

KIRKWOOD STAFF OF COLOR NEWSLETTER

January 2025

Winter Greetings!

Happy Black History Month!

As I begin my 40th year in the Kirkwood School District, it is still a surreal moment for me to even say that I have spent my entire career in the Kirkwood School District. Albeit, I officially retired from teaching in 2014, my passion to remain in education as a Lead mentor for teachers of color and as the Head Track & Field coach has remained strong. I want to thank many of you that sent congratulations a few weeks ago when I was named the Missouri Track & Field Coach of the Year by the Missouri Track & Cross-Country Coaches Association for the Class 5 Boys. I must admit the warm congratulations felt good coming from colleagues around the district as well as members of the Kirkwood community, these accolades gave me a strong sense of belonging. This school year I have seen more progress in our teachers of color staff hirings and equally excited that we have now hired eight administrators of color across the district. This increase in staff of color definitely shows that as a district we are valuing our Priority Goal: Equity, Diversity & Inclusion. With that said, "DEI" has become increasingly controversial in recent political discourse, even though the outcome is to promote inclusivity and fairness. In my forty years as an educator, I have witnessed racial inequality with respect to wealth, resources and opportunities within the United States and have watched it trickled down to communities, even communities such as Kirkwood. Our student African American student population has decreased from 25% when I first began my career to 9%, as our Asian/Asian Pacific Islander 4.7%, Hispanic/Latino, 0.1%, American Indian or Alaska Native 0.1. These numbers directly shows the systemic inequalities in the housing market with many of our black student families that left the district for more affordable housing in other surrounding cities; as well as the decline of the Voluntary Interdistrict Choice



Corporation (VICC) program provides students with more opportunities for city students to attend higher education where does that leave us in a predominantly white school district? Contrary to our current political climate, it appears that not only do our students of color need to see educators of color, but our white students also need more information about race and racism, not less. Children are the future and without diversity representation, there will be gaps, and we will all pay the price. As I reflect on my own experiences from being a classroom teacher, interventionist, coach, volunteer, parent and now as a substitute teacher, I have had such a wide perspective on the pre-established roles assigned by the racial constructs that perpetuate racism. We need to continue to support Diversity Equity and Inclusion in our district to help all children build authentic relationships with one another, no matter the color of the skin. This develops racial competence, racial identity and strong academic outcomes for all children. As I close this winter edition of the KSOC Newsletter, I am so proud of my journey as well as so many of my colleagues that have worked tirelessly to give all students opportunities to thrive! These opportunities in the way of Affinity groups, which are diverse in many ways. Many of the groups sharing a common interest, racial identity, ideology, gender or a shared hobby, academic or social identity. However, this collaboration is formed, I thank the leaders for taking the time to help staff and students feel included and valued. Let us continue to honor the history of all of those that brought such a rich history to this country and have given their lives, so that we can all have lives that matter. I look forward to participating in all of the Black History celebrations that have begun and are upcoming in all of our schools. Thank you for your time and in the words of Jesse Jackson, "keep hope alive"

Roberta McWoods
Master Mentor for Kirkwood Teachers of Color

From the Desk of Howard Fields

What Will Your Outlet Be? (A Renewed Call)

In November of 2022, I posed a question in the KTOC newsletter that was simple, yet profound: *What will your outlet be?* At the time, the focus was personal—encouraging us all to step away from the demands of school as we headed into a much-needed holiday break. It was a reminder to prioritize sustainable self-care, to reflect, and to recharge so we could return to our scholars and colleagues with a renewed sense of purpose and clarity.

Today, I find myself asking that same question again, but with a new lens: *What will your outlet be as we collectively face challenges that threaten the foundations of diversity, equity, and inclusion in education?* With the January 21st executive order and its potential impact on civil rights policies, our roles as educators of color take on an even greater weight. This moment demands more than reflection—it calls for unity and intentional action.



When KTOC was established, it provided a safe space for educators of color but also

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safe spaces for collective empowerment.

Over the years, KTOC has become a vital network—a space where your voices matter deeply. As external pressures challenge the very principles that support our work, we must ask ourselves: how do we ensure that KTOC stays true to its mission?

So, I ask again: *What will your outlet be?* Maybe this time, your outlet will be leveraging the power of KTOC to ensure that your voice—and the voices of others including our students—are not only heard but amplified. Perhaps it will include using this space to strategize, collaborate, and uplift each other, even in the face of systemic challenges. Your outlet could be the unwavering commitment to the original intention of KTOC: a space for growth, solidarity, and change. As we reflect on this question, I encourage you to hold steadfast to what matters most—our collective power to make a difference. Just as we focused on self-care in 2022, today's call reminds us that care also extends to the spaces we create and nurture for ourselves and our colleagues; irrespective of who questions or feel threatened by what such powerful agency looks like. Until we connect again, stay grounded, resolute, and inspired—none of which requires anyone's permission or approval.

A Message from Dr. Jeremy Mapp

These days as we begin 2025 have certainly proven to be challenging, particularly for people of color. I want to encourage you to feel what you're feeling and talk about those feelings with others. My family has found it particularly important to center intentionality in terms of our spending to be how we can make a difference (supporting local, black-owned and women-owned businesses). I encourage you to find what you and your family might need and center that in the coming days. It might be family time, exercise,



therapy, or just being around people who understand, whatever the means, make sure you center time to focus on doing what is best for you. We are excited about our upcoming KTOC professional development session where we'll welcome and work alongside allies to continue to improve the experience of employees of color in our organization. This past week I had the opportunity to facilitate a meeting of our Educational Equity Task Force (EETF). I encourage you if you're not familiar with this group's work to check it out [here](#). Our next meeting will be at Westchester Elementary School on April 16th at 6 pm. If you're interested in joining the EETF, you can send an email showing interest to ksdsuperintendent@kirkwoodschoools.org. We will continue forward in our efforts to improve and implement policies and practices to reflect a focus on DEI. I am confident that our staff, leadership, and Board of Education is committed to fostering a climate of belonging and culture of dignity across all Kirkwood Schools.

Ubuntu!

Parent Equity Building Updates

Robinson Elementary

REG was established in 2016 as a cooperative group between parents and teachers as a way to highlight and celebrate equity at Robinson. We recently became a committee of the Robinson PTO. We coordinate with Robinson staff to offer a Kids' Book Club for 3rd-5th graders to discuss a book focusing on equity issues. The two books we use are *Stamped for Kids* by Jason Reynolds and Ibram X. Kendi and *The Antiracist Kid* by Tiffany Jewell. Our other activities include school-wide cultural celebrations for Latinx History Month, Black History Month, and AAPI History Month. Other recent activities we have hosted include adult book clubs, podcast discussions, speakers on equity issues, Black History Tour of Kirkwood, service learning at Quinette Cemetery, LBGTQ+ parent social event, and more! We also promote events hosted by our fellow equity groups to Robinson families. We value sharing the strength of community, cultures, and initiatives across schools, especially since all of our kids come together at middle and high school levels. We can be reached at robinsonequity@gmail.com.



Keysor

Keysor's Parent Equity committee was formed in the Fall of 2017 as "Keysor Racial Equity Committee". Our mission is to *"Work together with parents and teachers to achieve the promise of racial justice. We believe that, together, we can hold ourselves accountable to dismantle racism that exists in KSD's policies, practices, and processes. We recognize we are a microcosm of the St. Louis region and situate our work within regional, national, and international efforts to bring racial justice in schools to fruition."*



The focus mainly on programming to achieve our mission. Last year we hosted 2 programs: 1) We co-hosted an event with Robinson Elementary at Quinette Cemetery to learn about the cemetery and to clean-up the fall debris. 2) We invited Maria Hussman, a Native American educator, to speak to us about Ojibwe culture. This year we have had 2 programs so far: 1) We co-hosted a district-wide event with Westchester; we were able to invite Maria Hussman back. She shared with us the story of Biboonkionini, the Wintermaker, who is responsible for the long, cold months of winter and who is a constellation in the winter sky. 2) We had an event for Keysor families led by a Keysor parent to teach us about Diwali, the Hindu Festival of Lights.

NKMS

North Kirkwood Middle School's Parent Equity Committee was established in January of 2025. In February of 2025, the Parent Equity Group will work collaboratively with NKMS' Library to host the

EyeSeeMe Book Fair at N

The mission of the NKMS

Foster a climate of belonging and a culture of dignity at NKMS.

Provide opportunities for learning through programs and practices that support student achievement and wellness through the goals of equity as stated in KSD's strategic plan.

Work collaboratively to support the inclusion and participation of NKMS students, staff, and families/caregivers of diverse backgrounds in all aspects of life at NKMS.

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Equity Around the District

Kirkwood High School

Kirkwood High School Building Liaisons (Santee Nixon, Nicolya Thomas, and Courtland Griffin) developed a Wellness survey for the staff of color at KHS to complete and then held a brief gathering as an opportunity to check in with one another. The focus was about their own mental and physical wellness. They were able to share their immediate needs and had some great conversations. Overall, everyone seemed to be in good spirits. The meeting felt incredibly wholesome, creating a happy and safe space for everyone to connect and support one another. More briefings will be held in the upcoming weeks.



What's New With Building Level Affinity Groups!

Nipher Middle School

Nipher's grade level Affinity groups have been meeting consistently with monthly meetings. Feedback from students has been positive as they have enjoyed having time to connect and "be themselves". Anissa Williams (K-12 Science, Art and Engineering Curriculum Facilitator) and Tonya Ampey (KSD Social worker) have assisted in leading the groups. The 8th grade students have been researching the origin of their names, and meanings of their names and how it's relevant to their identity. KHS graduate Officer Tyreese Norris-Hyche of the Kirkwood Police Department was a guest speaker, where he spoke with students about his experiences at Nipher and navigating concerns being a minority student in the Kirkwood School district. He also shared his choice of becoming a police officer. Tyreese expressed his desire to help people as his main reason to go into Law enforcement. Tyreese has been working to build rapport with the community and is looking forward to offering activities like "Cooking with Cops" at



Kirkwood High school, with Science classes.



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NKMS

The NKMS sixth grade Affinity boys celebrated Martin Luther King Jr.'s life and legacy by focusing on his powerful quote: "If you can't fly then run, if you can't run then walk, if you can't walk then crawl, but whatever you do, keep moving forward." These words encouraged them to set personal goals and how to be accountable by actively monitor their progress and emphasizing the importance of persistence and determination in achieving one's dreams, no matter the obstacles. The sixth-grade group is led by sixth grade social studies teacher, Darion Williams.



KECC

KECC Gaby Farias is the building Liaison for KECC and has been participating in the (Equity & Justice Academy in Character Education (EJACE) sessions as part of the KECC team, and this past month they hosted a session in the KECC building. The idea is to implement what has been learned at KECC.



Keysor Elementary

Keysor has had building level affinity group check-ins. The student affinity group was in charge of planning our BHM kick off assembly, which was held on January 28. A slide show of African Americans that have made history and contributions to the world. Special guest was KSDK Channel 5 Rene Knott who spoke at a school wide assembly. Rene spoke about how students are making history every day.



North Glendale Elementary

The next North Glendale staff of color have had gatherings outside the school environment. Their focus has been checking in with one another and making sure everyone is feeling a sense of belonging. The next gathering will be held at Amigos Cantina, a Mexican restaurant in Kirkwood, where the focus will be on a source of comfort, information and support for one another. Plans are being prepared for Black History month, where there will be building wide stories read by African American guest readers from around the district.



Robinson Elementary

Robinson has had several Affinity group gatherings and plan to have many more in the future! In the first quarter, the staff of color gathered at Rosalita's Cantina's in Des Peres. A holiday check-in

potluck gathering was held. The MLK Skate was held and everyone participated. This day was to connect in remembrance of the life and legacy of Dr. MARTIN LUTHER KING. A Black History Museum has been planned for Black History Month. The student Affinity boy groups meet regularly and are facilitated by Jonathan Porter (paraprofessional SSD) and Markis Steele (Teaching Assistant).



This connection has helped all of the boys in the group see two positive African male role models. Robinson Elementary Building Liaison's Joy Hill and Karissa Green are working hard to make sure everyone is staying connected.



Robinson Staff of Color Affinity Group



Robinson Boys Affinity Group



Robinson Boys Affinity Group

Tillman Elementary

The Tillman Pepper Steppers is a step Team that performs percussive dance in which students use their entire bodies as instruments and sponsored by Tillman 5th grade teacher, Tamala Merritt . The Pepper Steppers perform year-round and just recently performed at the Kirkwood Historical society's Black History event held at the Kirkwood Performing Arts Center (KPAC), on Friday, Feb



1. The Pepper Steppers will once again be partner with North Glendale for their annual BHM celebration. The shows are scheduled for March 7 at Tillman Elementary and on March 12, at North Glendale. For more information about the Tillman Pepper Steppers and their next performance, please see the Tillman Elementary School website. Another annual event that the Fifth-grade affinity group has traditionally led is the school store with proceeds benefitting the KTOC Scholarship fund for graduating seniors color at Kirkwood High School. The KTOC Scholarship is a Named Scholarship Award program managed by the Kirkwood School District Foundation.

Westchester Elementary

The Westchester gathered as a KSOC Family for lunch at Circle 7 restaurant on January 3rd. Time was spent getting to know more about each other's backgrounds to connect and share cultural experiences. The gatherings have been very helpful as they work to increase the feeling of inclusiveness in the school. They are also continuing to advocate for students and families who



feel they are not being heard...
underway. Many voices have
another overwhelming success! Discussions around recognizing Women's History Month and other
celebrations coming up in March are also being planned for recognition. Building Liaisons Carlos
Glenn and Dr. Nour Alhiyari consistently check in with staff of color and offer safe spaces for deep
conversations regarding culture at work and societal issues.



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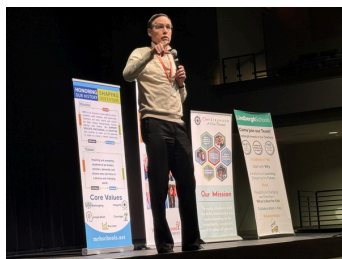
KTOC IN THE News!

Kirkwood School District Support Mounts For Teachers Of Color Group Support follows 2 federal complaints filed against district

https://www.timesnewspapers.com/webster-kirkwoodtimes/support-mounts-for-teachers-of-color-group/article_2b0d5288-978c-11ef-9fb2-07454244c01e.html

2nd Annual Collaborative Diversity Recruitment Event Overwhelming Success!

More than 70 participants attended the 2nd annual Collaborative Diversity Recruitment Event on January 25, 2025. The event marks the second year that Kirkwood, Lindbergh, MRH and Webster school districts collaborated on the diversity recruitment event. This year MRH hosted the event on their campus and each school's cabinet members gave passionate introductions about their school districts. Several staff and administrators were on available to assist with interviews and represent their districts.



Dr. Ulrich speaks to the participants



Dr. Shonda Ambers_Phillips (MRH) and Dr. Jeremy Mapp



Candace Harris (KSD Human Resources) and Dr. Adrienne Fox-Ray

Districtwide Ally Sessions continue

In the fall of 2024, ally sessions were held for all staff across the districts. Sessions have been a powerful way for staff to connect with one another across the district in order to establish racial allyship to ensure belonging for students, staff, and community members. Please look for new dates for the rest of the 2025 school year or email Dr. Jeremy Mapp for details. Sessions have been facilitated by Dr. Deborah Holmes from Educational Equity Consultants. We welcome all staff to attend!

Upcoming Events

KTOC PD February 19

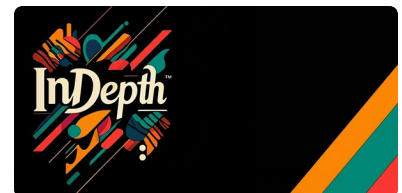
The Winter KTOC PD will have host extra colleagues. Building Liaisons were asked to invite two allies from their building to engage in conversation with KTOC. Participants will spend the day focusing on the following outcomes for the day:

- Reflect on life in Kirkwood, through a lens of racial identity, and share conversations about our individual and collective experiences
- Practice “calling in” strategies
- Plan to share the voices of KTOC members and allies with building administrators



The sixth annual InDepth (formerly SBE) is quickly approaching!

InDepth—a new, immersive, full-day professional learning experience scheduled for February 21, 2025, at the University of Missouri - St. Louis. This is always a transformative professional learning experience with a keynote, breakout sessions and networking. There are just a few more tickets available, if interested see Dr. Jeremy Mapp ASAP! For additional information go to sbeinddepth.com



KTOC Regional Professional Learning on April 19, 2025

The final KTOC Professional Learning for the school year, will be held on April 19, 2025 in the KSD School boardroom. The morning will feature a space for Kirkwood Staff of Color from 8:30-11:30 and the afternoon will be for neighboring school districts. from noon-3pm. These two sessions will

constitute a full day of pr
up in FRONTLINE to secu

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Black History Celebrations at St. Louis County Libraries

St. Louis County Library will host a Black History Celebration in February. The theme for 2025 is "From Blacksmiths to Wordsmiths: How the Labor of African Americans Continues to Shape American Culture." Events include performances by the Black Rep, a jazz concert, a gospel celebration, author events, historical lectures and more.

<https://www.slcl.org/news/black-history-celebration>



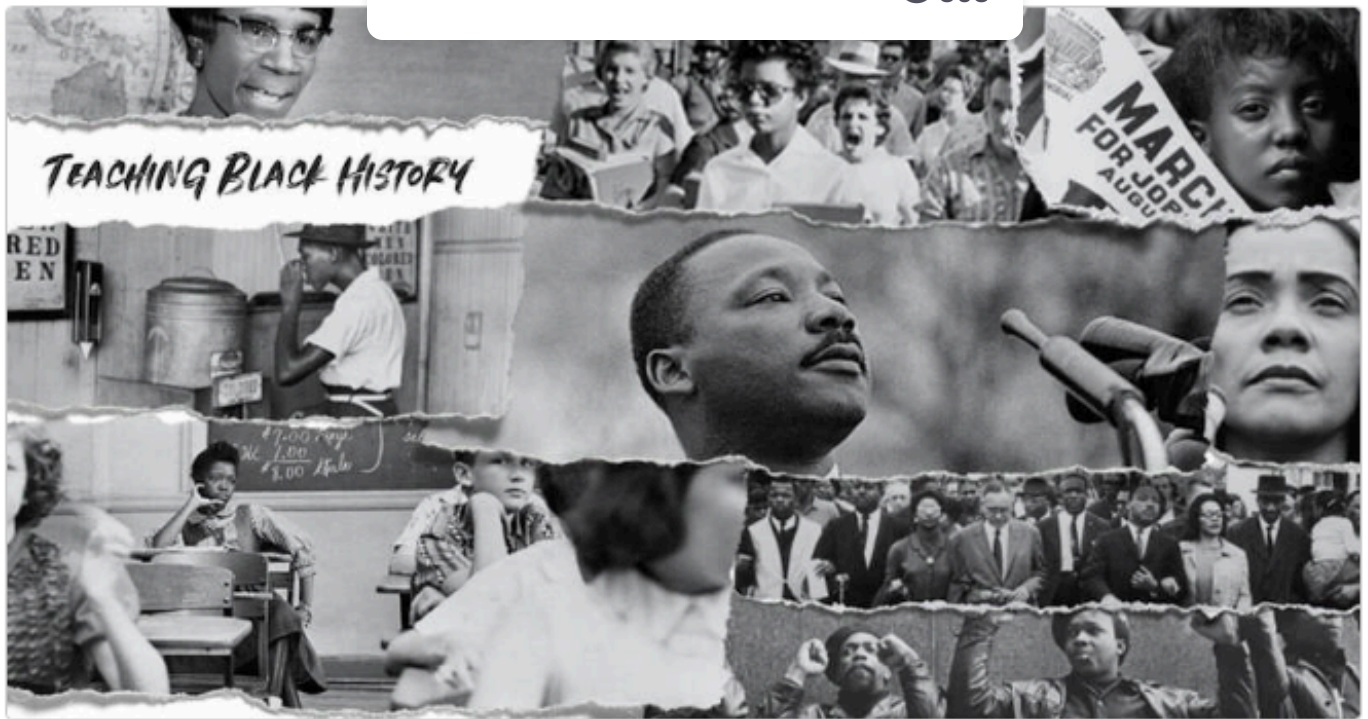
Kirkwood School District Foundation

The Kirkwood School District Foundation is proud to celebrate Black History Month. We cannot wait to see what the Kirkwood School District students and teachers have planned to educated, empower and enlighten each other during February.



Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. & Black History

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Kirkwood School District



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