

Before I became a student journalist, the world was just the world I lived in. I didn't find meaning in questioning or challenging it because I never thought there would be an answer waiting for me. I signed up as a reporter because I wanted to write food reviews. Instead, I found myself covering gifted education, racial inequality in housing, transgender athletes' rights, the Trump administration's response to COVID-19, and more. Being involved in journalism changed the way I view the world by teaching me how to observe what is going on around me with a critical and curious eye. It gave me an understanding of how politics affects students, and the role of journalism in that relationship. It taught me how to collaborate with others to produce news that is relevant and important in our community. Through journalism, I learned that everything has a story behind it - it's just a matter of knowing how to look for it.

I couldn't figure out what to write for my first Globe story. "You should write about housing in our neighborhood," my dad suggested. Why? I wondered, looking around my block. The first thing I noticed was the house across the street, which was being renovated from a rental duplex like mine into a single-family home. The same thing had been happening to duplexes on my block since I moved in, but I never thought twice about it. Once I started conducting interviews and digging into public records and zoning maps, I realized my street was part of a long-ignored issue in the affluent white suburb where I live - the systematic phaseout of affordable housing and the issue of unequal access to education based on race and socioeconomic status. I had spent four years staring out my window at rows of duplexes being converted and sold for double the price, and I had never once questioned or wondered about it.

Through journalism, I was able to gain a deeper understanding of the presence of injustice and how it affects individuals in my community. Now when I read the news about revoked transgender health protections, I think about Nicky, who I interviewed about playing on the girls' soccer team at my high school as a trans athlete, and her mom, who told me about testifying to the Missouri legislature against proposed anti-transgender bills. I can directly see how decisions made and policies implemented in Washington reach people halfway across the country.

I learned how to translate the anger that came with increasing awareness of injustice into research and craft my frustration into concise paragraphs. I found a love for the Opinion section, where instead of ranting about Trump to my friends I could use facts and evidence to build an argument about exactly how the Trump administration's lack of action heightened the pandemic's death toll and had devastating effects on the American people. I armed myself with awareness that gave me a sense of control and power over an unsettling world where I felt that very little was certain at the time.

I learned how to work with fellow reporters to gain an understanding of why the world around us worked as it did. When none of us knew why testing for the gifted program involved playing with blocks for two hours, we found out and wrote about it. We used knowledge gained from researching and interviewing gifted specialists and program administrators to craft a cover story that went in-depth about the history of gifted education in our district, and why recent changes were implemented to a program that had been criticized as unfair, biased, and lacking proper structure. Through journalism, we were able to shed light on an issue that not many students were aware of, despite the fact that it affected them.

Awareness is society's greatest shared form of power, and journalism is our most effective tool to spread awareness. When people start paying attention to the systems that surround them, an opportunity is created for those systems to change. As journalists, our work is a link between how and why the system works as it does now and how change is eventually brought about in that system. By spreading awareness, we make change possible. When I started to notice the housing problem in my neighborhood, I felt for the first time that there was a possibility for change - a possibility that started with putting it down on paper.

# diversity, duplexes and the middle class

Clayton's already-limited socioeconomic diversity is being affected by its lack of affordable housing.

IVY REED | REPORTER



**A home in the Clayton School District.**

**The City of Clayton has limited affordable housing available to residents.**

**LUCIA JOHNSON | PHOTOGRAPHER**

I live in a duplex on the tree-lined 6400 block of San Bonita Avenue. People push strollers and walk their dogs down the shady sidewalk to buy vegan body lotion, CBD oil and artisan ice cream on DeMun Avenue. On summer evenings that buzz with cicadas, cocktails are sipped at wine bars and parents push their kids on playground swings.

Currently, this is one of the more affordable neighborhoods in Clayton. But I've only lived here for four years, and it already looks different.

My house is one of several rental duplexes on the block, but I've seen at least three of them renovated into single family homes. I looked into St. Louis County public records and found that the house across the street was sold in 2014, the year before we moved to San Bonita. It was a duplex and sold for \$335,000. Then it was renovated into a single-family and sold in 2017 for \$676,000. The renovation more than doubled the house's value, and now it will never lose that value.

It will probably get even more expensive.

The same thing happened to another house on my block. It sold in 2016 for \$345,000. The family that bought it renovated it and now Zillow estimates its current value at \$727,356.

People renovate rental duplexes and then sell

them for double the original price. It's a smart financial move. But what is the impact on neighborhood demographics when affordable rentals become increasingly scarce?

Middle-class families, including mine, often struggle to buy property in Clayton. That's not to say that middle-class people aren't incredibly privileged compared to some that can't even dream of living in Clayton. However, the small middle class is really the most economic diversity Clayton has. I talked to realtor Laura Pierson about the challenges middle-class prospective homebuyers in Clayton encounter.

"There are pockets of Clayton that are more affordable," Pierson says. "In Clayton, they're mostly condos... And so, one thing that's hard is if you don't want to live in a condo, it's really hard to buy anything here that's under five or six hundred thousand. So then, some families have a hard time with condo living--if they have pets, for example."

Clayton is expensive. According to Zillow, it is home to a median property value of \$680,900. In comparison, St. Louis City's median property value is \$167,700.

Because homes are worth so much more in Clayton, the schools are exponentially better.

"Well, the truth is it's cyclical, because the schools are so good, the properties are worth more. Because the properties are worth more, the taxes are higher and the schools are better," says Pierson.

It's all part of the cycle. According to NPR, the School District of Clayton spends \$19,681 on each student, while St. Louis Public Schools can only afford to spend \$9,826 on each student. Kids who live in Clayton get an education that's worth more than double the education of students in the city. Also, Clayton students are usually from higher income families. The median household income in Clayton is \$91,531, according to Data USA, and \$41,441 in Saint Louis. So poorer students are getting a worse education.

This is the definition of socioeconomic inequality in education.

Middle and lower-class families should also be able to live in Clayton to give their kids a better education. But as long as the City of Clayton doesn't do anything to ensure that they have places to live, the cycle will continue.

When the voluntary student transfer program ends, even for all its flaws, it will greatly impact Clayton's already limited diversity.

The rich will get richer and the poor will get poorer. Clayton will remain overwhelmingly wealthy and white, no matter how much we white liberals talk about the value of diversity.

In fact, Clayton is built on a system of ensuring that wealth stays concentrated and lower-class people are kept out.

Zoning is a way cities determine how land is used. In Clayton, residential land is divided into seven residential zoning districts. These control what kind of housing can be built in different parts of Clayton. The first and most restrictive of these districts is R-1, or the Large Lot Single-Family Dwelling District. This district is, according to eCode 360, "intended to maintain high standards for quality residential living."

Zoning houses this way is Clayton protecting the upper class. There is no policy in place to protect, preserve or create middle and lower class housing.

Most of the DeMun neighborhood is zoned as R-5, or the Medium-Low Density Multi-Family District. This district allows single family homes, duplexes and medium density multi-family homes (medium sized apartment buildings). Because it's zoned this way, economic diversity can flourish in DeMun, while it's legally prevented from

happening in neighborhoods with houses mainly zoned as R-1.

However, there are also no laws that prevent every duplex and apartment building in DeMun from being converted into houses that sell for \$800,000 and up. Clayton is doing nothing to save the middle class and it's rapidly disappearing in the parts of the city where it's zoned to exist.

But then again, why would Clayton want to save it?

Lack of socio-

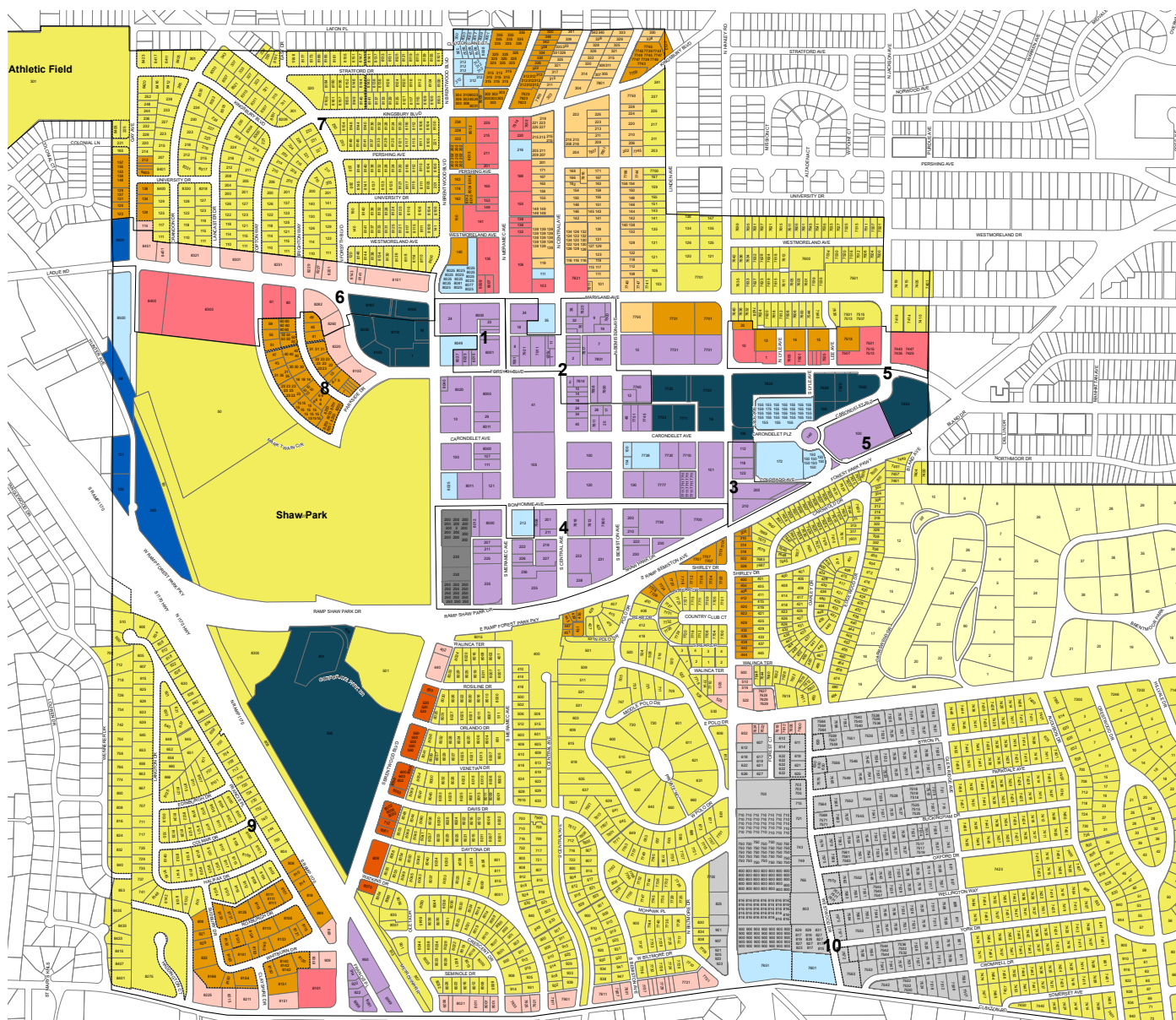
economic diversity isn't perceived as a problem by many members of the Clayton community, or at least as a big enough problem that it requires immediate action.

According to school board member Jason Wilson, "Affordable housing in Clayton isn't gonna happen. There's a paradigm that's in place, there's a construct that works a certain way. It was built on anti-blackness. It'll be fine, honestly."

He means that most Clayton residents won't suffer if nothing is done to ensure diversity. It won't affect the way of life we've all grown used to. As Wilson said, "nobody wants to give up anything."

And maybe no one will. 🗿

***"Affordable housing in Clayton isn't gonna happen. There's a paradigm that's in place, there's a construct that works a certain way. It was built on anti-blackness."***  
***-Wilson***



A City of Clayton zoning map, color-coded based on mandated establishment type in each building.

From the City of Clayton.

LUCIA JOHNSON | PHOTOGRAPHER

# proposed legislation threatens transgender rights

A wave of anti-transgender bills aim to limit transgender participation in sports that correspond with students' gender identities

IVY REED | PAGE EDITOR



Taghert in London | Photo from Taghert

"It basically affirmed my sense of belonging. Playing on the boys' team, I never really felt like I belonged," Nicky Taghert, 2019 CHS graduate, said about her experience playing on the girls' soccer team as a transgender athlete.

But if proposed state legislation is passed, other trans student athletes in Missouri won't have the same opportunity.

Senate Joint Resolution (SJR) 50, introduced by Republican state senator Cindy O'Laughlin, is a ballot initiative that suggests an amendment to the state constitution requiring students to participate in single-gender activities "corresponding to the student's biological sex." A parallel bill, House Joint Resolution (HJR) 82, has also been put forward by Republican representative Robert Ross in the Missouri House of Representatives.

While these two bills call for ballot measures, House Bill (HB) 2718, also introduced by Ross, proposes a law that would bar transgender females from participating in female sports "re-

gardless of hormone therapy use."

"We already have a climate where transgender people are [...] targets of violence, they're targets of bullying. So why would you open things up and create this opportunity?" said Anneliese Schaefer, Taghert's mother.

For Taghert to play on the girls' soccer team, she and her family had to complete a long process

*"We already have a climate where transgender people are [...] targets of violence, they're targets of bullying. So why would you open things up and create this opportunity?"*

through the Missouri State High School Activities Association (MSHSAA). MSHSAA's policy on transgender athlete participation is modeled on NCAA's procedure. Trans males are eligible to play on male teams regardless of whether they have begun receiving hormone/medical gender reassignment treatment, while trans females are only eligible to participate in female sports after

receiving one year of treatment.

Missouri's policy is seen as too restrictive by some. Transathlete, an online resource that provides information about transgender inclusion in sports, sorts states into three categories based on athletics policies for trans high school students: inclusive, needs modification and discriminatory. They define inclusive states as those that do not

require transgender athletes to receive hormone treatment or undergo gender reassignment surgery to play on a team with the gender they identify with. States in the "need modification" category-- Missouri included --do require these parameters.

But Schaefer believes MSHSAA's policy is reasonable despite being rigid.

"We [...] had faith that the process was fair. And that [Nicky] at least had the opportunity to make her case. These sports bills just put a wall up and say if you are transgender, you cannot participate in the sport that conforms with your identity," Schaefer said.

Along with her husband, she has testified at legislative hearings for these bills in Jefferson

City. From her experience at the hearings, she has come to believe that the reasoning behind the proposed legislation is not rooted in sound fact and more based in “emotion and conjecture.”

“Number one, there’s no scientific data to support the idea of this unfair advantage. Number two, these types of restrictions run afoul of federal protections,” Schaefer said.

Schaefer referred to Title IX, which states “no person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity.”

This federal civil rights law has been used on both sides of the ongoing debate over transgender participation in sports. For example, three Connecticut high school girls argued in a recent lawsuit that a state policy violated Title IX by putting cisgender females at a disadvantage competing against trans females. A ruling has not yet been made at the time of publication.

The ACLU responded to this lawsuit with a statement that called it “a dangerous distortion of both law and science in the service of excluding trans youth from public life.”

According to GLSEN, an organization that works to end discrimination against LGBTQ youth, there is no research supporting the theory that allowing trans females to compete on girls teams gives them a “biological advantage,” as the lawsuit claimed.

“I can’t find any solid, concrete, peer-reviewed data to support the idea that transgender females have a competitive advantage after they’ve had one year’s worth of hormone therapy,” Schaefer said.

Taghert, who now plays club-level soccer in college, agreed: “Speaking from experience, I can attest to the idea of there not being a competitive advantage. [...] One player can’t really affect the team much in terms of ability to win.”

The wave of proposed anti-transgender legislation in the Missouri government isn’t restricted to sports. SB 842 and HB 2051 suggest that any parent who provides for a child under 18 to receive gender reassignment treatment will be guilty of committing child abuse. HB 1565 would give parents the ability to refuse or remove any curriculum relating to gender identity or sexual orientation.

Representative Chuck Basye, who proposed HB 1565, called it “simply a parental rights issue.

[...] Existing Missouri law already has parental notification and an opt-out provision for sex education. I’m trying to include the same consideration for gender identity and sexual orientation based on complaints from [...] parents.”

Two more bills, HB 1721 and SB 848, would ban hormonal or surgical gender reassignment for minors and establish that any medical professional who provides hormonal treatment or performs gender reassignment surgery would be subject to losing their license. Similar bills that prohibit doctors from providing gender reassignment to minors are also proposed in South Carolina, Oklahoma, Idaho, Colorado and Florida,



Taghert at a pride parade | Photo from Taghert

and more will most likely be filed in other states.

On the federal level, a report released last July by the liberal Center for American Progress found that under the Trump administration, complaints related to sexual orientation and gender identity have become significantly less likely to result in corrective action or investigation by the Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights.

Though the Department of Education presents conflicting data that argues, “students who file civil rights complaints under U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos’ leadership are served more efficiently and effectively than [...] during the previous administration,” many still feel

that trans students’ rights have not been upheld under the Trump Administration. A month into Trump’s presidency, the departments of Justice and Education announced a reversal of Obama administration-issued guidance that pushed schools to allow trans students to use bathrooms corresponding to their gender identity under Title IX.

Despite setbacks under Trump’s presidency, there have been steps taken that are encouraging to transgender activists and supporters. For example, “bathroom bills” (that would require transgender people to use bathrooms and locker rooms corresponding to their assigned sex at birth instead of their gender identity), have failed in several state legislatures after the Obama-era federal guidance was repealed. When one of these bills was passed in North Carolina in March 2016, a national outcry followed, as well as an economic toll on the state caused by major boycotts. In July 2019, a settlement was reached that made it illegal for the state to “prevent transgender people from lawfully using public facilities in accordance with their gender identity.”

Meanwhile in South Dakota, a recent bill banning gender reassignment surgery or treatment for children under 16 was declared effectively dead. A bathroom bill and an athletic bill similar to SJR 50 and HJR 82 have also failed in the state in recent years.

It’s hard to predict which way these bills will go in Missouri, but their effects will undoubtedly be felt by transgender students.

Taghert said that if this proposed legislation were in place while she was in high school, “it would have been devastating to me [...] it’s also just a very restrictive and invasive policy

that discriminates against trans athletes and just reinforces the separation of binary.”

Taghert would not be alone in her devastation. Effects would hit particularly trans kids particularly hard. A 2018 study by the American Academy of Pediatrics found that transgender teens have disproportionately higher suicide attempt rates than their cisgender counterparts.

“I have no question if kids don’t have this outlet and ability to belong on a team sport, that that number will only go up,” Schaefer said. 🏳️‍🌈

# WHEN INCOMPETENCE BECOMES DEADLY: THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION'S CORONAVIRUS RESPONSE

IVY REED | REPORTER



Trump addresses the White House press briefing room on April 7. | ABACA PRESS

We all need some fun right now, so here's a little game: match each statement to the person who said it — President Trump or Dr. Fredrick Echols, Director of the City of St. Louis Department of Health.

"I like this stuff. I really get it. People are surprised that I understand it. Every one of these doctors said, 'How do you know so much about this?' Maybe I have a natural ability."

"This tragic loss to our community is a reminder that no one is immune to getting COVID-19. [...] For this reason, everyone must protect themselves, their family, friends and colleagues, by following the preventive measures and social distancing guidelines."

"It's going to disappear. One day — it's like a miracle — it will disappear."

Any guesses?

In times of crisis, we turn to our national leaders for guidance. But President Trump's inconsistent, irresponsible, xenophobic and inaccuracy-riddled response to the coronavirus pandemic has made state-level action to slow the spread more significant. For example, Trump's

advice to governors on providing their states with ventilators? "Try getting it yourselves." There's also the fact that Trump has resisted National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases Director Dr. Anthony Fauci's advice to issue a national stay-at-home order and has instead left it up to states to give them 'flexibility'.

So let's compare action taken by St. Louis officials to the Trump administration's pandemic response.

The first coronavirus case in St. Louis County (and the state of Missouri) was announced on March 7 by Missouri Governor Mike Parson. By March 16, Mayor Lyda Krewson had reported the first case in the City of St. Louis. But as Dr. Echols explained, preparing for the outbreak had begun much earlier.

"The activities related to our COVID-19 response started far in advance of the identification of the first case," Echols said. "Prior to the first case, we started reviewing our infrastructure [...] as well as identifying what operations need to be modified or altered during the response. [...] So a lot of the infrastructure and organizational

changes that needed to happen were already in place."

On the national level, there were already 437 cases in the country by March 7. The first case in the U.S. had been confirmed by the CDC on Jan. 21. When asked the next day in a CNBC interview about whether there were concerns about a pandemic, Trump responded, "No. Not at all. And we have it totally under control. It's one person coming in from China, and we have it under control. It's going to be just fine."

City of St. Louis health officials took serious measures to curb the spread of coronavirus before the first case in the area was even reported. In contrast, the foundation of Trump's catastrophic response was laid two years ago in 2018, when he disbanded the National Security Council pandemic office. When asked by a reporter at a March 13 briefing about his responsibility concerning the matter, the President responded with, "I just think it's a nasty question," and went on to claim, "I don't know anything about it."

Kimberly Dozier and Vera Bergengruen reported in Time Magazine that two days before,

Dr. Fauci told Congress, “We worked very well with that office. It would be nice if the office was still there.” Dozier and Bergengruen went on to explain that the CSIS Commission on Strengthening America’s Health Security published a report last November which urged the U.S. government to “replace the cycle of crisis and complacency that has long plagued health security preparedness with a doctrine of continuous prevention, protection, and resilience” in order to be prepared for a health crisis such as a pandemic. Obviously, that did not happen.

Not only did Trump disband a White House team that was in place to deal with global health crises like this one, but he was dismissing and downplaying the virus even after the first case had arrived in the country.

One may argue the increase in U.S. cases made it possible for St. Louis officials to be more prepared than the federal government by the time coronavirus came to the area. But the catch? When Trump was dismissing the possibility of a pandemic in late January, health experts were saying otherwise. Opinion columnist David Leonhardt explained in a New York Times op-ed that an editorial was published the same day – Jan. 22 – in online health news publication Stat by former CDC director Tom Frieden. Frieden warned, “The new virus is likely to continue spreading [...] We need to learn — and fast — about how it spreads and how often it causes severe illness so we can try to prevent its spread.” Leonhardt went on to highlight another editorial from late January titled

“Act Now to Prevent an American Epidemic,” this one published in the Wall Street Journal by Luciana Borio and Scott Gottlieb. The two former Trump administration health officials emphasized the urgency of immediate government action to prevent devastating consequences.

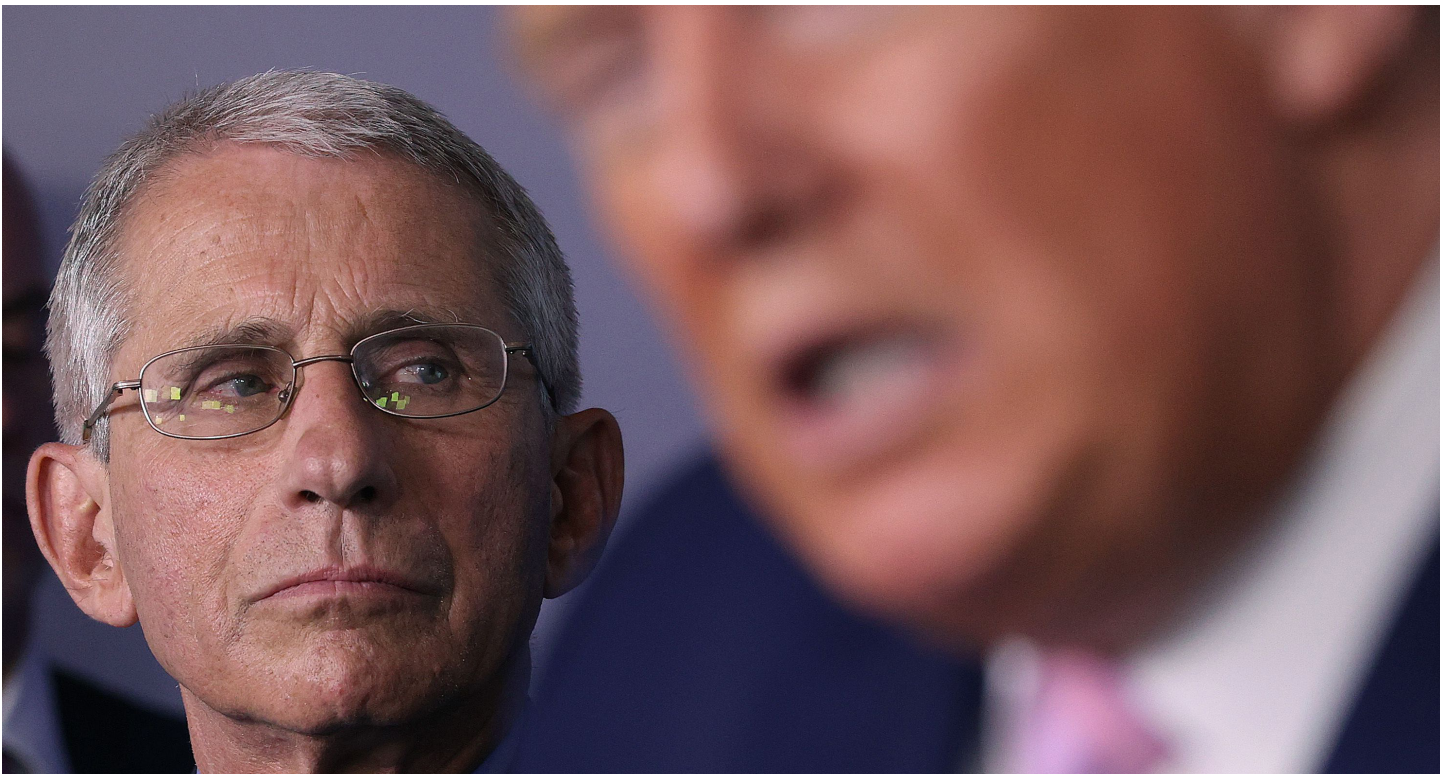
Trump had the information coming from epidemiologists and public health experts at his disposal. He had the tools to use presidential power to take more aggressive action to combat the spread of the virus early, but instead, he has dismissed the risks, celebrated himself and placed blame on others. He has called the virus the Democratic party’s ‘new hoax’ and normalized anti-Asian discrimination by labeling it the ‘Chinese virus.’ He’s tried to predict the miraculous disappearance of the virus one day (that’s not how pandemics work), attempted to blame the Obama administration and has taken a revisionist and self-congratulatory stance on his coronavirus response, saying, “I felt it was a pandemic long before it was called a pandemic.” He has refused to wear a protective face mask after the CDC issued official guidance urging all Americans to wear them. As the New York Times pointed out in coverage of Trump’s briefing on April 3, Trump said, “Wearing a face mask as I greet presidents, prime ministers, dictators, kings, queens — I don’t know. Somehow, I just don’t see it for myself,” despite the fact that foreign dignitary visits stopped weeks ago.

And speaking of those briefings? CNN’s Aaron Blake calculated that during one late March briefing, Trump spent about 25% of it blaming others

and congratulating himself. Blake pointed out, “That is more time than he spent conveying details about the coronavirus response.”

But Trump’s dismissive, immature and derogatory language throughout the crisis is nothing compared to his complete inadequacy as a national leader and his administration’s failure to act early on. Public health experts and epidemiologists agree that accurate, available and frequent testing is essential to curb the spread of coronavirus. But the reason the U.S. fell behind countries like Singapore and South Korea, who implemented large-scale and accessible mass testing, is a lack of action by the Trump administration, who refused to use a functioning test developed by the World Health Organization that was already being used by other countries. As Joanne Kenen explained in POLITICO, “why the United States declined to use the WHO test, even temporarily [...], remains a perplexing question and the key to the Trump administration’s failure to provide enough tests to identify the coronavirus infections before they could be passed on [...].”

Instead, a flawed CDC-developed test that delivered unreliable results was shipped to labs across the country. Only symptomatic people who had traveled to China or been exposed to coronavirus could be tested. And even after this test was discovered to deliver inconsistent and inconclusive results, the federal government did not switch to using a more effective test or loosen regulations to enable laboratories and medical facilities to develop their own tests. It wasn’t until Feb. 29 that



Dr. Anthony Fauci watches Trump during an April 1 press briefing. | WIN MCNAMEE/GETTY IMAGES

an FDA policy was announced to allow hospital labs to manufacture tests. But by then, it was already too late. As Harvard epidemiologist William Hanage wrote in the Washington Post, “as of late February, when the first case of covid-19 without links to known cases in the United States was detected in California, fewer than 500 tests had been conducted to detect transmission in this country.”

Dr. Fauci admitted to Congress on March 12 that the testing was ‘a failing.’ But the next day, Trump attempted to blame the Obama administration for his administration’s failure to make testing widespread earlier, saying, “I don’t take responsibility.”

The virus had spread to St. Louis six days earlier on March 7, and Trump continued to make contradicting claims and downplay the seriousness of the virus that would be declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization four days later, on March 11.

In contrast, when asked what approach the City of St. Louis has taken to combat the spread of coronavirus, Echols responded with, ‘Education.’ He emphasized the importance of providing accurate information and effective relief to disenfranchised communities in St. Louis and said, “When you have a pandemic or a large epidemic or outbreak, one of the things that it highlights is the inequity that exists within our communities.” Echols also explained why public officials should have strong relationships with the media because “the media controls the messages.”

“It’s important for health officials to have good working relationships with all media outlets [...] and having these initiatives in place allows us to ensure that the accurate information that we need to get to the community actually gets to the community,” Echols said.

Meanwhile, Trump’s relationship to the media is something more along the lines of this tweet from March 9: “The Fake News Media and their partner, the Democrat Party, is doing everything within its semi-considerable power [...] to inflame the CoronaVirus situation.” And to correct the grammar and capitalization errors, “The fake news media and their partner, the Democratic Party, are doing everything within their semi-considerable power [...] to inflame the coronavirus situation.”

But the glaring errors in the President’s grammar are irrelevant considering his vilification of factual journalism that has contributed to the pandemic of inaccurate misinformation spreading alongside the virus. Trump has accused CNN and MSNBC of “doing everything possible to make the Caronavirus look as bad as possible, including panicking markets, if possible,” as he tweeted on Feb. 26.

An April 1 poll by the Pew Research Center highlighted disparities in factual knowledge about coronavirus between Fox News and CNN/MSNBC viewers. The poll used statistics that identified 76% of those who name Fox News as

their primary news source as conservative Republicans, and 57% of those who mainly get their news from MSNBC as liberal Democrats. When polled about whether a vaccine will be available in a year or more (scientists are saying a vaccine won’t be ready until at least halfway through 2021), the poll found that 78% of MSNBC viewers knew the accurate answer, compared to only 51% of Fox News viewers. When asked if the virus originated naturally (it did) instead of being developed in a lab, 66% of MSNBC viewers were aware of the fact compared to only 37% of Fox News viewers. 79% of Fox News viewers thought the media exaggerated the risks of coronavirus, and only 35% of MSNBC viewers felt the same. And only 17% of MSNBC viewers reported seeing conflicting facts about the COVID-19 pandemic. But double that percentage – 34% – of Fox News viewers reported receiving contradictory information from news sources.

Trump promotes conservative news sources that present their viewers with inconsistent and unbalanced news coverage of the coronavirus

## ***“We’ve never closed down the country for the flu.”***

crisis while dismissing authentic journalism as fake news. That’s nothing new – welcome to the Trump presidency. But it’s more harmful now as misinformation becomes deadly.

“We struggle in public health in general with misinformation. And it can do a lot of damage,” said Washington University epidemiologist Dr. Christine Ekenga. “[...] We really need to take our directions from [...] scientists and healthcare professionals, and not politicians who may have ulterior motives other than protecting public health.”

But back to St. Louis, where gatherings of over 1,000 were banned in St. Louis city by March 12. The next day, St. Louis County Executive Sam Page announced a state of emergency in the county, and that gatherings of over 250 people would be banned. It was the same day the Trump administration declared a national emergency.

A state of emergency was declared in St. Louis County six days after the first case was announced. The Trump administration did not declare a national emergency until about seven weeks after the first case arrived in the U.S.

It was until around this time – mid-March – that, as the Associated Press found by reviewing federal receipts, the Trump administration waited to start buying masks and essential medical

equipment in bulk to supply healthcare workers. As supplies ran low and the national stockpile dwindled, the Trump administration encouraged states to figure out where to get medical supplies themselves. As Michael Biesecker explained in AP, “the Trump administration squandered nearly two months that could have been used to bolster the federal stockpile of critically needed medical supplies and equipment.” Trump also refused to use the Defense Production Act, which gives the executive branch greater control over the manufacturing sector to produce necessary equipment in an emergency, until March 27. Governors such as Andrew Cuomo of New York, where deaths had exceeded 500 by then, members of Congress, and health officials had been pressuring the President to invoke the act for weeks. Yet even when he did use it at the end of March, it was only directed at General Motors to produce ventilators. He waited until April 2 to widen the scope of its use to acquire respirators and ventilators from more companies.

On March 16, the Trump administration issued official social distancing guidelines.

Stay-at-home orders were issued by St. Louis City and St. Louis County officials on March 21. During Trump’s White House briefing two days later, he stated, “America will again, and soon, be open for business — very soon — a lot sooner than three or four months that somebody was suggesting. [...] We’re not going to let the cure be worse than the problem.” The next day, Trump said in an interview with Fox News that he wanted to see the nation open by Easter. This statement was met with alarm from health experts across the country who warned against relaxing social distancing restrictions too early.

Dr. Ekenga said (on March 27, for reference), “Us mere mortal humans, we can’t really determine the timeline of the virus. And I would say you can’t really put a timeline on how long we need to do social distancing. [...] What happens if you stop this early is that we could have a resurgence of cases. [...] We’re not even at the peak of the pandemic here in the U.S. We’re just at the beginning. [...] We won’t really see how effective these measures are until about three weeks to a month from now.”

In the same interview, Trump also compared the deadly coronavirus pandemic to the flu, saying, “We’ve never closed down the country for the flu.” This is a scientifically false comparison due to several factors, including the lack of coronavirus vaccine and the fact that it is about twice as contagious as the flu and an estimated 10 times deadlier, as an NPR fact check revealed.

Donald Trump is grossly unqualified to lead the nation during this crisis. If a competent administration had been in place and decisive action had been taken earlier, fewer Americans would be suffering and the spread of coronavirus could have been stopped earlier. But due to the blatant negligence of the Trump administration, it’s already too late. 🇺🇸




# WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE



BY IVY REED, SOFIA ERLIN, DISHA CHATTERJEE, RUTHIE  
PIERSON, SIDDHI NARAYAN AND GRACE SNELLING  
WITH REPORTING BY MARGY MOONEY AND ELLA CUNEO



A hand holding a pen is positioned over an open book. The book's pages are visible, with some text legible. A teal-colored overlay is present on the right side of the image. A horizontal dotted line with a left-pointing arrowhead is located above the main text, and a curved dotted line with a right-pointing arrowhead is located below it.

# LEFT?

# BACKGROUND

Although gifted services in the Clayton School District have seen numerous variations over the past 10 years, 2017 marked a new phase in the program. About 70 percent of total gifted-identified students were actively enrolled in gifted courses. That year, there were so few black students that Missouri's annual Gifted Students Report replaced the percentage with an asterisk. Clearly, there were some problems to be addressed.

Around this same time, the soon-to-be founders of Clayton Parents for Gifted Learners Jessica Del Pilar and Chris Win started to notice that the gifted program wasn't quite what it looked like from the outside. Each had children at Glenridge who seemed to be lacking the support that they needed and, when the two dug deeper into research on the social-emotional wellness of gifted children and state requirements for programs, they identified some serious shortcomings. Del Pilar felt that these gaps needed to be better understood in order for the district to formulate its next steps.

"As I was really struggling to figure out what [my child] needed at that moment, I came to understand that the program had changed from what it was intended to be and what the state required it to be," Del Pilar said. "We started asking some very pointed questions about what was actually being delivered [by the program] and what we were being told it was."

The district wasn't blind to these issues either. As part of a two year self-study, it hired outside consultant Dr. Kimberly Chandler, Curriculum Director at the Center for Gifted Education at the College of William and Mary, to examine Clayton's gifted services.

Her conclusions served as a wake-up call.

Chandler, in her official report from April 2017, found that the district lacked a "cohesive,

coherent document to guide the development and implementation of curriculum for gifted learners," as well as professional development for gifted teachers, a system to analyze program effectiveness, or a requirement for gifted specialists to meet national standards established by the NAGC and Council for Exceptional Children.

The report highlighted a "lack of clarity

ly, however, it had lost a real connection with the needs of gifted students. Changes needed to be made.

The report was part of a two-year self-study conducted by the District Gifted Committee, led by Coordinator of Gifted Education Sharon Slodounik and Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning Dr. Milena Garganigo.

Although Soldounik and Garganigo, as well as many other administrators and district gifted specialists, were engaged in improving gifted services prior to 2017, this study was the first step towards something much more comprehensive.

To address Chandler's concerns of insufficient training, unclear emphasis and variable curriculum, the district set out to make significant changes to the program, starting in 2018. In the spring of that year, a universal screener called the Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test was implemented to prepare for identification in the fall. Because this test is nonverbal, "it helps to eliminate any opportunities for language barriers, because it's really looking at just mental processing skills," said Meghan Margherio, the district's gifted coordinator.


Whereas before, students were required to be recommended by a teacher or parent in order to take gifted testing, this new system allowed all students an equal opportunity to qualify. Thus, it was intended to help solve the issues of equity and subjectivity that had previously been subject of concern. The identification process was now focused on academic ability, MAP scores, grades and performance levels.

But the 2018-19 process backfired.

The process was "identifying kids who are high performers, but don't necessarily have that brain that's wired differently, and has those learning needs for gifted services," according to Captain Elementary Gifted Specialist Laura Winkler.



regarding the program emphases." And, echoing Del Pilar and Win's concerns, it stated that "there is little evidence of optimal match between a student's academic profile and the program offered to meet his/her needs." Just as they had initially sensed, it seemed that the program no longer aligned with state requirements. More important-



It was also failing to meet the proposed goals of increasing diversity and making the identification process fairer.

“The intention was to be more inclusive, and it was more exclusive,” Del Pilar said.

111 students were identified as gifted that year. Three were African-American.

In July 2019, both Margherio and Assistant Superintendent of Student Services Robyn Wiens concluded in a review that, “Students from underrepresented populations (racial/ethnic subgroups, students of low socioeconomic status, English learners, and twice exceptional students) did not have an equal opportunity for gifted identification. [And] there was a mismatch between the identification process and the services provided in the gifted classroom.”

Despite the universal screener and changes made to the identification process, the district was still under-identifying minorities. Wiens’ and Margherio’s review also found that the number of African-American students being identified for gifted services was below the Missouri Department for Elementary and Secondary Education’s encouraged 20% “equity index,” which means that the subgroup racial percentages of a district’s gifted program may show a +/- 20% discrepancy with overall district percentages.

The review found that only 4% of the gifted program is African American, compared to 15% of the district.

Confronted by this troubling outcome, Margherio, Wiens and the district decided to once again fine-tune the gifted curriculum and identification process, this time over the summer before the 2019-20 school year.

The universal screener is still used for every student in grades two and four, as well as any new students, but more students move on to further evaluation stages after the screener. This year, 30-40% of screened students were moved on to further evaluation, a much higher percentage compared to that of 2018.

“We widened the screener,” Margherio said. “DESE (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education) [recommends] that we take the top 10-20% of students screened on for

further evaluation. We widened that a little bit more to take anywhere between 30 and 40%. Just so that we can make sure that we are looking at as many kids as possible and really trying to make sure that we catch anybody that might fall in the cracks.”

The identification process has also begun to exclude grades and standardized test scores, and focuses more on behavior, cognitive processing and creativity. The district has moved away from national norms to create local norms, comparing stu-

ents with each other within the district instead of with their peers across the state. Students from underrepresented subgroups are compared to each other, rather than their grades as a whole, to address the problems of inherent bias and inequity in the identification process. Identification no longer relies on students to advance past a number of gates (with one “failed” test meaning exclusion from consideration) and instead pools teacher feedback, assessments and a number of other considerations to come to an ultimate decision.


The district has worked to make the program more holistic. Margherio said that the gifted team is “making sure that we’re supporting kids on every level, not just academically or socially and emotionally, but really thinking about them from a holistic standpoint, all the way from how we identify to the services that we provide to their classroom experience.”

A shift in perspective to the idea of gifted


services as a learning need, a vertically aligned curriculum and a general recognition of implicit bias in the identification process have been among other reforms implemented.

This year, 125 students in grades two through eight were evaluated. Out of the 44 students who qualified, 12 were African-American.

Wiens is hopeful that the district will continue to see positive results as the gifted program




**CHANDLER FOUND THAT THE DISTRICT LACKED A “COHESIVE, COHERENT DOCUMENT TO GUIDE THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF CURRICULUM FOR GIFTED LEARNERS.”**



evolves.

“When we talk about implicit bias, and when we think about systemic barriers that may be in place, either intentionally or unintentionally, it really makes you think critically about the process,” Wiens said. “And so that’s what our plan is this year [...] really rethinking where we’ve been and where we want to go.”



Senior Abby Cooper grew up thinking that she would go to Metro High School in the St. Louis Public School District.

Cooper had attended a school for gifted students throughout elementary school. However, when her sister chose to attend CHS for more opportunities and better access to resources, she followed suit. On her first day, she walked into Wydown Middle School unsure of what to expect.

“I was really disappointed moving here,” Cooper said. “At my old school, I think we had a better curriculum. But the teachers weren’t as good. The content just pushed people to learn themselves.”

When Cooper got to Wydown, she was already more than a year ahead in math-- almost at a high school level. But communicating with the district was difficult at best, and Cooper ended up in the same math class as all of her peers. To compensate for the time she spent re-learning information in class, she was provided with extra sheets to do outside of schools. These were often finished within 10 minutes.

“They told me, ‘Sorry, we can give you extra worksheets each week to challenge you more. But if you want to join the gifted program, you have to drive to the high school every day.’ So I took two years of the same math classes that I already took. And then I just kind of kept on the same path [as everyone else],” Cooper said.

Without a direct opportunity to move ahead in math, Cooper was delayed on the same track as other honors middle school students. When she took honors geometry freshman year, friends from her old school were using the same textbook to furnish their eighth-grade math classes.

Transition to Clayton was hard, and because Cooper hadn’t tested into the gifted program as an elementary school student, she didn’t take Exploratorium in middle school. However, she still felt that there should’ve been more support for her as a gifted student in need of an accelerated curriculum.

I feel like a more solid gifted program would encourage students to take harder-level classes because I think a lot of people find that once they’re in them, it’s not that different from other classes. It’s just kind of faster-paced,” Cooper said.

Today, Cooper is a highly-driven student who has taken many honors and AP courses throughout high school. Although her middle school experience didn’t prevent her from excelling, she continues to feel that a greater infrastructure for

gifted students at that age should be more accessible and apparent.

Senior Iman Jamison, however, was involved in the gifted program throughout elementary and middle school in the Clayton School District. She initially tested into the program because she had been involved in the gifted program at her previous school.

“I was only thought of for the gifted program because of the school that I was at before Glenridge, Mark Twain Elementary,” Jamison said.

While she wasn’t especially impressed by the program at her elementary school, Glenridge, she enjoyed Exploratorium at Wydown.

“I loved Exploratorium way more than gifted. It was amazing because it was like a high school class, and it introduced me to that,” Jamison said.

While Jamison enjoyed the different aspects of the gifted program, one thing she noticed was the lack of diversity within her classes. Jamison was the only African American student in her gifted class at Glenridge, and only one more person joined her once she went to Wydown.

“It kind of frustrated me just a little because over time, I saw people that could’ve been in the gifted program. Especially because I didn’t see it as something measuring your academic level,” Jamison said.

Jamison believes that the lack of inclusivity and diversity in the gifted program correlates directly to the underrepresentation of those same groups in honors and AP classes at the high school.

“It’s hard to get on the path when you don’t start from the very beginning. You see that in classes here, if you’re on the honors track, you’re set, but if you’re not, it takes forever to get there,” Jamison said.

She believes that the lack of diversity within these programs stems from the system of gifted programs. If administrators address the root of the issue, she believes, the lack of inclusivity can be solved.

Junior Ella Ferguson tested into the gifted program on accident.


“They were supposed to have a different Ella take the test on that day, and they grabbed me instead... and then after that, every Monday, I went into the gifted teacher’s room, and we just

did projects and other things,” Ferguson said.


Ferguson enjoyed the unique learning opportunities the program provided her with. She was exposed to new concepts that pushed her out of her comfort zone. Because so much of the learning was independent, Ferguson remembers more of what she did in the gifted program than in her regular classes.

Although she did not enjoy the robotics units in the program, she felt there was enough flexibility that she was able to explore what she was interested in.

Once she moved up to Wydown, Ferguson continued in the gifted program by taking



**“IT’S HARD TO GET  
ON THE PATH WHEN  
YOU DON’T START  
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BEGINNING.”  
-IMAN JAMISON**



Exploratorium. She preferred Exploratorium’s heavier focus on problem-solving compared to the elementary school program. Additionally, she liked meeting every day instead of once a week.

Ferguson’s favorite parts of Exploratorium were the trips. Getting hands-on experience with her learning outside of the classroom helped her grow exponentially.

“[The trips] were really fun because they were constant exposure to these concepts,” Ferguson said.

Although she loved the time she spent in the gifted program, Ferguson believes that the program should not continue into high school. She feels like honors and AP classes provide enough rigor to keep gifted students challenged.

# VOICES



"I don't think it should continue into high school. You can get those same challenges from classes that we already offer... I think it would get too competitive for the same reason that we don't have valedictorian or anything like that," Ferguson said.

Eighth-grader Medha Narayan tested into the gifted program immediately after moving to Clayton in fourth grade. Her parents recommended her to take the test because they believed the program would help her to grow as a learner.

During the weekly pull-out sessions, Narayan and her gifted classmates would work on weekly projects separate from the materials they learned in their regular classes.

Narayan continued on the gifted path at Wydown by taking Exploratorium. Right away, she noticed the slower, more comprehensive pace of Exploratorium projects.

"The gifted program is definitely a building base and it went by a lot quicker. We didn't spend as long on each project. Right now [Exploratorium is] more independent. And there's a lot of research about topics that you're interested," Narayan said.

The extended time provided for Exploratorium work allows the students to study topics that interest them in-depth. Even more so than in elementary school, Exploratorium allows for choice, which Narayan appreciates.

Because students can study whatever they like, Narayan does not see why the program is not open to more students. She believes that if students are motivated to complete the projects, they can thrive in the class.

"Based on what I know about the students that I am around in my regular classes, all of them are very capable of exploring what they're interested in. They're just not given the opportunity to because of the way the test is strategized. There's a feeling that if you're not academically strong, then there's no point to even try to do it," Narayan said.

Narayan also feels as though the word 'gifted' misrepresents the program. It causes students to associate the program with academic success instead of extended learning. She believes that the name Exploratorium better describes the program since it is all about research and self-directed education.

Lucas Ruan, a current fourth-grader at Meramec Elementary School, transferred from the Rockwood School District last year. Ruan was involved in the gifted program there, so when

he came to Clayton his parents submitted his previous test scores to have him considered for Meramec's gifted program.

After getting accepted into the program, Ruan began attending the weekly pull-out classes. He feels like the logic and reasoning skills they work on in the program help him find different ways to approach problems, which helps him in school.

Currently, in his gifted class, Ruan is working on two projects: a passion project, and a PBL, or Project Based Learning. Through these two projects, Ruan is able to explore his interests, as well as learn about issues in the world.

Being in the gifted program has helped Ruan find a community at his new school.

"I like the hands-on activities the teamwork activities... It creates a better bond with all the people in the class. So I can make friends and we can get to know each other better," Ruan said.

However, while the gifted program is helpful for the people who are able to participate in it, it can create a divide between them and those who are barred from the program.

Junior Leo Thomas, who was not in the program, sometimes felt separated from his 'gifted' peers.

"The gifted kids would talk to each other about the gifted things. And, you know, I would think, 'Oh wow, that's really cool. I wish I was in that,'" Thomas said.

Thomas was often envious of the content his peers were learning in the gifted program.

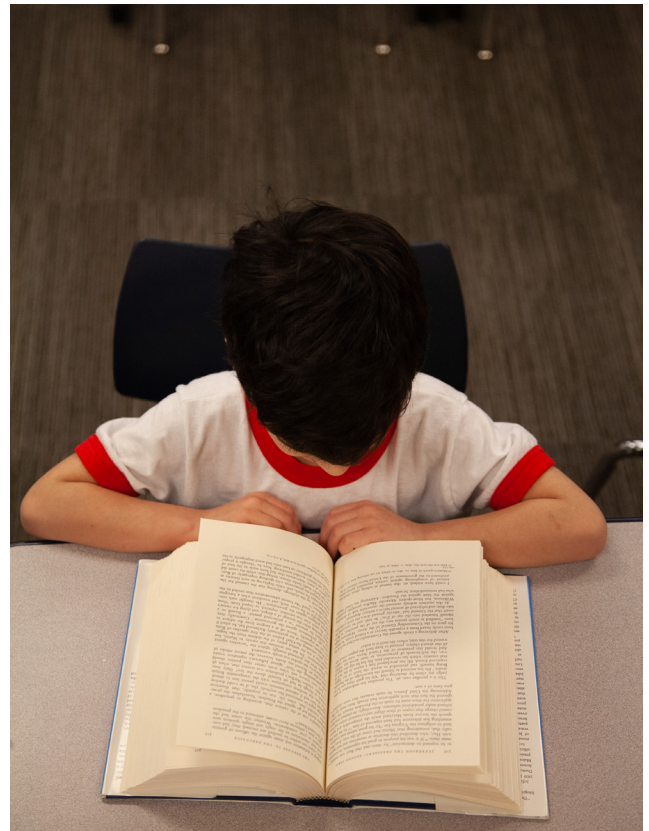
"They were being taught these kinds of things that were really interesting and creative, and unlike anything we were studying in regular school. I was also jealous that I didn't get to work with that stuff - to study these interesting problems, these current events that actually interested me,"

Thomas said.

In addition to missing out on content, Thomas thinks that the title - the 'Gifted Program' - fueled his envy.

"In middle school, when my self-esteem was not great, it was a big factor in what I thought of myself. Honestly do not call it the gifted program-- that will go to kids heads," Thomas said.

Thomas believes that the content being taught in the gifted program should not be exclusive to a certain group of students. He believes that the material could interest students who are otherwise



indifferent to regular school.

"They connected material to the real world a lot. And when you do connect, at least for me, I find it so much more interesting. I think those things, those studies, should be an option for every kid," Thomas said.



# faces of GIFTED



# PSYCHOLOGY

Many have heard the term “gifted child.” Some may even have been labeled as one. But how many truly understand what it entails?

“It’s not necessarily about how smart a child is. It’s just about how their brain is wired,” gifted counselor Amanda Moeller said.

A gifted child is generally defined as anyone who has a naturally high level of mental ability or extraordinary ability in any specific area of activity or knowledge.

“Giftedness is a product of the interaction of native ability and life experiences. If a child has a native ability, his environment determines the use he makes of his gifts and special talents,” Ruth Strang, a previous psychologist at Columbia University, wrote in a 1954 journal article.

Most psychologists agree that there are differences beyond intelligence between gifted children and others. Lewis Terman observed 1,500 gifted children in a 1921 study, finding a greater drive to achieve, greater mental and social adjustment, and high sensitivity to issues such as boredom or rejection from peers. The exceptional abilities often possessed by gifted children can be associated with certain issues.

One idea sometimes believed to be a result of gifted programs is the idea of “gifted child burnout,” popularized through viral memes chronicling aspects of a gifted child burnout identity. However, previous gifted education teacher and current gifted counselor Emily Kircher-Morris believes that gifted programs are much more of a positive experience rather than a contributor to any symptoms of burnout.

“What I see more often is kids who get to high school, for example, and they feel a lot of pressure to take a lot of AP classes or honors classes at the expense of self-care because they feel like they should do it or people say, ‘Oh, you’re so smart so you should do this.’ I see that causing a lot of stress and burnout at the high school level, but not necessarily associated with participation in a program when they were younger. Most often the kids, teens and adults who I work with have positive memories and experiences of being in those programs when they were kids, because it was kind of the one place that they could generally go and be challenged and work at a quicker pace, whereas in the general ed classroom, that wasn’t such a great fit,” Morris said.

Still, Moeller sees issues with anxiety and perfectionism in gifted children. In her experience,

study skills tend to be one lacking aspect in gifted children, as some of them were never challenged in their general classrooms and do not know how to truly study when faced with the obstacle later in life. She noted that college students often come to her for help with these problems, as they have not been truly challenged until college and now are beginning to struggle. Other issues she notices are cases of “impostor syndrome,” children in disbelief or confusion about their special talents. Both counselors attend to “twice-exceptional” children, those who are gifted but have an additional diagnosis, such as ADHD, Asperger’s, dyslexia and others. Moeller explains that with



high IQ children, you’re more likely to see secondary diagnoses. This can lead to one aspect of the individual overpowering the other, such as the giftedness masking their struggles, or vice versa.

“So you might have a child who is gifted with ADHD, and they’re so bright they get by. But then when their ADHD symptoms appear, people think that they’re just being lazy or they’re unmotivated when really they’re not. There’s another diagnosis there that needs to be supported. The flipside of that is that you might have the ADHD symptoms that are more prevalent, so they mask the giftedness. Then the kids don’t get

the challenge and the strengths-based instruction that they need for their cognitive ability, because people only see the ADHD characteristics,” Kircher-Morris said.

Today, several schools have implemented some form of a gifted program to educate these children in ways that best serve their needs. Implementing certain ideas, such as a social-emotional learning aspect to the program, proves beneficial. Psychologists generally agree that the environmental pressures gifted children face differ from their peers.

“Gifted kids have very intense emotions... They need to have a place where they can talk through those emotions, especially when things get overwhelming,” Moeller said.

Kircher-Morris believes it’s important to educate gifted children on how to navigate friendships, perfectionism, handle the pressure of believing they have to “measure up” and manage the competitive nature of upper-level classes. Twice-exceptional kids also receive greater social and emotional benefits from these programs. Both counselors have ideas on how gifted programs can improve to better serve their intended purpose. Moeller suggests a strong emphasis on encouraging students to focus on their interests and delve deeper, especially with project-based learning and components of group work. She wants programs to shift away from an overview of generic concepts to a much more challenging curriculum that teaches gifted children the study skills they will need to utilize later in life. Kircher-Morris hopes gifted programs will also refine their programs based on their identification criteria.

“The bottom line is that schools are limited based on what the state regulations and recommendations are as well as what they’re able to do,” Morris said. “I would say a gifted program should match the identification process for how they’re identifying their gifted students. So if, for example, a student is going to be placed in a highly academic, rigorous, gifted program, meaning that there is a lot of researching and writing, perhaps higher level math types of things that they’re doing in the gifted program, then the identification process should include achievement measures that that look at those things. Some programs are more based on critical thinking and problem solving, and so those might be a little bit more related to some other types of measures that look at creativity, problem solving, perhaps IQ.”



**2016**  
*district gifted committee begins 2 year self-study*

*self-study calls for focus groups and written surveys for those involved in the program*

**2017**  
*outside consultant finds that the district lacks a cohesive gifted program*

*district asks gifted teachers to modify curriculum*

**2018**  
*district begins using a universal screener*

**2019**  
*results show that screener limits diversity in program*

*changes made to Fall 2019 screening process result in improvements in equity*

You might remember the day you took the gifted test. You were probably pulled out of class for tests that measured your nonverbal, quantitative, and verbal ability, IQ, problem-solving skills, divergent thinking using verbal and non-verbal stimuli, cognitive processing-- or, like most Clayton students, you just remember there were blocks involved.

"It wasn't even a math test or English test. It's just a puzzle with these weird blocks," Jamison said.

Mohr was similarly bewildered.

"They came in, and they're like, build with blocks, and what are tires made out of?" Mohr said.

There is a general sense of confusion about how the gifted identification process works and how the district defines giftedness, even among students who were in the program and spent elementary school meeting with a gifted specialist twice a week. This was the experience of many current high schoolers and middle schoolers in the gifted program. However, according to Clayton Superintendent Sean Doherty, "students aren't just gifted on Tuesdays and Thursdays when they go to the gifted classroom." Going forward, the district is tackling a new challenge: supporting gifted students throughout the school day.

To begin with, recent changes to the gifted identification process and curriculum have brought with them a new understanding and dialogue around the variable idea of giftedness.

"It's not about academic achievement, and it's not about learning extra math," Win said. "[...] We do think that there's a reason for some students to be accelerated in certain areas, but the system is not set up to automatically do that. Some kids will have a lot of challenges in their social emotional world, and will need to focus on that, whereas other students may not have as many of those challenges. I think the more individualized our program can be, to meet these individualized needs, because it's not the same for every kid, the better off we'll be."

The idea that giftedness is synonymous with being conventionally "smart" is a misconception that has generated an attitude of exclusiveness and pressure to be high-performing around those who have tested into the program in the past.

"I think what happens sometimes for our

students in the gifted program is that we put unintentional pressure on some students,” Doherty said. “It becomes about the intelligence, and it’s like, ‘You’re smart, you’re in the gifted program, why aren’t you getting it?’ or, ‘You made a mistake at this? I thought you were gifted.’ There is so much pressure on a student when they have that, and they’re afraid to make a mistake. Or sometimes they feel like they have to be perfect. We are learning so much about that social-emotional aspect of being gifted, and we have to make sure the students know how to grapple with really difficult things and be vulnerable enough to say when they don’t know something. They’re not gifted in everything, some students are really gifted in certain areas.”

Both Win and Del Pilar agreed that pressures on gifted students to excel in all areas have caused the original meaning of giftedness to be lost. Typically, the term “gifted” is used to describe a person who has an unusual ability in a certain area, such as athletics or music. But the expectation that a student should be unusually skilled in all areas can be damaging over time, especially considering that asynchronicity, or heightened performance in one area and deficiencies in others, is, according to Margherio, “a hallmark of giftedness.”

There is a high level of pressure put on gifted students to excel, but there are also students who go unnoticed because they don’t exhibit what are commonly recognized as gifted characteristics. Not all gifted students are academically successful.

“You can do really well academically and also be intellectually gifted, where your brain is just wired in this different way-- you feel things deeply, you think deeply. You just have this different way of experiencing the world. But you can also be that way without having academic success,” Winkler said.

This year, the district has tried to shift away from an academically-focused identification process and is stressing the the idea of gifted services as a learning need instead of a privilege for students with high IQs.

But some things still need to be fixed. The stress placed on gifted students remains very real, and these stressors are apt to compound over time.

When gifted students reach the high school level, a drive for overachievement can lead to enrollment in the maximum number of honors and AP classes available, regardless of whether or not those classes play to the individual’s strengths. Going forward, the district hopes to continue restructuring the program in a way that best supports gifted students in all areas.

“With the realignment in the program, the

support for high school students. Additionally, Doherty has been working with other administrators to answer the core question, “How do we provide an equitable and personalized learning experience for students?” He feels that a more individualized style of teaching may help to address the problems that gifted students face as they advance through Clayton; namely the prevalence of unhealthy levels of stress and anxiety.

“What are the things that we have in place right now that are inadvertently causing students undue stress? Or not allowing them to have choice and voice in what they’re learning? We are looking at a schedule that might allow students time to take a breath. We added

Greyhound Time, and I love that, but I also think, ‘What could we do more systematically?’ That’s really hard. One thing about our district is that we are very high-performing, so when we look at changes, people might ask why we would change if we’re doing so well. But the underlying issue is that we have students who are extremely stressed or staying up all night. Those are the unseen consequences that we need to look at,” Doherty said.

Although the future of the program is not yet certain, the district has made an evident commitment to its improvement. It may take years for a large change to be seen in the attitudes and ideas centered around giftedness, which have become deeply ingrained in Clayton’s culture. But important steps have been taken this year, encouraging gifted specialists, administrative staff and classroom teachers alike to understand the importance and unique challenges of supporting gifted learners. Del Pilar sees these

shifts as an important tool to empower students.

“I think it’s important to find the places where you feel growth and support,” Del Pilar said. “Where you soar.”

In the coming years, the district hopes to do just that-- help all gifted individuals find learning environments where they can soar. 🌟

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**“YOUR BRAIN IS JUST WIRED IN THIS DIFFERENT WAY— YOU FEEL THINGS DEEPLY, YOU THINK DEEPLY. YOU JUST HAVE THIS DIFFERENT WAY OF EXPERIENCING THE WORLD.”**

**-LAURA WINKLER**

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team will be able to really focus on some of those skills [...] around the perfectionism, the fear of failure, a lot of these SEL (social emotional learning) skills that we know are really important for students who have gifted characteristics,” Wiens said.

Wiens and Margherio see a future in which further professional development and gifted counseling begin to provide more structured

# love, the globe: a column

IVY REED | REPORTER



The Metro stop in Clayton. ELI MILLNER | PHOTOGRAPHER

I really hate the word “sketchy.” I hate it every time people in Clayton use it to describe the metro, or the city, or basically anything that’s not Clayton. But I never really say anything, because I know they won’t get it.

When I hear you tell me about all the people who sell drugs and get shot on the Metro, I want to say that I love taking the Metro, especially in the early morning when the air is thin and music sounds so much more beautiful. I want to describe how cavernous and quiet the station feels, and how when I take the metro at the end of the day, with all the other people coming home from work and school, I feel like I’m just one small part of something bigger. I want to tell you that in the early morning, I forget how much I have to do and the long day I have to get through. How between the Skinker and Forsyth stations, when the train goes underground, I can imagine I’m in a strange city that I don’t know, speeding through a dark tunnel beneath unfamiliar streets, and it’s somehow comforting.

When you say the city is scary, I don’t talk about the nine years I lived in South City, but if I did, I would describe Tower Grove South and Shaw and how well I knew all the paths and pavilions of Tower Grove Park.

How I thought Natasha’s had the best falafel on South Grand because it was the crispiest, and how we used to go to Pho Grand for tofu and

spring rolls so often that the family who owned it recognized us.

I’d talk about the dog park my dad and I used to take our dog to in Shaw, and I would tell you about burritos on Cherokee, and playing cards at the Mud House, and going to protests downtown.

.....

***“The same way you love Forest Park and the smooth-paved roads and wood-fired pizza restaurants of Clayton, I love the uneven bricks and the funky coffee shops, the bumpy alleys and close-together houses that surrounded me as I grew up.”***

.....

I’d tell you everything I remember about farmer’s markets, sledding in Benton Park, spicy-scented Osage oranges, early-morning picnics and summer afternoon library visits.

I could tell you countless memories of the city

that were anything but sketchy, so why is that the only thing you think of when you think of the city? Is it just because not everyone in the city is privileged and white? Or because living in Clayton your whole life has given you a skewed idea of what the city is that’s so different from my idea of the place I grew up in?

But instead, I don’t say much.

I don’t try to explain that when you label the city as sketchy, because you grew up in the Clayton bubble and didn’t need to think of it as anything else, you label the things I love as sketchy.

The same way you love Forest Park and the smooth-paved roads and wood-fired pizza restaurants of Clayton, I love the uneven bricks and the funky coffee shops, the bumpy alleys and close-together houses that surrounded me as I grew up.

I love the Schnucks on Arsenal that’s not as fancy as the ones in Clayton, but I love it because it’s part of me. I love Tower Grove Park even though it’s not as big as Forest Park and there aren’t golf courses or museums or a zoo. I love the round library on Kingshighway with the book quotes on the walls, that’s not as new as the one in downtown Clayton, but I love it because that’s where I remember learning to love books. And all of those city places and memories and people I love - that’s what I’m thinking about while you talk about how sketchy the city is. 🌎