luen," said gifted education teacher, Amanda Finn. "He represents the very best of our students—curious, driven, and compassionate. His future is as bright as his intellect."

As Hong awaits college decisions, his sights are firmly set on MIT, the school that first inspired his passion for innovation and research. "MIT has been my dream since I was a kid," he said. "It's the place where geniuses are made—and I want to be part of that."

The Hazelwood School District proudly recognizes Luan Hong for representing the spirit of innovation and leadership that defines our students. His story inspires a new generation of

Wildcats and other students to reach higher and pursue their own paths to greatness.

Luan Hoang (4th from the right in the front row) with his fellow attendees of the MITES program.





HSD Roots Run Deep: The Adkins Trio Shines

The Adkins siblings—Isabela, Brock, and Kennedy—have each carved their own path to success in academics and athletics throughout their time in the Hazelwood School District, showcasing determination, talent, and a shared drive to achieve their goals in the classroom and on the field and court.

With one sibling who has already graduated and two still attending West High, their connection to Hazelwood runs deep. Their mother, Melissa Adkins, is principal of Lawson Elementary, and a longtime employee of Hazelwood School District. Ms. Adkins expressed deep pride in her children and all they have accomplished while moving through HSD.

“My pride comes from many places. All three of them are excellent athletes and scholars, but more importantly, they are good people,” Ms. Adkins said. “They care about others, they are always respectful. I get compliments all the time from teachers, parents, and even other students about how well my kids treat them or the kind things they have done.”

Isabela, the eldest, was a leader in academics and athletics during her time at Hazelwood West, graduating with a 3.9 GPA and earning both the A+ and Hazelwood PTA scholarships. She helped lead the girls basketball team to its first conference title in 20 years. Now a sophomore at St. Louis Community College, where she is majoring in fine arts, she continues to play basketball on an academic and athletic scholarship and maintains a 3.4 GPA. Isabela credits her success to her patience, determination, hard work, and willingness to try.

Brock, a senior at West High, holds a 3.6 GPA and is the varsity quarterback for the football team. He also runs track and currently holds the fastest mile time at the school. He believes his heart and determination have helped lead to his success as a scholar and an athlete.

“I’m most excited to take the field in football this season because of all the hard work and dedication I’ve put into the game,” he said. “And I’m excited to spend time with my friends and teachers that I’m close to before I move on to the next chapter of my life.”

Kennedy, a soccer standout, made the varsity team her freshman year and was named 2nd-team all-conference. She also plays for Missouri Rush and won the US Club Soccer National Championship in Denver this past July—her proudest achievement. Now a sophomore, at West High, with a 3.1 GPA, she looks forward to making new friends and attributes her success to her determination and desire to achieve her goals.

“I have raised my kids to work hard, no matter what the circumstances or what the obstacles are, and to always treat other people with respect and kindness, never believing you are better than anyone else,” Ms. Adkins said. “They have put in the hard work, determination, and grace to persevere despite what life has thrown their way.”

The Adkins family’s story is a testament to the values, support, and commitment to student success found throughout the Hazelwood School District.



Sunny Start Kindergarten Registration Opens Soon!

The Hazelwood School District is excited to welcome incoming kindergarten students and their families to Sunny Start, a free summer program designed to help children feel confident, comfortable, and ready for their first day of kindergarten.

Sunny Start is available at all Hazelwood School District elementary schools and is open to students who will be starting kindergarten this August in Hazelwood School District. The program focuses on helping children build familiarity with school routines, make new friends, and develop early learning skills in a fun, supportive environment.

“Sunny Start gives our youngest learners a positive first experience with school,” said Catherine Wrisley, director of federal programs and special projects. “By spending time in a real classroom with caring teachers, students can start kindergarten feeling excited, confident, and prepared for success.”

Program Details

- **Cost:** Free
- **Who Can Attend:** Hazelwood School District Students starting kindergarten this August who turn five before August 1, 2026
- **Dates:** June 3–June 25
- **Schedule:** Mondays through Thursdays, 8:50 a.m.–2:00 p.m.
- **Length:** Four weeks
- **Location:** All Hazelwood elementary school sites
- **Transportation:** Provided; students ride the same buses as elementary students
- **Meals:** Breakfast and lunch are provided at no cost to families

How to Register

Registration opens March 9. Families can sign up by selecting the Sunny Start option during the 2025–2026 school year registration process in Campus Parent. Students must be in compliance with immunization requirements and residency documents must be current and fulfilled.

Sunny Start is a wonderful opportunity for children to ease into kindergarten while families connect with their school community. Hazelwood School District encourages parents and guardians to take advantage of this engaging and supportive program and register early.

For further information, please contact Catherine Wrisley at cwrisley@hazelwoodschoools.org.



Interested? Scan here.





Hazelwood East Middle Now Accepting Applications for Upcoming 8th Graders

Student enrollment for the upcoming 2026-2027 school year is now open, and Hazelwood East Middle School wants your future eighth graders!

Hazelwood East Middle School takes college and career readiness to the next level by offering students a fast-track to learning. Students can choose a Traditional Path or an Accelerated Path, making East Middle the place to be for students who are ready to work towards their career goals.

The Traditional Path at East Middle School mirrors a traditional 8th-grade program found at any middle school, while also offering students the opportunity to earn 1–2 high school credits prior to entering 9th grade. The Accelerated Path provides two options where students may choose to graduate high school early or pursue an associate degree in general studies.

East Middle students are provided free transportation to school from anywhere across the District, and can participate in dual enrollment at East High School at no cost to the students and families.

“Graduating high school with an associate degree allows students to complete their bachelor’s degree in as little as two additional years. This opportunity accelerates their path into careers and life experiences, while the District covers the cost of the first two years of college,” said East Middle School Principal Abida Jafari.

Ms. Jafari said East Middle prepares students for high school in a way that sets them apart from their peers. By focusing on 8th grade, the setting is more intimate and tailored to what these students need to provide a smooth transition to the high school level. Students can take high school courses which sets them on course to attain an associate degree alongside their high school diploma. Students also get to experience high school events such as East High School pep rallies and guest speaker presentations. In programs such as the East Middle theatre program or drum core, the 8th graders work with high school students, which

exposes them to higher levels of expertise at an earlier age.

Hazelwood East Middle School demonstrated measurable gains in APR scores in the 2024-2025 school year, which looks at a number of categories including state test scores. Driven by the school’s accelerated program and the sustained efforts of students in a rigorous learning environment, East Middle improved their APR score by 26% last year. This was the largest increase in total APR points across the District. The school had the highest improvement in both English Language Arts and math scores.

Also in the 2024-2025 school year, East Middle had the best staff and student attendance at the middle school level in the District, and ranked in the top 44% of middle schools in the state.

“Our high school teachers can always tell when students went to East Middle because of how well prepared they are for high school, and how confidently they navigate their high school classes and activities,” Ms. Jafari said.

Any current 7th grader in the Hazelwood School District has the option to apply and experience this unique program, with free transportation provided by the District. Students will be accepted based on MAP scores, iReady scores, grades, attendance and behavior.

Students interested in applying to Hazelwood East Middle School can do so by visiting <https://ems.hazelwoodschoo.org/about-ems/apply-for-ems-8th-grade>. Applications will be accepted through the end of May. More information is also available at <https://ems.hazelwoodschoo.org/>.





Celebrating Music in Our Schools Month: Spotlighting Student Talent Across HSD

Each March, schools across the nation celebrate Music in Our Schools Month, a time dedicated to raising awareness of the vital role that music education plays in the lives of our students. Throughout March 2026, the Hazelwood School District will proudly join this celebration by highlighting the creativity, dedication, and talent of our student musicians through a series of concerts and community events.

From building creativity and confidence to strengthening academic achievement and community connections, music programs provide lifelong benefits for students of all ages. Music in Our Schools Month offers an opportunity for music educators to showcase the excellence of their programs and the meaningful impact music has across the District.

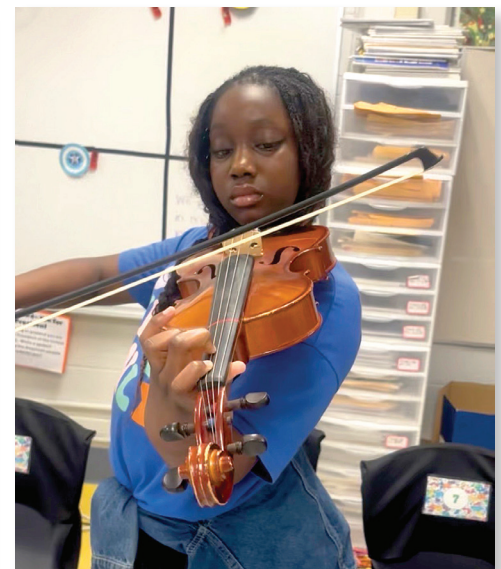
“Music education gives students a voice and a sense of belonging,” said Dr. James Garrett, Hazelwood School District band coach. “Through music, our students learn discipline, teamwork, and creative expression, which are skills that serve them well both in and beyond the classroom. Music in Our Schools Month allows our community to see and celebrate that growth.”

As part of the celebration, HSD schools spotlighted student musicians through the following events:

- **March 3:** Presentation at the HSD School Board Meeting, 6:30 p.m. - The Learning Center
- **March 7:** Spring Art Showcase, 10:00 a.m. - West High School
- **March 11:** All-String Orchestra Concert, 6:00 p.m. - Central High Field House
- **March 12:** Choir Concert, 6:00 p.m. - Central High School Auditorium

These performances and showcases reflect the excellence of music education across the Hazelwood School District and provide students with meaningful opportunities to share their talents with families, staff, and the community.

HSD is thankful for all the families and community members who have helped us celebrate Music in Our Schools by attending our students' musical events.





Hard Work Pays Off: Double Bassists Shine In HSD

Two Hazelwood School District double bassists have been standing above the crowd with impressive achievements recently, showcasing their talent and hard work.

West Middle School's orchestra student, Avery Ray, recently shined as the first chair double bassist in the 7/8th Grade All Suburban Orchestra. Additionally, West High School's Sabrina Bush was selected as All State Orchestra, making her the only musician in the District to earn this recognition.



Avery has been playing the double bass for three years, initially choosing the instrument because, "It looked fun." The All Suburban Orchestra performed together in early January, with the audition process starting back in September.

"Once I was given the music, I worked on it with a lot of different people to make sure it sounded good," Avery said. "I felt really great about my audition, I put a lot of work into it."

West Middle orchestra teacher, Linnea Johansen, said that Avery's acceptance into the orchestra is a result of not only her incredible musical talent, but is a testament to her dedication.

"It's really kind of the fruit of her labor, she practiced really hard and she sounds really good," Ms. Johansen said. "I'm so proud of her, she works so hard and she totally deserves the honor. She didn't even think she was going to make it and then not only does she make it, but she gets first stand."

"The first stand is called the principal," Avery explained. "It's kind of the best play of the instrument in that orchestra."

West High Sophomore Sabrina Bush earned her very first All State Orchestra recognition this year after earning honorable mention last year as a freshman. Auditions took place in Columbia, Missouri in December, where high school students from across the state attended and performed. Sabrina's acceptance into the All State Orchestra marks a stellar achievement for her, as she was selected as one of just eight double bassists in the state to make the orchestra, and she is the sole Hazelwood School District musician to earn All State Orchestra recognition this year.

"Sabrina is a natural born musician," West High orchestra teacher Elizabeth Schmiedeke said. "She takes her music education very seriously and never takes it for granted. I am in awe of her musical abilities."

Both Avery and Sabrina are also members of the Webster Community Music School Young People's Symphonic Orchestra, which is an auditioned ensemble. These two students are representing their schools and the Hazelwood School District as not only talented double bassists, but also as beacons of immense work ethic. They serve as examples of how working hard and being passionate can propel HSD students to success.

Local Media Spotlights Hazelwood Teachers for Dedication and Passion

A spotlight has been shined upon Hazelwood School District teachers in recent weeks by local news media for their dedication to students and going above and beyond in the classroom.

Myronna Pryor, Hazelwood West High School engineering teacher, was recently named the St. Louis Post-Dispatch Teacher of the Month for December. She was selected from several St. Louis region educators who were nominated by community members, earning a check for \$250 courtesy of Elco Chevrolet-Cadillac.

Steve Wehmeyer, an English Learners (EL) teacher at Walker Elementary, also recently won Fox 2's Tools for Teachers recognition. He was nominated amongst a number of teachers, and received a \$500 gift card from Weber Chevrolet as well as an interview spotlight segment on Fox 2 (KTVI-TV).

Both Ms. Pryor and Mr. Wehmeyer were nominated for the way they use their roles as teachers to, not only educate students, but provide a well-rounded experience for students within Hazelwood schools.

Ms. Pryor has been helping to shape the engineering program at West High, along with her co-teachers, with the goal of increasing opportunities for her students.

"We're actively working to increase awareness of both our entry-level and advanced engineering courses so more students can see opportunities available to them. One of my biggest goals is encouraging students of all genders to explore both the biomedical and engineering pathways," Ms. Pryor said. "Too often these fields are seen as belonging to one group or another. I love helping students realize that curiosity and talent, not stereotypes, should guide their choices."

Mr. Wehmeyer hosts a yearly event at Walker Elementary called Walker Around the World, in which students and their families celebrate cultures from across the globe.

"He assists the staff to understand cultural differences and etiquette so that all students at Walker feel appreciated, supported, and able to communicate their needs," Mr. Wehmeyer's nomination letter stated. "How fortunate Hazelwood School District is by having a liaison like Mr. Wehmeyer to help their students learn and grow—especially the English Learners."

Congratulations to both Ms. Pryor and Mr. Wehmeyer for your well-deserved recognitions, and thank you for all you do for our students. We are Hazelwood proud!





Meet the Voices Behind the HSD Podcast: Darrin Lilly and Olivia Kennah

The Hazelwood School District's new communications platform, the HSD Podcast, has quickly become a vibrant showcase of the people, programs, and passions that make the district unique. Behind every thoughtful conversation and inspiring story are its hosts — Darrin Lilly, Director of Communications and Public Relations, and Olivia Kennah, Assistant Director of Communications and Public Relations.

With each episode, Darrin and Olivia bring listeners inside the classrooms, hallways, and events that define HSD's spirit. From student achievements to innovative teaching methods, the HSD Podcast is helping to strengthen the district's connection with its community, one story at a time.

Darrin Lilly brings prior experience to the microphone. Before joining the Hazelwood School District, he served as both a host and guest on multiple podcasts for the Pro Wrestling Torch, where he honed his skills in interviewing and storytelling. His professional background in communications, combined with his genuine curiosity, makes him a natural at bringing out the best in each guest.

"For me, one of the most rewarding parts of hosting the HSD Podcast is hearing the incredible stories from people throughout the district," Darrin said. "Every student, teacher, and staff member has something special to share, and being able to highlight those voices is truly meaningful."

Olivia Kennah, a Wyoming native, brings her own unique perspective and passion for storytelling to the podcast. With a background in journalism and a deep commitment to education, Olivia helps ensure that each episode reflects the heart and diversity of HSD.

"I love that the HSD Podcast gives us a platform to celebrate the amazing things happening in our schools," Olivia said. "It's inspiring to share stories that remind our community just how much dedication and creativity exist within the district."

Since it launched, the HSD Podcast has focused on various topics, such as explaining why attendance is so crucial, how students juggle academics and athletics, highlighting the HSD music program, exploring Montessori teaching at Twillman Elementary, and even sitting down with HSD Superintendent Dr. Collins-Hart, to discuss the growth and progress made throughout HSD's first semester, and a look at what's to come for the remainder of the school year. When asked about his favorite episode so far, Darrin points to the Veterans Day episode. "Getting to hear from two HSD staff members who served in the military was incredibly meaningful," he said. "I learned so much about their backgrounds and how their military experience shapes the work they do every day here at HSD."

Episodes of the HSD Podcast are available on the district's website at www.hazelwoodschoools.org. Whether you're a parent, student, staff member, or community partner, tune in for your front-row seat to all the innovation, hard work, and heart that power the Hazelwood School District.



HSD News is a news magazine created by the district's Communications and Public Relations Department. You can contact the Communications and Public Relations Department at (314) 953-5045 or info@hazelwoodschoools.org

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More Than a Game: Southeast Middle Basketball Players Show What True Sportsmanship Looks Like

When the Hazelwood Southeast Middle School boys basketball team faced Brentwood Middle, the scoreboard quickly became the least important thing in the gym. What happened that evening reminded everyone what youth sports—and true character—are all about.

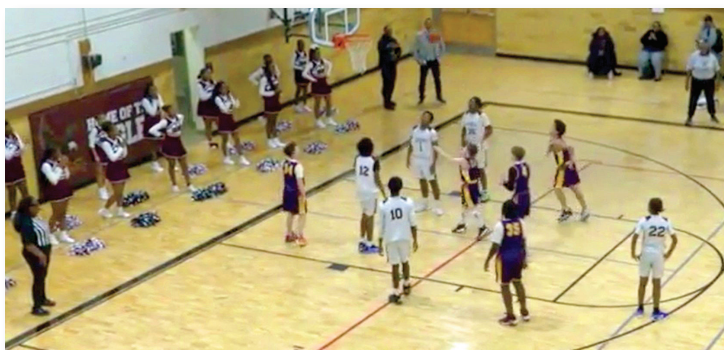
A Brentwood parent, moved to tears, later wrote this heartfelt message to the school:

“Good Morning. I am the parent of a Brentwood Middle School basketball player. I am writing to compliment the sportsmanship of your boys in a very special gesture by your basketball team last night.

In the first boys’ game against Brentwood, one of our players who has some challenges was brought into the game. What happened next was a very united and unspoken act of kindness by your boys’ team.

The Hazelwood boys were very aware and gentle. They quietly stepped aside to let this student shoot the ball. He missed. Your player #10 rebounded the ball and handed it back to him. Our student made the shot the second time! It was such a celebratory moment for our student, and a beautiful gift that your team gave. Your team was even cheering! Many eyes were filled with tears.

The world needs more care, kindness, and sportsmanship like your boys showed.”



That single moment—when compassion outshone competition—perfectly reflects the spirit that Coach Jacqueline Thompson has built within her program.

Coach Thompson, now in her fourth year leading the Southeast Middle basketball team, has one clear message for her players: “Teamwork makes the dream work.”

A retired educator who returned to coaching to “give back” has made sure her team values integrity, accountability, and respect as much as points on the board.

“I tell them all the time—you never know who’s watching or listening,” she said. “Play hard, stay humble, and remember



that teamwork and good character matter most.”

Her players take those lessons seriously. Seventh-grader Demetrius Hammonds said, “Being a Southeast basketball player means helping each other out,

doing the right thing, and showing others the right way.”

When asked how their sportsmanship carries into school life, Demetrius put it simply:

“When we walk in the building, first comes education. If you don’t have an education, you can’t play.”

For these student-athletes, representing Southeast Middle means striving to be leaders in the classroom, on the court, and in the community.

Sixth-grader Chayce Ford summed it up best:

“Sportsmanship is the key to basketball. It means caring for the other team and your own team. Sportsmanship can get you to a lot of good places.”

Coach Thompson still gets emotional recalling the Brentwood parent’s letter.

“When I read it, I teared up,” she said. “I tell my boys to stay calm, stay kind, and play as a team—and that night, they showed the world exactly what that means.”



Central High Celebrates Commitment, Character, and College Dreams on Signing Day

Central High School's Signing Day ceremony honored more than athletic achievement. It celebrated years of hard work, academic dedication, perseverance, and family support.

Administrators reminded attendees that Signing Day reflects effort in the classroom and beyond the field. Activities and Athletics Director Scott Borcharding emphasized that the honorees are recognized as true student-athletes, supported by families, coaches, and teachers who helped them reach the collegiate level.

Four student-athletes were recently recognized for continuing their academic and athletic careers.

Caeyson Hornberger signed with Ottawa University, where he plans to play football and possibly baseball while majoring in civil engineering. A four-year football player, Caeyson said Ottawa felt like home and encouraged future athletes to "keep going" and choose their own path.

Da'Marion Smith signed with Millikin University as a running back. A longtime football player and wrestler, he plans to major in agriculture and reflected on the pride and nerves of Signing Day. His advice focused on prioritizing academics, health, and independence.

Julia "Jewels" Bockhorst signed with Missouri Baptist University to continue her soccer career. A standout

student-athlete with numerous honors and extracurriculars, Julia credited balance and consistency for her success. She described Signing Day as both a relief and an exciting milestone, reminding future athletes that challenges are part of growth.

Otis Banks III signed with Wabash College after 10 years of football, including four at Central and three as team captain. A two-time all-conference honoree, Otis plans to study mechanical or aerospace engineering. He expressed gratitude to his parents and coaches for shaping him as a person, emphasizing patience and faith in the process.

The ceremony also recognized the sacrifices of families, coaches, and teachers. Borcharding noted that Signing Day reflects countless hours of support behind each student-athlete's success. The event concluded with applause, photos, and pride as each athlete acknowledged those who helped them reach this milestone.

Signing Day at Central High highlighted that success is built on discipline, resilience, and belief—and that these students are ready for both the next level of competition and the next chapter of life.

Congratulations to our Central High signees. We look forward to celebrating East High and West High Signing Days later this semester.

Keeven Elementary Honored with \$5,000 Prize and Recognition at Inaugural Louie Awards

The Gateway to Success Foundation has announced that Keeven Elementary has been selected to receive a \$5,000 cash prize and special recognition at the first ever Louie Awards in February, for its remarkable progress in student achievement over the past three academic years.

This honor, grounded in growth data from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and analyzed by the PRiME Center at St. Louis University, celebrates schools and districts across St. Louis City and County that exemplify exceptional progress and continuous improvement.

Keeven Elementary's consistent upward trajectory reflects a culture of collaboration, perseverance, and purpose shared by its educators, leadership team, students, and community.

"After nine years at Keeven school, seeing our exceptional progress is both humbling and deeply rewarding," said



Dr. Ingrid Carter, principal of Keeven Elementary. "It reflects the unwavering commitment of our staff, the resilience of our students, and the strength of our shared vision. As we enter the second semester, the progress made is not just a milestone; it is momentum. It encourages me as a leader and reinforces my belief that we are well-positioned to reach even greater heights together, with purpose, confidence, and renewed determination."

Keeven Elementary will be formally recognized during the Louie Awards ceremony, hosted by the Gateway to Success Foundation, at the St. Louis Central Library.

This recognition underscores a powerful message — that when educators, families, and communities unite behind a shared vision, students thrive and schools flourish.

Congratulations, Keeven Elementary! Your success story is an inspiration to schools across the district, St. Louis, and beyond.





Meet the School Board Candidates Election Day: April 7, 2026

Three Hazelwood School District Board of Education three-year seats are open in the April 7, 2026 election.

Biographies were written by the candidates, and they were not edited by the Communications and Public Relations Department.



Sylvester Taylor II

My name is Sylvester Taylor I am running for re-election for the Hazelwood Board of Education, In hopes of continuing to have a voice in my community.

I am 60 years old and have

been married to my wife Ernestine for 31 years. We have 3 children Malissa, Sydney and Christine (Janae), and 7 grandchildren. I worship at New Salem Missionary Baptist Church where I serve as a Deacon and Sunday Superintendent Under the leadership of Pastor Michael Franks and his wife Lillie. I have been a member of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers local #1 for 35 years and I am the Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

I have been elected to the Board of Education for 5 years, and have been the Treasurer, Vice President and now the President. During my tenure, our board has been even more diligent in helping the students at the Hazelwood School District. I introduce the district to a Group called the infinite Scholars; this partnership has netted our students 30 million dollars in scholarships. I started a coat drive through the Electrical Workers Minority Caucus, and we have donated over 1,000 new coats to the underserved children in our district. I was appointed to be an Apprenticeship Ambassador by the Department of Labor. This program was designed to help women and people of color find their way into registered apprenticeship programs. The Hazelwood School District has placed more kids into the construction building trades than any school district in our area, because of our career fairs and community outreach.

BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

- Director of Black Jack fire district 2000-2010
- Elected to the House of Representative 80th district 2010-2012
- Founding Member of the Greater St. Louis Electrical Workers Minority Caucus
- Chairman of the Fire Safety and Standards Commission 2018- current
- Apprenticeship Ambassador (under the Biden Administration) 4 years

Thank You for your time and attention.



Sparkl A. West-Pruitt

Sparkl A. West-Pruitt is a passionate champion for children, public education, and community equity, serving as a member of the Hazelwood

School Board. With a proven record of leadership, mentorship, and results-driven advocacy, she brings energy, real-world experience, and a heartfelt commitment to ensuring every student can reach their full potential.

A longtime Hazelwood advocate, Sparkl previously served as an HSD Ambassador and Key Communicator for the Hazelwood School District and has held multiple leadership roles with the Hazelwood PTA Council and Missouri PTA. Her community involvement spans local and national organizations, including the Charles Drew Red Cross board, the National Coalition of 100 Black Women, the American Business Women's Association, and Christian Women's Empowerment, where she has worked to expand access, resources, and opportunity for families across the region.

Professionally, Sparkl is a trailblazer in entertainment and business management—having guided national artists, produced major events and tours, and broken barriers as the first female production leader in the live R&B concert world and working with several nation, Grammy award winning artist. Since 2023 she has also built a successful career in real estate, earning monthly recognition from Coldwell Banker Premier and St. Louis Realtors, selling multiple homes in North County, and serving on the St. Louis Realtors Advocacy Committee.

A minister and motivational speaker, Sparkl inspires audiences on goal-setting, business marketing, parenting, and diversity. A graduate of Georgia Technical Institute of Technology, she is a tireless mentor who encourages students to pursue education beyond high school and to aim high. On the Board, Sparkl combines visionary leadership and practical experience to promote academic excellence, equity, and strong community partnerships for every Hazelwood student.



Robert L. Birdsong

Robert Birdsong, a retired federal employee, has also previously worked in the education sector.

He has experience in

managerial roles, oversight of programs, fund development responsibilities, and customer service. Robert is a proud member of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Incorporated, possesses a Bachelor's Degree, and completed coursework towards a Master's degree.

He believes in community service and advocates for children and families through the many boards he has served on in his lifetime. Robert and his wife live in Hazelwood and have adult children.



Turkeshia Newsome

Turkeshia Newsome, and I have deep roots in the Hazelwood School District. I lived in the community for more than ten years before

briefly relocating, and I am proud to have returned and invested once again as a homeowner. My husband and I raised six children, who attended schools in the district. As empty nesters, I now have the time, focus, and flexibility to fully dedicate myself to serving our schools and community.

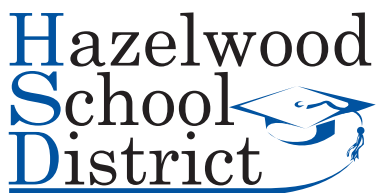
I currently work as an Administrative Assistant for University Services at Washington University, where I am also completing my degree in Strategic Communications. I have been recognized on the Dean's List for each semester completed and am an active member of the Black Faculty and Staff Cabinet. My professional and academic experiences have strengthened my skills in communication, collaboration, and leadership.

Serving on the Hazelwood School Board would allow me to be a parent-first advocate and an active voice in shaping decisions that support academic excellence, equitable access to education, and meaningful family engagement. I believe parents should be informed, empowered, and equipped with the tools needed to support student success. I am committed to collaborating with educators, administrators, and community partners to ensure every child can thrive.

My decision to run is driven by service. Hazelwood played a vital role in my family's journey, and I am ready to give back by leading with integrity, advocating with purpose, and helping strengthen the district for future generations.

From the Community. For the Community.





"A Culture of High Expectations and Excellence!"

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