

# *Transforming Schools*



*Jennings School District*  
*Jennings, Missouri*

*Dr. Tiffany Anderson*  
*Superintendent of Schools*



OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

*Dr. Tiffany Anderson*  
 Superintendent of Schools

Dear Friends of Jennings School District:

Thank you for supporting Jennings School District. One of our goals is to break generational poverty through education. The demographics of Jennings School District include 100% free and reduced meals and we have a 93% graduation rate. The accreditation achievements are below:

MSIP Movement	2012	2013	2014	2015
APR Total Points	80/140	92.0/140	109.5/140	113.5/140
Percent of Points	57.1%	65.7%	78.2%	81.1%

MSIP 5 Standards	Points Possible	Points Earned 2012	Points Earned 2013	Points Earned 2014	Points Earned 2015
1. Academic Achievement	56	33	32	42	46
2. Subgroup Achievement	14	7.5	8	9.5	10
3. College and Career Ready	30	2	12	20	18
4. Attendance	10	7.5	10	8	9.5
5. Graduation Rate	30	30	30	30	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>109.5</b>	<b>113.5</b>

Jennings is a school district bordering Ferguson, Missouri. Our success and progress is attributed to working with the community to meet their needs. As a result of a supportive school board and an exceptional staff working together, Jennings serves as a national model of excellence in urban education. Our strategies to improve schools focuses on:

- **Content** -- Implementing an aligned standards-based curriculum.
- **Relationships** -- Building community relationships.
- **Pedagogy** -- Having a highly qualified staff with effective instructional techniques.

Enjoy the articles informing readers of initiatives and accomplishments. You can remain up to date on all of the incredible accomplishments by visiting our webpage at [www.jenningsk12.org](http://www.jenningsk12.org) where you can sign up to follow us on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. If you would like to donate to the Friends of Jennings School District Foundation 501(c)(3) student scholarship fund, please visit our website at [www.jenningsk12.org](http://www.jenningsk12.org).

Sincerely,

Dr. Tiffany Anderson  
 Superintendent of Schools

## Jennings School District hums a new tune for success

Saturday school, arts and college prep yield better discipline and learning

### JENNINGS SCHOOL DISTRICT IN MISSOURI

**Superintendent Tiffany Anderson**

**Enrollment:** 2,561

**Number of staff:** 449

**Number of schools:** 8

**Per-pupil expenditure:** \$10,688

**Students on free or reduced-price lunch:** 95%

**Budget 2013-14 projected expenditures:** \$27 million

**Website:** [www.jenningsk12.org](http://www.jenningsk12.org)

*A Saturday School class, below, which is voluntary, allows students to review academic material from different teachers outside the district.*

When students in music class at Jennings School District in Missouri started taking violin lessons, they would show when they were frustrated. After a year of playing beautiful music, the students wait a beat, and calm down, instead of acting out.

With troubled schools where standardized test scores are abysmal, absenteeism runs rampant and aspirations of breaking out of poverty feel like a pipe dream, the district in urban St. Louis County has the look and attitude of a feisty kid that wants to overcome the long odds for success.

To outsiders, this may seem ambitious. That's because it is. More than 95 percent of the district's 2,500 students receive free or reduced-price lunch. Many students are on the verge of homelessness and growing up in single-parent households, or are in the care of a grandparent, extended family or distant relative.

Yet instead of grouching about having disadvantages, the Jennings administrators, its faculty and students at its eight schools are singing a more upbeat tune. Credit the arrival of Superintendent Tiffany Anderson in 2012 and the district infusing every area of its curriculum with performing arts, fine art and music.

### Saturday school

The district launched a Saturday Academy, which is voluntary and open to all students. It reinforces and extends what students learn during the regular school week. Their classroom teachers write lesson plans for the Saturday teachers, who are from local districts and universities. This gives students a chance to experience different teaching styles across the same subject area. Breakfast and lunch are also served.

Superintendent Anderson, who grew up in the area and attended nearby schools, says closing the achievement gap is all about raising student performance and creating communities.

"Great neighborhoods don't by themselves make great schools as much as schools create better communities," she says. "So really, closing the achievement gap is about social justice."

### College prep

At the district's brand-new College Prep Academy, middle school students wear uniforms—a red cardigan, white shirt and khaki pants—and attend school for an extra hour each day. Students and their parents are required to volunteer at the school or in the community. And tucked away in every building are appliances one rarely sees in a public school:





Some Jennings School District students play the violin and viola—using music to help them make connections in core subjects of math, science and language arts. The students above rehearse for their district gala recently.

sets of washing machines and dryers.

“One of the things we know that parents in our community need is a place to do laundry,” Anderson says. “So, each hour of volunteer work in the schools entitles them to do a load of laundry.”

The district benefits from the volunteer work, but students also get to see their parents being involved in the school, whether it’s reading to classes, volunteering in the main office or assisting with the lunch, Anderson says.

### Music and art’s role

Anderson wanted to include music and art in all academic subjects from kindergarten through senior year. “Music and art are a form of expression, and (they) can be used to simplify complex skills and to help students express themselves academically,” Anderson says.

“And the arts are used to accelerate learning in math, science and social studies. The arts are helping to give students a voice and helping to build their confidence.”

For instance, in kindergarten, youngsters learn to tell time with a dance exercise that reinforces their understanding of math and how clocks work. In math, students write and sing rap songs to increase their understanding of mul-

tiplication tables. The music and arts program also pairs students with musical instruments. Beyond mastering their assigned instrumental pieces, the students are learning time management and organizational skills and how music can have a calming influence.

**“I’ve noticed students that were notorious for flying off the handle tone down how they respond.”**

—James McKay Jr., teacher,  
Jennings School District

Yet, in many districts across the country, music and arts enrichment are cut when budgets get lean—even as a growing body of research points out that immersion in art and music are connected to gains in math, reading comprehension, improved cognition, better concentration and willingness to work in a team.

### Teacher observation

While there aren’t any tests to prove if music and art improve students’ grades,

there are anecdotes. For instance, teacher James McKay Jr. credits the music instruction he received in school for getting him into college, giving him a career and enabling him to buy a home. He started playing the violin in the fourth grade, and had switched to the double bass by high school.

McKay’s students are learning the violin, the viola and the cello. From his perspective, even though the full impact of the arts at Jennings may not be known for some time (testing is underway now), he sees a change in his students since the music program started.

“I would have to say it’s self discipline,” McKay says. “I have noticed students that were notorious for flying off the handle really tone down how they respond when they are angry or if something doesn’t go their way. I see them taking a moment to step back and think how they want to respond, instead of just being reactive.”

“Because music deals with repetition and mastery to be successful on their instruments, they must do a lot of critical thinking,” McKay concludes. “This is transferring to their daily lives, and I see them thinking more in their tasks.” DA

*MariAn Gail Brown is a freelance writer in Connecticut.*



# NEWS RELEASE

February 26, 2016

## JENNINGS SCHOOL DISTRICT WINS ARCUS AWARD



### *District Achievement in Educational Attainment Recognized*

**(JENNINGS, MO)** The Jennings School District received the Arcus Award for Achievement in Educational Attainment at the Arcus Awards Ceremony hosted by the St. Louis Regional Chamber on February 25, 2016. Other nominees in the category were AT&T, Burns & McDonnell, Engineering Company, Inc., Citi, Harris-Stowe State University, SIUE-East St. Louis Center and WGU Missouri. The Arcus Awards celebrate the achievements of companies and leaders they say are making the St. Louis region a more attractive place to live, work and invest. For information on all of category winners, click on the Post-Dispatch link below.

- [http://www.stltoday.com/business/local/st-louis-regional-chamber-announces-arcus-award-winners/article\\_8df5320b-8720-5e33-aa0a-9e0c0dd6f9ef.html](http://www.stltoday.com/business/local/st-louis-regional-chamber-announces-arcus-award-winners/article_8df5320b-8720-5e33-aa0a-9e0c0dd6f9ef.html)

The Jennings staff, Board of Education and students learned at the exciting event that they won their category. As with all events Superintendent of Schools Dr. Tiffany Anderson attends, students joined her and gave out their business cards, networked with CEOs, and they joined the Board and Jennings staff members on stage to accept the award. Dr. Anderson invited Dr. Art McCoy to the stage, a leader she has mentored who will serve as Jennings superintendent in 2016-17 who will keep the district's momentum moving. Dr. Anderson gave a special tribute to the staff and Board of Education for their support in her leadership. Further acknowledgements regarding the important role of the school board in supporting teachers and schools can be viewed on the link below.

- [http://www.stlameric.com/news/columnists/guest\\_columnists/article\\_e7af5afe-db79-11e5-82f9-8313e98dfbeb.html](http://www.stlameric.com/news/columnists/guest_columnists/article_e7af5afe-db79-11e5-82f9-8313e98dfbeb.html)

There was also a People's Choice Award category where the general public could select their favorite from all nominees across the award categories. While Jennings received numerous votes, they didn't qualify because the district was informed they won the category of District Achievement in Educational Attainment.

Congratulations Jennings staff, families and students on the tremendous progress that continues to be recognized as a national model for success in education.

## JENNINGS SCHOOL DISTRICT RECOGNIZED AT STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESS

Governor Jay Nixon recognized Jennings School District at the Governor's State of the State Address on January 21, 2015 for the progress and achievements the district has made.

Superintendent of Schools Dr. Tiffany Anderson shared, "The true heart and soul of the district are the staff members and students." To share in receiving this recognition, Dr. Anderson brought with her as guests Mrs. Melba Davis, Jennings Junior High/College Prep Academy principal; Mr. Curt Wrisberg, Woodland/Kenneth C. Hanrahan Elementary principal; and Mrs. Kathy Foster, an English teacher who has been awarded by the district for high performance for two consecutive years and supports teacher induction activities.

Additionally, Mrs. Foster's student, Breyannah Parker, was also in attendance. Breyannah, a seventh-grader at College Prep Academy, received a standing ovation when Governor Nixon announced her 4.0 grade point average.

**"Jennings students have made big leaps forward over the past several years with higher test scores and higher graduation rates."**

**Governor Jay Nixon**



***From left to right:*** Dr. Tiffany Anderson, superintendent; Breyannah Parker, 7th grade College Prep student; Mr. Curt Wrisberg, Woodland/Kenneth C. Hanrahan Elementary principal; Mrs. Kathy Foster, English teacher; Mrs. Melba Davis, Jennings Junior High/College Prep Academy principal; First Lady Georganne Nixon; and Governor Jay Nixon.

Governor Nixon shared that even though 90% of the kids in Jennings come from poor families, the district isn't letting anything hold them back. Governor Nixon stated, "Jennings students have made big leaps forward over the past several years with higher test scores and higher graduation rates. Please join me in thanking Dr. Anderson for her leadership and dedication to the success of students like Breyannah."

## Jennings breaks ground on \$1.4M sports complex



Photo by Wiley Price

**Groundbreaking**--On April 8 Jennings Superintendent Tiffany Anderson and other district officials participated in the groundbreaking for a new \$1.4 million sports complex. The funding comes from Proposition J, an \$11.5 million bond issue that Jennings voters approved in April 2011. Contractor ATG Sports Industries is committed to 30 percent MBE subcontracts, 5 WBE subcontracts and 30 percent minority/women field workforce.

On April 8 the Jennings School District broke ground on a new \$1.4 million sports complex, which will include a new track and field.

On February 25, the Board of Education approved a contract with sports facilities contractor ATG Sports Industries. According to the ATG Sports' contract, the district's minority participation goals for the project are 30 percent of contracts to minority-owned businesses (MBE), 5 percent of contracts to woman-owned business (WBE) and 30 percent minority/women field workforce.

ATG Sports expects to exceed the district's minority participation requirements, according to board documents. ATG Sports will be required to report monthly on manpower and amounts paid to MBE/WBE firms.

The funding comes from Proposition J, an \$11.5 million bond issue that Jennings voters approved by 61 percent in April 2011. The new complex will make Jennings School District one of only a few high schools east of Interstate 270 to have a modern, outdoor sports complex, district officials said.

Superintendent Tiffany Anderson said the district appreciates the community's "support for voting for Proposition J and investing in our schools."

ATG Sports will install a synthetic turf sports field, an all-weather track, goal posts, high jump, pole vault, long jump and a restroom/concession building for a total amount not to exceed \$1,403,595.

The track must be reworked to achieve the Missouri State High School Activities Association's standards for grade tolerances and will have a new rubberized running surface with all the association's standard stripping and markings. The bleachers will be moved, along with a new concession / restroom facility.

Construction is scheduled to begin after the last soccer game in May.

Track and field coach Darryl Williams, who has been involved with the Jennings program for 30 years, said with an 8-lane, Missouri State High School Activities Association-approved track and field facility, Jennings will soon be a sought-out destination for other programs who want to compete on a high-grade surface.

"It's just a wow factor," Jennings Senior High Principal Dayle Burgdorf said. "The kids are going to be playing on a facility that actually mirrors their competitors", and so it brings them up to a different playing field."

Prop J funds will also go towards renovating libraries, media centers, science labs, auditoriums and cafeterias in the district's eight buildings. To increase safety and security, the district will also upgrade cameras and locks, along with making building improvements.

Another major part of the Proposition J is the building addition on Northview Elementary, which will consist of two classrooms and a new library. The cafeteria will be expanded into the old library space. On February 25, the board voted to award the Northview contract to C. Rallo Contracting Company for \$1,667,500.

C. Rallo also expects to exceed the minority participation goals, which are the same as the sports complex project.

Education

# Teach For America filling fewer gaps in St. Louis area

By Elisa Crouch and Koran Addo  
 St. Louis Post-Dispatch

Aug 27, 2015

Teach For America, a formidable player in urban education, is declining in the St. Louis area where tighter district budgets and fewer recruits have resulted in diminishing corps members in classrooms.

The number of first-year recruits in area schools is down to 54 this year, from 70 in 2014-15. In all, about 110 corps members are teaching in three area school districts and three city charter schools.

The organization's mission is to reduce education inequity by putting top college graduates into the most troubled urban and rural schools, where districts often struggle with hiring. The commitment of a teaching recruit is two years. Some stay longer.

The decline in recruits partly reflects the challenges being felt in the teaching profession overall. A better economy means more job choices for top college graduates, the very candidates the organization works to attract.

"We're working in a space in education nationally where applications to teaching projects of all kinds are down," said Brittany Packnett, executive director of Teach for America St. Louis.

Even so, the organization is expanding its reach into the Jennings and East St. Louis districts this year.

Nationally, many districts are having trouble filling candidates at a fast enough rate to replace those who have taken early retirement incentives in recent years.

In St. Louis Public Schools and Normandy, for example, where teacher turnover rates are higher than most other districts in the area, a number of positions last year went unfilled, such as foreign language and high school science teachers.

This school year, St. Louis district schools has 36 Teach for America corps members in its schools. Last year, that number was 52.

Corps members are district employees who are paid the same as first- or second-year teachers. They receive Americorps benefits to help cover college debt. Private and school district funds cover training and other support.

The organization is polarizing among those in the education sector who either see the organization as beneficial or hurtful.

Corps members arrive in classrooms without education degrees. Instead, they complete an intense seven-week training program and earn certification after completing their two years.

Teach For America is no longer in Hazelwood or Riverview Gardens. But it has expanded this year into East St. Louis and Jennings schools. It also has recruits at South City Prep, Confluence and KIPP charter schools.

One of the four recruits in Jennings left shortly after school started. Superintendent Tiffany Anderson said it was the recruit's decision to leave, and it wasn't a good match. The district is working with the three other teachers, providing ongoing training and mentoring as it does with other new educators.

"We are really interested in getting teachers who not only have a high work ethic but also have a commitment to serve kids in poverty," Anderson said. "We don't care where you come from."

Carole Basile, dean of the College of Education at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, attributes the lower numbers to a general decline in the number of people who want to be teachers.

Leaders of teacher preparation programs have become wary of how politicized the profession has become, as politicians increasingly place the blame of poor performing schools on teachers.

"The profession has gotten a bad name, in some regards," Basile said. "Also the economy is getting better and people are going out and getting higher-paying jobs."

Kathleen Fink, of UMMSL's professional and continuing studies program, added that Teach For America's local leadership has very high standards for recruits, which also could be responsible for the smaller numbers.

Nationally, the organization accepts 15 percent of those who apply. And that standard has stayed in place even as fewer recruits have signed up nationally.

Becky O'Neill, Teach For America's vice president of communications, said the declining numbers are not reason to panic.

Nationwide, the number of corps members fell to 8,800 this year compared to 10,600 last year.

But O'Neill said those numbers could just be a part of the normal highs and lows the organization sees from time to time.

"Securing applications is more challenging when the economy is strong but we continue to compete," she said. "I'm not worried about St. Louis. The leadership there is a big draw for recruits."

O'Neill said an encouraging sign is that Washington University, one of the top providers of corps members among medium-sized schools, is contributing 25 graduates this year, up from 14 last year.

Increasingly, the organization works to recruit those with ties to St. Louis. More than 40 percent apply as a professional or a graduate student.

Among them was Kim Burke, who teaches English at Jennings Junior High as a first-year corps member.

After five years in banking, she wanted more fulfillment. So she applied for Teach for America.

"I've always wanted to be a teacher but I never pursued it because of the costs teachers live by," she said.

Another challenge facing Teach for America is recruiting a corps that reflects the communities they serve.

In St. Louis, recruits are increasingly minority, with 29 percent of corps members either African-American, Asian, Latino or multiracial. Forty percent come from a low-income background.

"We are looking at the needs of our community head on," said Packnett, who is also an activist and member of the Ferguson Commission. "We at TFA have decided to be intentional partners to work as hard as we can to meet those needs. Our communities, our students have been clear they want a diverse pipeline of teachers."



Kimberly Burke of Ferguson, a 2015 corps member of Teach for America, assists Talasia Jackson (center), 12, of Jennings, during a College Prep Academy class at Jennings Junior High School on Wednesday, Aug. 26, 2015. Also pictured are Desteny Davis (left) and Brandi Conner, both 12 and from Jennings. Photo by Cristina M. Fletes, cfletes@post-dispatch.com



Kimberly Burke (right), of Ferguson, a 2015 member of Teach for America, listens to her teaching mentor, Kathy Foster of Florissant, as they prepare for back-to-school night on Wednesday, Aug. 26, 2015. "I haven't had a mentee this awesome in a long time," said Foster, the 2014-15 Teacher of the Year for the Jennings district. "She takes advice. She's really grown and thriving." The number of first-year recruits for Teach for America in St. Louis is down this year. Photo by Cristina M. Fletes, cfletes@post-dispatch.com

Education

## Jennings schools increase awareness of trauma's impact on learning

By Elisa Crouch St. Louis Post-Dispatch Jul 31, 2015

**JENNINGS** • The list was a familiar one to the counselors looking at the projector screen inside the Jennings High School cafeteria.

Physical abuse. Violence to mother. Abandonment. Divorce.

The school counselors nodded their heads, indicating they have high percentages of children in their schools who have experienced a number of these traumatic events. This kind of trauma can profoundly affect nearly every aspect of a child's development and ability to function, Patsy Carter of the Missouri Department of Mental Health told them. It can hurt a child's ability to control behavior, and have negative consequences on classroom learning.

It's an approach to education that the counselors in Jennings worked for two days this week to better understand.

"This is not a free pass," Carter said to the counselors and district administrators sitting at three round tables. "But if we want their behavior to change we have to look at it through the lens of trauma and the impact."

The Jennings School District is on the forefront of work to create trauma-informed schools, places where teachers move away from suspending students for disruptive behavior, and toward looking for the root cause of the actions.

In schools with this mindset, students still face consequences for lashing out at a teacher. But teachers and counselors are trained to determine the trigger points for such action, and how to help a child move himself or herself out of stress mode.

"We really are changing mindsets about how do we work with people — parents, students and teachers," said Superintendent Tiffany Anderson, who sat through the training sessions. "We really are wrapping services around the whole child and helping them better their lives. So often systems are punitive in how they handle these issues. As educators we really can be proactive and be problem solvers to look at the root."

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate that more than half of the U.S. population has experienced at least one traumatic event during childhood. Children in high-poverty communities such as Jennings are at greater risk to experience chronic trauma.

Though many children are able to move past these experiences, others struggle throughout their life with chronic stress. That stress can lead to a long list of health problems and a shorter lifespan.

Eventually, Anderson wants every staff person in the district — from the principals to the janitors — to go through trauma training.

For the next three years, the district will be partnering with Washington University and the Pediatric Residency program at St Louis Children's Hospital to infuse the approach throughout Jennings schools. Funding comes from a grant made possible by the Missouri Foundation for Health and the American Academy of Pediatrics.

"It's more than just training," said Sarah Garwood, an assistant professor of pediatrics at Washington University.

Trauma-sensitive schools began in the state of Washington, where a principal in Walla Walla found that addressing trauma is more effective than responding to behavior with punishment alone. Other districts in Missouri, including Kansas City and Independence, are integrating this approach into their schools.

For generations, the standard response to chronic disruptive behavior has been suspension, even for children in kindergarten.

In February, [a study](#) by the Center for Civil Rights Remedies at UCLA found 3.5 million U.S. children lost almost 18 million days of instruction in the 2011-12 school year to suspensions. Keeping students out of school reduces their chances of graduation and success, a phenomenon commonly called the school-to-prison pipeline.

Black elementary school children are more likely to be suspended in Missouri than in any state in the nation, the report found. Missouri also has the greatest [disparity between how often black and white students](#) get out-of-school suspensions.

Educators are increasingly questioning whether suspending students improves their behavior. It's rare that an adult is working with students after they're sent home — on homework or behavior — often leading to more misbehavior, punishment and, eventually, academic failure.

"It's a moral imperative that we address the entire child," Monica Barnes-Boateng, assessment and data coordinator for Jennings, said during a break. "We can't begin to help them with student learning outcomes until you address their personal needs."

## Fairview Elementary is 2015 Monsanto School of Excellence



**DeAun Blumberg, Ed.D.**

Fairview Primary School principal DeAun Blumberg, Ed.D. talks with students DeMarier Jones and Jamar Hankins.

Posted: Thursday, September 10, 2015

7:15 am

By Rebecca Rivas

Fairview Primary School in the Jennings School District is just a couple of miles away from West Florissant Avenue and Canfield Drive – the area known as Ferguson Ground Zero.

After the initial unrest following Michael Brown Jr.'s death, third-grade teacher Chantel Neal gathered her students together and read them a book called "Smoky Night" by Eve Bunting. It's a picture book that tells a story of the aftermath of the Los Angeles riots following the police beating of Rodney King and the exoneration of the officers.

"The pictures mirrored that of the pictures they saw on the news and if they were present," said Neal. "It also shows how the community heals, and that it's going to be okay."

Neal was one of the Jennings teachers who helped clean up West Florissant in the days after August 9, 2014, when Brown was shot and killed by a Ferguson police officer.

Neal said helping children feel safe and loved is important to their academic achievement. Fairview has a strong "community feel" because their families live within walking distance, Neal said, but their families are also very transient. "It's not uncommon for our students to be in 10 to 12 schools by the time they are in third grade," said Neal, who has spent 16 years teaching third-graders in

the district.

Despite these challenges, Fairview students still perform well on the state's standardized tests, particularly in math. In 2015, 61 percent of Fairview students scored "proficient" in math and 40.3 percent in English on the state's tests.

On September 25, Fairview Elementary will receive this year's Monsanto School of Excellence Award at the 2015 Salute to Excellence in Education Gala, which will be held at the America's Center Ballroom.

DeAun Blumberg, who became the principal of Fairview this fall, said Jennings students and teachers are showing what is possible. Sometimes people and educators lose hope, wondering how the children can possibly succeed in the face of all these odds, she said.

"I have been able to see what the teachers are doing that's different from other places," said Blumberg, who came to Fairview from the University City School District. "I am so impressed with the rigor and the level that they are asking students to perform."

High expectations have become "operationalized" in Jennings, Blumberg said.

"They actually put procedures and policies in place that support that," she said. "Every classroom uses materials for the grade level above."

And for students who aren't keeping up, they have interventions, she said.

"In my mind, what is unique about Fairview is intentionality," she said.

She said they also benefit from how the district addresses the basic needs – both physical and emotional – of their students and families. The majority of the district's population lives in poverty, she said, and that means there are high student needs. She said they can't even think about the curriculum until they address students' basic needs, including food, clothing and social services.

Jennings is one of the few school districts in Missouri that provides free breakfast and lunch to all of its students – along with dinner for students who participate in the district's after-school programming.

"Feeding a system of positive support and possibilities can create a new system reflecting back hope, access and opportunity," Jennings Superintendent Tiffany Anderson wrote in *The American's* 2015 Diversity edition.

"Schools that do not become directly involved in implementing restorative practices that positively contribute to the physical, mental and economic health of the entire community will not improve in sustainable ways at high levels."

The district also requires uniforms, but Blumberg said they work with several companies to have most of them donated to families.

"I think that what uniforms do for a district with a high level of poverty is it levels the playing field," she said. "Everyone comes starting in the same place. Rather than focusing on the external elements, they can focus more on academic success."

Fairview has a full- and part-time guidance counselor, along with full-time social workers and onsite counseling. When families aren't able to pay utility bills, rent or unforeseen expenses, they have supports in places to help them.

Blumberg said Jennings students have proven that they can work towards academic excellence if some of their daily stresses are addressed.

"This can be replicated," Blumberg said. "This is not just a Jennings thing."

Net proceeds from the St. Louis American Foundation's four annual Salute to Excellence events benefit scholarships for local minority students, as well as educator and community grants. In 2015, the St. Louis American Foundation will foster more than \$580,000 in minority scholarships and community grants, and since its inception in 1994 the foundation, with the assistance of its educational, corporate and individual supporters, has distributed more than \$4 million locally.

The 2015 Salute to Excellence in Education Gala will be held at 7 p.m. Friday, September 25 at the America's Center Ballroom, following a reception at 6 p.m. Tickets are on sale now. Individual tickets are \$85 each/\$850 table, and VIP/Corporate tickets are \$1,500 table. For more information or to purchase tickets, visit [www.stlamerican.com](http://www.stlamerican.com) and click on Salute to Excellence, or call 314-533-8000.

## For Missouri football team, trip to Arkansas about more than football

By Adam Woodard, USA TODAY High School Sports September 29, 2015

If you've played high school football, or even if you've just attended a game, chances are you know what it's like when you're under the Friday night lights. Whether you're from a small town or a big city, public school or private, the atmosphere on a Friday night is undeniable.

However, students at Jennings (Mo.) High School don't have the opportunity to play under the bright lights. Jennings play its games on Saturdays, thanks to its close proximity to Ferguson, the site of immense social unrest and protests after the August 2014 shooting death of 18-year old Michael Brown.

"We actually missed some days of school, which meant missing a lot of practices. Our area was shut down because it was so dangerous," Jennings coach Mark Harris said. "No, we aren't the Ferguson School District, but we're neighbors separated by one street, and there's a lot of things that have given the area a bad look."

Jennings had an opening in its schedule for this season after a local high school in its conference dropped its football program after the schedules were made last spring. Harris and the athletic director Ryan Wallace decided they didn't want to have an open week, and that's when something just short of fate happened. The result was a unique opportunity to mix football and education and those elusive Friday night lights.

### The buildup

Last school year, Wallace got a call from a company that sets up out-of-state games, saying that Pulaski Academy (Little Rock, Ark.) had an opening that same week.

"So I went on the web and thought 'Wow...these guys were state champions last year...they're pretty good,'" Harris said. "Then I saw they were in Little Rock and noticed the game would be on Sept. 25, and I thought it had to be a sign."

The "sign" that Harris was referring to was that the game would be played on the 58th anniversary of the integration of Little Rock Central High School, where the historic Little Rock Nine were officially admitted into the school.

When the light bulb went off, Harris jumped at the opportunity to take his team on an "educational football trip."

### More than just a football game

In the days leading up to their trip to Little Rock, the team watched two films – *The Ernest Green Story*, and *Little Rock Central: 50 years Later* – and did worksheets created by their teachers. The team watched *The Ernest Green Story* a second time on the drive down to Little Rock and took a 20 question quiz. "We graded them and they earned 100 percents," said Harris, who's in his fourth year as the head coach. "The kids know why and how it happened and what this all means for them."

Before Friday's game, Harris took the team on a tour of Little Rock Central High School.

"We try to use football as an educational tool, and that's my biggest thing as a coach ... I'm trying to teach them to use football and those long days as training for life," Harris said. "For us to be able to come down (to Little Rock) and experience where history was made and play a football game, it's a win-win despite the score."

Even though Jennings is unlike the usual Pulaski Academy opponents, the four-time state champions didn't hesitate to invite Harris and his Jennings team to Little Rock. Located about six hours south, Pulaski provided Jennings with about \$4,000 for accommodations, including a joint-team gathering after Friday night's game where the players were given the opportunity to interact.

"If you can do something for someone else, it's always great. The more you're blessed with, the more you have the chance to give back," said Pulaski senior Justin Charette. "It's amazing that high school football gave us all the chance to do something like this."

Charette, who plays offense, defense, and moonlights as the team's rare kicker (and even drop-kicks field goals), said the experience to play and interact with kids from a completely different background gave him a whole new perspective, which is exactly what Pulaski coach Kevin Kelley wanted.

"Their coach was up front and said, 'We're the closest school to Ferguson, and I don't want to alarm you with that, but we're trying to teach our kids and be proactive in that area, and show them that it doesn't have to be that way,'" Kelley said. "When you start thinking about the Ferguson thing and the racial tension and that whole episode, it's a chance for our kids to interact with guys who went through that. It's a real life situation and a learning experience for both our kids."

"Even more than that, it's a chance for two schools from completely different backgrounds to meet on the football field, and then when it's over, to realize we're all just people and kids who want to play the same game," said Kelley. "That's a great story in itself."

### The game

Kelley and Charette didn't mince words when describing the atmosphere of a Pulaski Academy game on Friday night. Both referenced the stadium and environment as a "party" with its loud music and fog machine and the student section that numbers nearly 300.

"At PA we really do put on a show. The lights and the feeling of running through the tunnel, the fog machines and everything ... It's not even like playing a football game. It's like a big party," said Charette. "Usually everyone from Little Rock comes to our games to check us out. We're always doing something outside the box or crazy."

Jennings couldn't wait for their opportunity, either.

"The excitement had been building, and it got to a fever pitch the last few weeks when the reality set in," Harris said. "We were about to make school history and going to play a team that's nationally ranked under the lights. How often in high school do you get to do that?"

Not very often.

It was a lopsided game, with Pulaski winning 56-12. But for both sides, it wasn't the score that mattered, it was the experience.

Jennings hopes to be able to create a home-field advantage just like Pulaski in the future. The school had lights installed at its field and intends to play on Friday nights next season. It also will be the only school in its district to have a turf field.

"It felt as if it was a college game and environment. It was big time," said Jennings senior Bobby Sanders. "The trip was a great experience for my team and I to go on. To be in the same hallways as those Little Rock Nine students felt unbelievable."

Harris knew the impact this trip would have on his players.

"For my kids to come down here and get to finally play under the lights, knowing Pulaski is gonna bring the whole town out, a lot of them knew it was going to be more fun than any other game," he said. "They weren't worried about the score, they were just excited to play football."

"For most of my kids, this was a once in a lifetime trip."



Pulaski Academy and Jennings players shake hands before Friday night's game. (Photo: Sheldon Smith)

## In 'Chess Capital' of St. Louis, Game Takes Root in Poor Districts

Expansion targets region's most challenged schools

By [Denisa R. Superville](#)

Nakya Pearson discovered the joy of playing chess as a student in the Hazelwood, Mo., school district. But when the 14-year-old transferred to nearby Ferguson-Florissant schools three years ago, she had trouble finding an after-school activity that challenged her the way the game of chess had.

She did not want to play basketball, and the other after-school activities were, in her words, "kind of boring."

That all changed last semester when the Chess Club and Scholastic Center of Saint Louis and Ascension, a health-care company, [teamed up to support extracurricular chess programs](#) at 17 elementary and three middle schools in the Ferguson-Florissant district where, a year earlier, [protests erupted over the fatal police shooting of 18-year-old Michael Brown](#).

Nakya was among the 200 students to sign up for the program, which has the backing of an accomplished figure in the field: Maurice Ashley, the first African-American to become a chess grandmaster, who attended the program's launch last September.

Chess and kids make a natural marriage, Ashley said.

"It was just a wonderful idea to support those kids, folks who live in the neighborhood, who are so much more than the sum of the stories that we recently heard," he said.

Seizing on Ascension's \$45,000 donation, the Chess Club and Scholastic Center of Saint Louis launched a corporate challenge with the goal of expanding chess instruction to every school district in St. Louis County. The global manufacturing corporation Emerson, the food company Post Holdings, UMB Bank, and a local resident, Laura Lueken, are among those that have donated to make chess available this academic year at schools in the Hazelwood, Normandy, and Jennings districts, according to Lauren Stewart, the chess club's development manager.

'Intellectual Training'

Those who promote chess in schools say the game helps students with critical-thinking, complex problem-solving, and spatial skills. In a 2014 review of research on chess' educational benefits, William M. Bart, an education psychology professor at the University of Minnesota, concluded that while more rigorous research was needed, previous studies had shown evidence that "chess training has salutary cognitive and educational effects among school-aged students."

One such study indicated that chess instruction could lead to improvement in math performance among special education students. Another, by James P. Smith and Bob N. Cage, in the journal *Research in the Schools*, found that African-American students in rural Louisiana who received chess instruction performed significantly better in math than students in the study's control group.

Ashley, who has taught chess to underprivileged students, including in New York City, has seen firsthand how chess instruction can make a difference in students' lives.

"I've seen my students who may have not been interested in school, who may have not been inspired by their circumstances, when they take up chess, they feel like they've found something they can chew on, that they can bite into," he said. "And they have taken that training—that intellectual training that transfers so well into scholastics and into life—and really run with it."

Some of his students have gone on to attend top universities, including Harvard, Yale, the University of Michigan, and the University of Maryland, he said.

The push to expand chess into every district in the region makes sense given St. Louis' rich chess tradition, its [moniker as the "Chess Capital" of the United States](#), and its role as a regular host to tournaments and championship events.

"You can't throw a rock in St. Louis these days and not hit a grandmaster walking somewhere," Ashley joked.

Tiffany Anderson, the superintendent in Jennings, said without the support from Emerson, the district would not have been able to offer the program at two schools this year. Now, Jennings is contemplating adding competitive chess, and it is tracking the academic progress of students in the program to examine the game's impact on their school work, Anderson said.

The chess programs are expanding after a tumultuous year for local residents and students. Since the August 2014 shooting death of Brown, the St. Louis region and several of its largely poor and African-American public schools have been under a microscope, with calls for more robust academic offerings for students.

Chess is not expected to be a panacea for all that ails the region's school systems, but it can be a "real tool in the toolbox for teachers [and] administrators who are trying to help make change in the community," Ashley said.

And it can help train students with skills they need to succeed in life, he said. Players are challenged to make sound decisions at every moment, and those decisions have real and immediate consequences, he said.

"If you make an error, you'll end up losing the game despite the fact that you may have played a really good game for 40 moves," he said. "One mistake, and you could lose the game."

"So you have to be focused, concentrated," he continued. "You have to be very disciplined in your thinking. You have to solve all these problems moment to moment. ... It's you playing against a determined opponent, who is trying to defeat you. You have to take all these factors into account and make the right move, time after time. And that is training for life."

Seeding New Chess Programs

The seeds for the Ferguson program were planted last summer when Frankie Ragone, an 11-year-old who lives in suburban St. Louis and plays chess competitively, asked his father, Nick Ragone, whether all schools in the area offered chess like his does. Nick Ragone, the communications chief at Ascension, couldn't answer the question, and neither could anyone he asked at work the next day.

A quick call to the Chess Club and Scholastic Center of Saint Louis, where the Ragones are members, revealed that most of the public schools in the area did not offer chess programs. However, Ferguson-Florissant's new superintendent, Joseph Davis, had been inquiring about doing just that. Ragone ran to his boss with the idea of Ascension underwriting the program and got the green light to proceed.

It was just what Nakya had been looking for.

"It teaches you to think logically," she said. "I think it would be something I would be interested in competing in. I'd like to do that."

Her mother, Lakysa Jeffries, is equally happy that the district has added chess. She also likes that a program, which is not as widely available to students in the area as sports activities, is offered at no cost.

"I was especially proud of her for having an interest like that," Jeffries said. "One, she is young; two, she is female; and three, it's a mental sport."

Nakya and her mother said the game was helping the 8th grader become more independent and confident.

"It allows her to use her mind, and, like she said, be strategic about making better decisions ... as she becomes a young adult," Jeffries said. "Just the fact that it is actually helping her to be more independent and [with] her schoolwork, I feel like that will be very helpful."



Sixth graders at Woodland and Kenneth C. Hanrahan elementary schools in the Jennings, Mo., school district take part in an after-school chess program, one of several that were launched in low-income districts in the St. Louis region last fall. —Courtesy Jennings School District



Maurice Ashley, a chess grandmaster, encourages students who are learning the game of strategic skill at Walnut Grove Elementary in Missouri's Ferguson-Florissant school district. —Courtesy of Ascension

CAMPUS & COMMUNITY

## Transforming K-12 science education

The Institute for School Partnership has introduced its MySci curriculum to every elementary classroom in the Jennings School District. The result: prepared educators, inspired students

By **Diane Toroian Keaggy** • February 25, 2016

This Jennings School District Superintendent Tiffany Anderson knows: Her students will never understand science if her teachers don't. And yet, many elementary teachers are not trained to teach scientific concepts. "In primary education, the emphasis is on math and reading, as it should be," Anderson says. "But that means there can be a hesitancy to get too deep in science. We want to change that."

Anderson, who will depart at the end of the school year to lead the Topeka School District, has led a remarkable turnaround at Jennings. Since her arrival in 2012, she has stabilized district finances, boosted attendance and introduced programs to serve district's overwhelmingly low-income population. The district is now fully accredited for the first time in years.

Still, Jennings' standardized test scores lag. Though Jennings outperforms neighboring districts with high levels of poverty, fewer than 20 percent of the district's fifth-graders tested proficient in science. So Anderson enlisted the help of the Institute for School Partnership (ISP) at Washington University in St. Louis to bring its innovative MySci program to every Jennings K-5 classroom, 46 classes in all.



MySci, a cornerstone program of the ISP supported by the Monsanto Fund, provides K-8 teachers across the St. Louis region a comprehensive science curriculum and the materials to conduct hands-on experiments. And yet Victoria May, ISP executive director, understands why teachers stick to the textbook. Experiments are messy, supplies get lost, small groups get rowdy. That's why MySci works with teachers to develop and test every lesson to make sure it's clear and achievable.

"Teacher feedback is key," May says. "Once they see how this will work in their classroom, they never go back to teaching with worksheets again."

The first step is intense teacher training at the MySci warehouse at 6601 Vernon Ave., in University City. Last year, some 750 teachers from across the region learned MySci lessons and curriculum.

"It's not enough to inspire teachers, you have to prepare them," May says. "We let them know it's OK that they don't know all of this. MySci gets their confidence so they feel great about teaching science."

Students document the results of their MySci experiments in Johnnie Bowe's fourth-grade class at Fairview Primary. (Photo: James Byard)

Johnnie Bowe is one of those educators. A communication arts instructor for most of her 24-year career, Bowe wanted a change — not just what she taught, but how she taught.

"But I wasn't sure exactly how to go about it," says Bowe, who teaches at Fairview Primary. "MySci helped me and it's helping my students. The critical thinking, the collaborative work — the students are really challenged and engaged."

### 'Doing work, causing change'

On this day, Bowe is wrapping up the energy unit. So far, her students have learned different types of energy, how humans use energy and what variables affect energy. A chorus of "ooh, ooh, oohs" fills the room when Bowe asks students to define energy.

"Energy is the ability to do work and cause change," answers student Laskye Keen, who, one day, wants to go to the Moon.

"And what is a hypothesis?" Bowe asks.

"An educated guess," Marquis Hardin says.

"OK then, let's get to it," Bowe replies.

Students break into small groups to build a simple series circuit with wires, a battery and a light bulb. Everything Bowe needs for the lesson, from books to batteries, is contained in a big, red box delivered from the MySci warehouse.



Fairview Elementary teacher Johnnie Bowe says MySci has brought critical thinking and collaboration to her science class. (Photo: James Byard)

Laskye hooks one wire from the battery to the light and another from the light to the battery. The light bulb starts to glow.

"It's working, it's working!" Marquis exclaims.

But why? And how? And what happens if the circuit is arranged differently? Bowe continues to probe as the students record their results and sketch the experiment in their notebooks.

"I love doing experiments," Marquis says after class. "It's more fun than just sitting and being lazy."

Meanwhile, Anderson likes what she sees in Bowe's classroom.

"To see a teacher who has never taught science before take off like this shows the effectiveness of the program," Anderson says. "When you know that you have high expectations and a tremendous amount of support, it really changes your comfort level. You are willing to take risks. And you know where to go when you need help."

### Seeing themselves as scientists

May says MySci experiments do more than teach kids basic science, they teach them to think.

"The ability to make a claim, evaluate evidence and explain your reasoning are skills students need in English and history class, not just science," May says.

Hands-on learning also fosters creativity and resiliency. A well-designed experiment, after all, is a tantalizing "what if" frequently followed by a vexing "what now." "Every engineer knows you never get it right the first time," May says. "Scientists know the importance of persistence and resilience. It's so important to teach students, especially those who are underrepresented in the sciences, those habits of mind when they are young. By middle school and high school, the gap becomes too wide."

It is too soon to say whether MySci is impacting science scores. Bowe's students take their first standardized science test in fifth grade. Internal testing shows that students are meeting the Next Generation Science Standards, which have been adopted across the country.

Skyler Wiseman, ISP K-5 curriculum and instructional specialist, has used another measure of success at other schools.

"I've asked students at the beginning of the year to draw a picture of a scientist," Wiseman says. "I end up getting a lot of pictures of white men in lab coats blowing things up."

The photos at the end of the school year are markedly different. Now the scientists are boys and girls, black and white. They're peering through magnifying glasses, digging fossils, building spaceships.

"It gives me chills," Wiseman says. "They are able to see themselves as scientists."



Students in Johnnie Bowe's 4th-grade class at Fairview Primary perform MySci experiments. (Photo: James Byard)

"Teacher feedback is key. Once they see how this will work in their classroom, they never go back to teaching with worksheets again."

Vicky May

"Scientists know the importance of persistence and resilience. It's so important to teach students ... those habits of mind when they are young."

Vicky May

## Jennings School District regains its full state accreditation

Riverview Gardens, St. Louis, Normandy unchanged

BY JESSICA BOCK AND ALEX STUCKEY

St. Louis Post-Dispatch

**JEFFERSON CITY** • Missouri education officials voted Tuesday to give full accreditation to the high-poverty Jennings School District after it showed consistent improvement on the state's report card.

The upgrade moves Jennings from provisional accreditation. For most of the last 20 years, the district has lacked full accreditation.

But after the arrival of Superintendent Tiffany Anderson in 2012, the performance of the north St. Louis County district began to stand out from other urban schools struggling with students in poverty.

Anderson has focused on the needs of students, and created programs and projects to meet them, such as a food pantry, training for teachers on trauma's impact on behavior and most recently, a foster home. The superintendent known for wearing tennis shoes with business suits and doing crossing guard duty at district schools trimmed administrators to free up money for classrooms. She replaced teachers and principals. And she has high standards for students, beginning an accelerated college prep academy for the middle school and expanding tutoring and dual credit programs.

In the last three years, the Jennings School District has increased its score from the state, going from meeting 57 percent of standards in 2012 to 81 percent this year. Still, the challenges remain. A little more than 40 percent

See **SCHOOLS** • Page A4

## Superintendent's leadership cited in transforming Jennings School District



POST-DISPATCH FILE PHOTO

Tiffany Anderson (right), the Jennings School District superintendent, talks to a student following class in 2013. Anderson's efforts are credited with the school district regaining state accreditation.

### SCHOOLS • FROM A1

of students passed reading tests last spring, and less than 27 percent passed math tests.

The progress represents what's possible for all high-poverty communities, Anderson said. She credits their team of teachers, students and strong leaders with the achievement.

"Generational poverty leads to so much in not getting great health care or education," Anderson said Tuesday in Jefferson City. "We're on a mission to change that."

Along with Jennings, superintendents of St. Louis and Riverview Gardens school districts also requested that the Missouri State Board of Education upgrade their status. They all earned enough points on their performance report to put them in range of full accreditation. School districts are classified as accredited, provisionally accredited or unaccredited.

The board considered the accreditation classification of school districts statewide based on their scores on the

most recent annual performance report. The board also takes into account a district's performance in the two previous years when determining whether a change in classification is warranted.

But board members wanted to see a two-year trend in that range before changing the classification of Riverview Gardens and Normandy, both unaccredited.

"For folks in those two districts, don't view our inaction as being nonsupportive of what is happening in the district," said Charlie Shields, state board president. "I'm heartened by what's happening in those two districts."

An upgrade in accreditation for Riverview Gardens and Normandy would have freed them from a state law that requires districts to pay for the cost of students there to transfer to higher-performing schools. Tuition and transportation bills for the students who chose to transfer has funneled millions of dollars from the unaccredited school districts.

Similar to Jennings, St. Louis Public Schools Superintendent Kelvin Adams had asked state officials for an upgrade from provisional to full accreditation. A school system needs to have 70 percent of those points for the Missouri Board of Education to classify it as fully accredited.

This year was the first time since 2000 that St. Louis Public Schools scored high enough on the state's school district rating system to land in the accredited range. And it's the second-straight year the district has posted some of the highest gains in the state, going from earning 24.6 percent of available points in 2013 to 76.1 percent this year.

"I think you're not there yet, but you're almost there," said Michael Jones, a state board member from St. Louis. "We understand your efforts and how far (you've) come."

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# School-based health clinic established at north St. Louis County high school

Started by the School of Medicine, the clinic at Jennings Senior High addresses health and social services for teens

by [Kristina Sauerwein](#) • February 24, 2016



JAMES BYARD

Sarah Garwood, MD, an assistant professor of pediatrics at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis, discusses student health care at the newly opened clinic at Jennings Senior High School.

They help me with my problems and encourage me to do things that relax me, like painting.”

“They” represent The SPOT’s staff, including [Sarah Garwood, MD](#), an assistant professor of pediatrics at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis. This past fall, Garwood began offering students with signed parental consent forms free and confidential medical services. These include immunizations, sports physicals, routine annual exams and treatment for chronic conditions such as diabetes and asthma and illnesses like strep throat and skin rashes.

“Adolescent Medicine at Washington University approached the Jennings School District because we saw the need for health services,” said Garwood, who also sees patients at St. Louis Children’s Hospital. “We know from the medical literature that school-based health centers are an effective way to reach kids who may have unmet health and mental health needs.”

School of Medicine licensed social workers Rochelle Moore and Chardial “Chay” Samuel also help Jennings students by providing mental health counseling, budgeting tips, preventive drug and alcohol programs, job-search guidance, as well as assistance in locating community referrals for housing, legal and other quality-of-life issues.

“People at The SPOT are nice,” Dixon said. “They don’t make me feel like I’m bad because I have a lot of problems.”

Surrounded by a hallway of red lockers, an unassuming classroom door leads to The SPOT at Jennings, where space recently was modified to include two private exam rooms, counseling offices, a conference area and a quiet resting nook for students. There is also a tiny, temperature-controlled laboratory in a corner where specimens await transportation to a lab for analysis.

The Jennings student clinic is an offshoot of The SPOT in the Central West End, a Washington University drop-in clinic for youth ages 13 to 24 that opened in 2008 and has since helped nearly 12,000 patients. Garwood and physicians from the departments of pediatrics and obstetrics and gynecology oversee the free and confidential medical service at both locations.

“Every day at The SPOT in the Central West End, kids form a line at least an hour before we open,” Garwood said. “And almost every day, we have to turn kids away from medical care at The SPOT because it is hard for us to keep up with the need for our services.”

Both clinics receive funding from government agencies, nonprofits and private businesses.

Lately, life is more down than up for Autumn Dixon, an 18-year-old senior at Jennings Senior High School in north St. Louis County. On top of already taxing, typical teen problems, she lives in a high-risk neighborhood where Dixon said she must navigate “negative” relationships and “complicated” methods to meet basic needs.

Inside her home, peace and quiet prove elusive. Dixon has younger siblings and cousins and, at any given time, she may babysit for a half-dozen children including infants and toddlers as well as tweens.

“Someone is always crying, fighting, needing a diaper change or asking me for something,” Dixon said. “I want to get my schoolwork done, but I always have a little shadow following me. I get behind and I’m even more stressed.”

Fortunately, Dixon has a place to decompress at Jennings high school’s on-site health and social-services clinic called Supporting Positive Opportunities for Teens, more commonly known as The SPOT at Jennings. “They understand me here,” Dixon said. “No one bugs me.



**KRISTINA SAUERWEIN**  
Sarah Garwood, MD, examines Jennings Senior High School senior Autumn Dixon during a visit to the school's clinic.

The nonmedical portion of the Jennings clinic started in March after statistics showed the majority of youth visiting The SPOT in the Central West End came from low-income, high-risk communities in north St. Louis County. Garwood said this prompted collaboration between the School of Medicine and Jennings' school officials, who were especially concerned about student absenteeism. With few convenient health-care and social services accessible in their neighborhoods, students had to find help in other parts of the region – a problem exacerbated by limited transportation options.

“The Jennings school-based health clinic brings The SPOT model to where we want teenagers to be – in school, completing a high school degree,” said [Katie Plax, MD](#), founder and medical director of The SPOT. “If they stay in school, if their medical and mental health needs are met, students are more likely to succeed.”

The unrest in Ferguson also contributed to the need for the student clinic in Jennings, which borders Ferguson. “When Michael Brown was shot, we saw a lot of hurt and anger among the youth we serve at The SPOT in the Central West End,” said Plax, the Ferring Family Chair of Pediatrics at St. Louis Children’s Hospital and the School of Medicine. “We wanted to respond in a way that would make a difference. The SPOT at Jennings is an important response to Ferguson, a recommendation of the Ferguson Commission and a model of community partnership to change the lives of children and youth.”

Additionally, in October, the School of Medicine received a three-year, \$60,000 grant to work with the Jennings district to understand how trauma can negatively affect a child’s ability to learn in the classroom. Stressful situations familiar to many Jennings residents such as poverty, violence and substance abuse can in-

crease student behavioral problems, thwart development and incapacitate the ability to perform necessary, day-to-day activities.

The grant – given by the Missouri Foundation for Health and the American Academy of Pediatrics – supports a whole-child approach to discipline and education by focusing on how trauma impacts a child physically, mentally and developmentally. “There is a toxicity to poverty that can lead to stressful and traumatic experiences,” said Jennings Superintendent Tiffany Anderson, who has received national recognition for overhauling the once-unaccredited school district. “When students have unmet basic needs or do not know how those basic needs will be met daily, behaviors that are symptomatic of being in trauma may be viewed.”

So far this school year, the focus is on training staff – every teacher, secretary and custodian – to understand “the story behind the behavior,” Anderson said. “The whole idea behind a trauma-informed school district is that everybody is trained so that when they see a behavior, they seek to understand the story first. That changes what our response might be.”

The Jennings district also has posted a job opening for a therapeutic teacher who will be trained by Washington University specialists in trauma as well as mental health. “Transitioning students to the therapeutic teacher, as needed, allows the child to be in a safe, loving and instructional environment that will help teach that child how to function,” said Anderson, who is leaving the district at the end of the school year for a position in Kansas. “Ultimately, suspending children out of school is not productive. It’s just not. And it’s an ongoing cycle – that student misses school and is disconnected. That is not good.”

Besides working through traumas, students visiting The SPOT at Jennings also can seek reproductive health care, and girls can receive medication to regulate menstrual periods and reduce cramping.

After a recent exam, Dixon said she felt “lighter, like I can fix some of my problems. I’m feeling more upbeat than down.”

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**JAMES BYARD**  
Sarah Garwood, MD, listens to a student during an exam at the clinic in Jennings Senior High School.



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## Jennings Schools readies to open its own foster home for homeless students



Jennings School District Superintendent Dr. Tiffany Anderson, 43, pulls a new rug into place at the new Hope House on Monday, Nov. 9, 2015, in Jennings. Final touches were underway to prepare the house for the grand opening on Tuesday afternoon. Photo by J.B. Forbes, jforbes@post-dispatch.com

November 10, 2015 • BY NANCY CAMBRIA

Jennings Superintendent Tiffany Anderson has no problem getting her hands dirty with unique projects.

On Monday, there she was: on her knees laying a carpet, dragging a desk into place, teetering atop a bed to reach old curtains that needed to come down, hanging paintings, putting books on a shelf. This was after her usual morning job in the district: working as school crossing guard.

Since Anderson took the superintendent's position three years ago, she has distinguished herself as a visionary who does what needs to be done for students who have many needs and burdens.

More than 85 percent of the district's students — about 2,500 — live in poverty.

Anderson says her students have the best chance of succeeding when the district pays attention to the stress they face 24 hours a day, not just the six or so hours they are in school.

That includes homelessness.

At 3:30 p.m. Tuesday, Anderson will unveil her most ambitious project yet when the district and area leaders cut the ribbon on its new foster home, called Hope House.

The house will be home for up to 10 homeless students from the district who otherwise would end up in state care. In that court-mandated system, they probably would have to change school districts, lose credits and be separated from supportive staff, teachers and friends.

Hope House is similar to Joe's Place, created in 2006 by the Maplewood Richmond Heights School District and Crossroads Presbyterian Fellowship Church to provide a home for teenage boys in the district who are homeless or whose families are struggling to provide housing for their children.

"What we're doing here is trying to create stability for kids and for families," Anderson said. Anderson said Hope House will succeed because the entire community has a stake in it. In the past month, Jennings high school students have created colorful large-scale paintings for the bedrooms with hopeful messages. She has asked each of the schools to help decorate. Some classes have gone shopping to donate towels, kitchen goods and decorations.

Students who reside in the foster home will be in private foster care. It's an arrangement where the parent or guardian gives consent for guardianship, and the family court is not involved.



The youths will live with Virginia Robinson, a 30-year secretary in the school district who, for 10 years, raised foster children in her home.

Robinson, who is retiring from the district, said she and her 12-year-old son are eager to move in. She has no doubt that she will be caring for children she already knows from her years working in the district.

"It's a nice home. Warm and inviting," she said. "I love children, and I like to see them succeed. I like to see them smile and feel they are a part of my family."

Each child's stay at the foster home will be overseen by a foster care management team from Missouri Baptist Children's Home. Vice President Ramona Conrad-Cooper said the agency will make weekly visits to support Robinson and the students. The team will provide counseling and other services.

"The plan is always going to be, for every child and every youth, is there a way to get them back to a family member?" Conrad-Cooper said.

Anderson said she got the idea for a foster home less than two months ago when officials were examining the high number of students who suddenly find themselves with no place to go. There were 200 to 250 of them.

Many of the students just needed a place to stay until the crisis in their family was resolved and they could return home. Anderson said many district families struggle with issues such as substance abuse, temporary incarceration, mental illness and the frequent threat of eviction. Sometimes relatives cannot step up for the kids at these times.

So Anderson immediately started looking at district property. She found a vacant home at 8450

Old Lucas & Hunt Road that had previously been used as district offices.

The house had a two-burner stove in the kitchen; the dishwasher and trash compactor were old. But it had a lot of bedrooms and even some office space to conduct counseling and other group meetings.

Anderson got buy-in from the School Board, which enabled her to divert \$50,000 in capital projects for renovations to the house. Her hope — partially realized — was that the district would be able to recoup its expenses through donations of materials, labor and time.

"I told my (leadership) team they had 30 days, because the longer we take to make this a reality, the longer kids go without a permanent home."

As word got out, the St. Louis Regional Business Council donated \$10,000 to help with replacing the siding and roof. Paric Construction donated labor and materials to replace the windows, rewire the home and replace the heating and cooling system. Ashley Furniture and Weekends Only donated beds, a sectional couch and a dining set. A hotel chain donated dozens of towels.

The home still has issues. There is a gaping space in the kitchen waiting for someone to donate a large refrigerator. The ancient stove, dishwasher and oven remain, prompting Anderson to remark, "They still work." Anderson hopes that flooring can someday be replaced.

The district is covering the home's general costs, but hopes for donations of bedding, dressers, a coffee table, lamps, chairs, tables, a computer and kitchen items, including a microwave.

Even with its imperfections, Anderson views the house as a source of pride for the community. She imagines a community willing to donate food, toiletries, services and other necessities to the children who live in it.

DeAun Blumberg, principal at Fairview Elementary School, said the foster home has been a boost for everybody in the district.

"What we'll provide for these kids is hope and stability," she said. "They will not have to leave their school. They will not have to leave their teachers that know them. And they will not have to leave their friends."

### **For Your Information**

For more information, contact the Jennings School District: 314-653-8000.



By Denisa R. Superville

# Tiffany Anderson

## Confronting Poverty's Challenges, A District Regains Academic Footing

POSITION: Superintendent

DISTRICT: Jennings School District, Jennings, Mo.

EXPERTISE: Community Schools

*Jennings, Mo.*

About 75 people lined up outside Jennings Educational Training School, an alternative high school here, on a chilly day last fall, their hands stuffed into their pockets, hoods pulled to their foreheads, waiting for the food pantry to open.

In this St. Louis suburb of about 15,000 residents, nearly 44 percent of the community's households earn less than \$24,999 a year, according to U.S. Census data.

So when Tiffany Anderson, 42, became the superintendent of the local school district of about 3,000 students in April 2012, her first project was to tend to the most basic needs of students and their families. She teamed up with the St. Louis Area Food Bank to open a school-based food pantry for Jennings' struggling families. More than 90 percent of the district's students are eligible to receive federal free and reduced-price meals.

"There was a big need," said Leon Hite III, the district's safety and security coordinator, who runs the food pantry with the help of eight student volunteers and packs fresh vegetables, canned foods, and multigrain bread and pasta into cardboard cartons to distribute to 200 families every two weeks.

The pantry was just the first of many initiatives that Ms. Anderson launched over the past three years to engage the community while tackling obstacles students face outside of school that affect how they perform in the classroom.

She has installed washers and dryers in each of the district's eight schools; set up a clothing boutique in one school through a collaboration with a local nonprofit that provides free coats, socks,

undergarments, and other essential clothing to students; started home visits after a child misses two days of school; created parent classes; offered Saturday classes; started a student advisory council that allows student input on district policies; instituted meetings with the local police to discuss crime and collaborative efforts; offered dinners for students; and made a commitment that at least 30 percent of the district's employees will be alumni and residents.

Last month, an unused high school classroom became a health clinic that will serve students in its first year of operation and expand to accommodate the community in later years.

The challenge of running a suburban district with many of the chronic problems of an urban system would have led some to turn in the other direction. But those challenges were the very reasons that Ms. Anderson was excited about Jennings.

### Good Foundation

The unrest and racial strife that followed the death last August of 18-year-old Michael Brown, an African-American teenager who was shot and killed by a white police officer in the bordering community of Ferguson, Mo., have strengthened her resolve to continue to confront the deep-seated racial divisions and economic and social inequities in the St. Louis region that were brought to the fore in the aftermath of the tragedy.

Perhaps influenced by her parents' example—her father was a pastor, her mother a principal—Ms. Anderson sees her job as superintendent as one that helps to restore hope in communities that have lost theirs.

"People often have a myth about what

kids in poverty can do," said Ms. Anderson, who started her career as a teacher in neighboring

Riverview Gardens and still considers herself a teacher at heart. "It is unfortunate, and the only way to dispel that myth is to show that they can not only achieve beyond what many have thought was possible, but in a time frame that is much shorter than what many believe is possible."

With high expectations and the right support, students in high-poverty districts can thrive, she said.

"Instead of kids having a running start, they are standing in the ditch, and you want them to do a high jump," Ms. Anderson said of children who live in poverty. "They can do the high jump if you give them the right platform as a springboard."

Martin J. Blank, the president of the Washington-based Institute for Educational Leadership and the director of the Coalition for Community Schools, said:

"This is a superintendent who looks at the reality in her children's lives and says, 'What do I have to do to make this better, what can I take off the plate of my teachers so they are not faced with hungry children or children who don't have any additional learning experiences or a place to go on the weekend? How do I create a more wholesome overall environment for my young people in which they can learn?'"

When Ms. Anderson became superintendent in 2012, the district was facing a \$1.8 million deficit in its \$30 million budget, which followed years of shortfalls. Three years earlier, a state audit had publicly upbraided the district for unbridled spending and top-heavy management that it blamed for driving up costs. She got to work implementing a deficit-reduction plan the district had devised before her arrival and that relied heavily on attrition to achieve the sav-

“

People often have a myth about what kids in poverty can do.

It is unfortunate, and the only way to dispel that myth is to show that they can not only achieve beyond what many have thought was possible, but in a time frame that is much shorter than what many believe is possible.”

ings. Expenditures that did not directly affect student learning were cut. Some jobs were restructured. Curriculum specialists' positions were not filled, and instructional coaches, whose numbers were reduced, were reassigned to the classroom part time and now assist with curriculum development.

### Solid Financial Footing

By December of that first year, the deficit had been eliminated. And last year, the district had a \$500,000 surplus, said Michael O'Connell, the chief financial officer. With its fiscal affairs in order, Ms. Anderson turned her attention to the classroom and to obtaining full accreditation status in the eyes of the state department of education, which the district lost in 2008.

The superintendent hired teachers who had mastered their content areas; accelerated the curriculum; and created a specialized college-preparatory academy, where a select group of 150 students attend classes six days a week, 11 months a year, and will graduate with a high school diploma and associate degree at the same time. Collaborating with local colleges, the district increased the number of dual-credit classes it offered.

In the past two years, Jennings made steady academic progress, but it did not receive full accreditation last year despite gaining enough points—109.5 out of a possible 140 points under the Missouri School Improvement Program—to do so. Jennings was exemplary in some areas, gaining all 30 points for reaching graduation benchmarks. But it fell short in others, particularly in boosting achievement for student subgroups such as special education students. (The state changed the accreditation process and is now looking at multiple years of district data that demonstrate a continuous upward trend in improvement before making accreditation changes.)

Performance on state assessments also showed gaps. The percentage of Jennings students who are “proficient” in English/language arts in tested grades is below the state average; the same is true for math. In Algebra 2 and geometry, the percentage of Jennings' students who meet proficient levels was higher than the state average, but only a small number of the district's students took those tests.

Ms. Anderson knows there's more work to be done. “We've achieved academic improvements in ways that they have not seen in many years, but we have not

reached the goal of achieving at the highest possible levels within our state,” she said.

Jennings Mayor Benjamin Sutphin said that gaining full accreditation, at this point, is simply pro forma, and he is banking on Ms. Anderson to get the job done.

“She's got the respect of the teachers, the principals, the students, and the people in the community—this lady is unbelievable,” said Mr. Sutphin, who meets with Ms. Anderson frequently. “I would put her up as a model anywhere in the country.”

Parents are also warming up to Ms. Anderson's efforts to help students both in and out of the classroom. Janice Watkins, the mother of 4- and 8-year-old students, volunteers at the district about five hours a week. Since losing her job last spring, Ms. Watkins has also used the food pantry to make ends meet.

Ms. Watkins said she appreciates the academic rigor in the classroom and the open communication between the district and the community.

Ms. Anderson “lets us know what she expects, [and] she asks us what we expect,” Ms. Watkins said. “We actually see a face. She comes to our PTO meetings. I don't recall superintendents coming to PTO meetings. Even the kids know who she is.”

### Constant Visibility

Communication—and skillful negotiation—may explain the absence of significant pushback against Ms. Anderson's proposals. The district was already shifting to a model that emphasized data-driven instruction and community engagement, and Ms. Anderson pushed those programs into high gear. But she sought community input before rolling out the initiatives, meeting with and listening to parents, police, local politicians, business owners, and the teachers' union—the latter an unprecedented move, said Rose Mary Johnson, a member of the Jennings school board.

“People feel like there is actual, authentic conversation,” said Phillip C. Boyd, the assistant superintendent. “I think with many school districts, they see themselves as a total entity that just happens to be in a community, as opposed to being a stakeholder in the community. I think that's the big difference.”

Michael McMurrin, the president of the Jennings teachers' union, said that while there's been “quiet pushback” from some quarters, “people have looked at the re-

sults she has gotten—and you can't argue with that.”

Ms. Anderson, dressed in dark suits and her trademark white tennis shoes and socks, is a constant presence in the school buildings and on the streets. The shoes come in handy when she takes up crossing-guard duty at busy intersections and during her daily visits to each school.

At least three times a week, the superintendent leaves her home in Overland Park, Kan., at around 3 a.m. for the nearly four-hour, 270-mile drive to Jennings. On the other days, Ms. Anderson stays in St. Louis, where she teaches a course in personnel administration at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. She arrives in the district early enough to pitch in on morning duties in the schools. From there, it's a series of meetings with teachers, community members, police liaisons, parents, and school board members until she returns to the office around 5 p.m. to deal with administrative tasks.

The constant visibility is about building and strengthening relationships, Ms. Anderson said.

“No significant learning can really occur without a strong relationship—in a classroom, in a district, in a school,” she said.

Ms. Anderson is proud of the district's progress in such a short period and stressed, repeatedly, that the improvements were the results of a great team working toward a common goal.

Even a work-in-progress can offer lessons to districts serving similar populations, said Ms. Anderson.

There are no barriers to achieving at the highest levels, she said, and schools have a responsibility to actively engage and empower the communities in which they are located.

“High-poverty environments have a tremendous degree of resiliency from their youth,” Ms. Anderson said. “I think that they have resiliency from staff as well, and if you build a process—and a foundation—that is sustainable, they will improve. I believe that, and have seen that occur every place that I have been.” ■

## JENNINGS SCHOOL DISTRICT USES DISTANCE LEARNING TO PARTNER WITH SCHOOL IN GHANA

### *Jennings Partners with Dutch Komenda Basic School in Central Ghana*

Channel 4 KMOV featured Jennings School District on the March 19, 2014 newscast. The story may be viewed online at <http://www.kmov.com/home/Jennings-students-get-exposure-to-unique-foreign-exchange-program-251078491.html>.

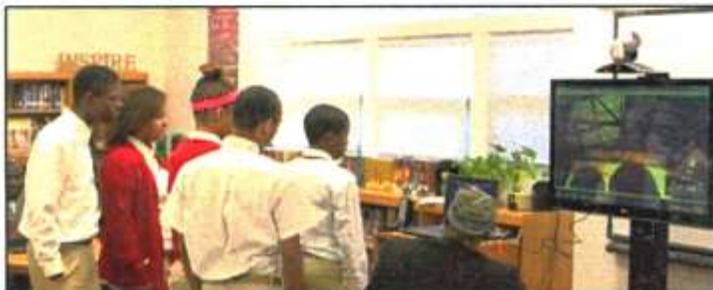
(JENNINGS, MO) Jennings is encouraging their students to become global leaders through community service projects while also learning about other cultures. In addition to the local community service projects which has included coat drives, food drives and later this month hosting a bone marrow sign up drive aimed at the African American community, the district has selected a school in Ghana to partner with as a sister school. Students will have a culminating project of Skyping with the students in Ghana. "With the current technology, we want to expose our students to classrooms around the world and help them learn more about other cultures," shared Dr. Tiffany Anderson, Jennings School District superintendent.



On Monday March 17, 2014, students from Mr. Weaver's history class at Jennings Junior High College Prep Academy participated in a distance learning activity in which they met students from a village in Ghana. Using distance learning technology, Jennings' students spoke with students from the village in Ghana and learned more about the region.

As part of the global leadership curriculum at Jennings Junior High College Prep Academy, students examined various ways in which they can impact other communities and they studied continents around the world. As part of this project students collected supplies and clothing which they mailed to the region prior to the Skyping activity. Additionally, students explored various foods which they tasted while communicating with students from the region, and at the Jennings Junior High College Prep Academy students are planning to communicate with the students they met through pen-paling with them throughout the rest of this school year and next year. Principal Melba Davis shared that it is her goal to help students examine ways in which they can be global leaders as part of the College Prep Academy experience.

The Ghana project was made possible in part due to two staff members: Mrs. Monica Barnes-Boateng who is the assessment coordinator for the district, and Ms. Jewel Jenkins, special school district coordinator. They agreed to travel to the region at their own expense to ensure the Skyping activity was successful and to also assist with ensuring the supplies were delivered directly to the region.



Superintendent Dr. Tiffany Anderson shared that it is her hope to introduce students to various regions around the world, and the distance technology equipment that is available in every classroom in every school makes this goal a reality. She also shared that she appreciated the teamwork from many individuals who helped make this project possible and she is looking forward to taking this project a step farther in the future by allowing some students an opportunity to travel to the regions that they've studied.

# This superintendent has figured out how to make school work for poor kids

By Emma Brown December 20, 2015

JENNINGS, Mo. — School districts don't usually operate homeless shelters for their students. Nor do they often run food banks or have a system in place to provide whatever clothes kids need. Few offer regular access to pediatricians and mental health counselors, or make washers and dryers available to families desperate to get clean.

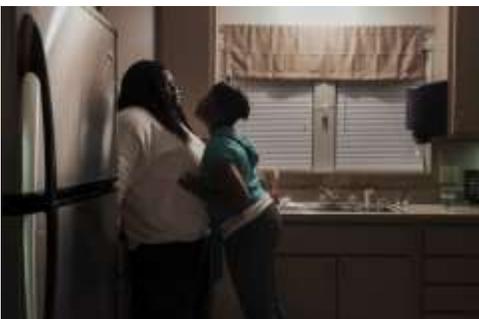
But the Jennings School District — serving about 3,000 students in a low-income, predominantly African American jurisdiction just north of St. Louis — does all of these things and more. When Superintendent Tiffany Anderson arrived here 3 1/2 years ago, she was determined to clear the barriers that so often keep poor kids from learning. And her approach has helped fuel a dramatic turnaround in Jennings, which has long been among the lowest-performing school districts in Missouri.

"Schools can do so much to really impact poverty," Anderson said. "Some people think if you do all this other stuff, it takes away from focusing on instruction, when really it ensures that you can take kids further academically."

Public education has long felt like a small and fruitless weapon against this town's generational poverty. But that's starting to change. Academic achievement, attendance and high school graduation rates have improved since Anderson's arrival, and, this month, state officials announced that as a result of the improvements, Jennings



Hope House in Jennings, Mo., on Dec. 11. The house was a school building that was converted to a shelter for homeless students. (Bonnie Jo Mount/The Washington Post)



Gwen McDile, right, chats with her boyfriend, Nicholas Branscomb, at Hope House in Jennings, Mo., on Dec. 10. This was Branscomb's first visit to the house. (Bonnie Jo Mount/The Washington Post)



Gwen McDile, left, meets with Superintendent Tiffany Anderson in Jennings, Mo., on Dec. 10. Anderson was helping McDile, 17, get a job interview. (Bonnie Jo Mount/The Washington Post)



Tiffany Anderson, the superintendent of the 3,000-student Jennings School District in Jennings, Mo., addresses college-prep students on Dec. 10. Anderson has a "hands-on" approach and visits classrooms frequently. She has brought additional funding, initiative and momentum to the district. (Bonnie Jo Mount/The Washington Post)

has reached full accreditation for the first time in more than a decade.

Gwen McDile, a homeless 17-year-old in Jennings, missed so much school this fall — nearly one day in three — that it seemed she would be unlikely to graduate in June. But then she was invited to move into Hope House, a shelter the school system recently opened to give students like her a stable place to live.

She arrived a few days after Thanksgiving. The 3,000-square-foot house had a private bedroom for Gwen, who loves writing and poetry; a living room with a plush sofa she could sink into; and — perhaps most importantly — a full pantry.

She's no longer hungry. She has been making it to class. She believes she will graduate on time.

"I've eaten more in the last two weeks than I've eaten in the last two years," Gwen said on a recent afternoon, after arriving home from school and digging into a piece of caramel chocolate. "I'm truly blessed to be in the situation I'm in right now."

There also is a new academic intensity in Jennings: Anderson has launched Saturday school, a college-prep program that offers an accelerated curriculum beginning in sixth grade, and a commitment to paying for college courses so students can earn an associate's degree before they leave high school. Anderson restored music, dance and drama programs that had been cut, as they so often are in high-poverty schools, finding the money for those and other innovations by closing two half-empty schools, cutting expensive administrative positions and welcoming new grants and a tide of philanthropic contributions. The district was running a deficit of \$2 million before Anderson arrived and balanced the budget.

Sherry Johnson said her daughter Breanna, a sixth-grader in the college-prep program, is being challenged in a way she never was before.

"I feel she's getting an education," Johnson said, speaking outside the student-run food bank, which distributes thousands of pounds of basic goods every other Thursday.

Johnson was one of 175 people who stood in line on this Thursday, each family there to pick up a box of canned goods, fresh vegetables and a turkey, special for the holidays. "It helps a lot, it kind of carries us through," said Johnson, whose family lives on her husband's disability checks.

Among those handing out food was Samuel Brown Jr., a 2015 graduate of Jennings High who works as a custodian for the district. He was one of 10 members of his graduating class who didn't find work elsewhere, and Anderson hired all of them. It was an extension of her effort to change lives by reaching beyond the classroom door.

"I've learned how it feels to be getting your own," Brown said of his first job, which pays \$9.50 an hour. "I've learned how it feels to be free."

Jennings is a town of 15,000 that borders Ferguson, Mo., where police officer Darren Wilson shot and killed Michael Brown in August 2014, [triggering months of protests](#) and the birth of the Black Lives Matter movement. Like Ferguson, Jennings is a mostly poor, mostly black town where opportunity can feel out of reach.

One-quarter of Jennings' residents are living below the federal poverty line, [according to 2014 Census Bureau data](#). The median household income is \$28,429. Just 13 percent of those age 25 and older have a bachelor's degree, half of the state average.

Yet: In 2015, 92 percent of high school students graduated on time, and 78 percent of those graduates had enrolled in the military or post-secondary training within six months of graduation, according to state data. Gov. Jay Nixon (D) invited Anderson and a student to his state of the state address this year, [praising Jennings](#) for its "big leaps forward."

Jennings still has a ways to go. Most students are not proficient in math and reading, and just 36 percent of the graduates in 2015 scored high enough on the ACT, SAT or similar tests to meet Missouri's definition of "college and career ready." But almost every academic indicator has been improving.

"What we are doing in Jennings is bigger than us," Anderson said at the end of a holiday concert this month, triggering a wave of cheers and applause. "We are giving hope where

there was no hope.”

It’s not just the support services that are making a difference, said Maureen Clancy-May, of the state education department. She said she has “no doubt that Jennings will continue to grow.”

Teachers are expected to give weekly assessments to measure student progress, and principals meet monthly with Anderson to discuss whether their schools are on track to meet goals for academic achievement and attendance.

Anderson also regularly pays new teachers a full salary to work alongside a more experienced mentor teacher for a semester or a year. And prospective hires must pass a 10-question quiz — usually in math — written for students two grade levels above the students the teacher is applying to teach. Most applicants don’t pass.

Many of the district’s initiatives, including Hope House, are done in partnership with social services organizations. But a lot of people in Jennings say that the driving force in this community’s turnaround is Anderson.

“We just needed someone who believed in us,” said Jeff Arnold, an art teacher in the district for the past 23 years. “I’m wondering if someday somebody’s going to click their heels and she’s going to go ‘poof,’ and we’re not going to have anyone else. She’s the best thing that’s happened to us in a very long time.”

Anderson, 43, has brought rapid change in a manner that is nearly the opposite of the slash-and-burn fierceness of reformers such as Michelle Rhee, [the former D.C. schools chancellor](#) who once fired a principal on television. Anderson instead uses a relentless positivity and sense of shared mission.

“Hello, Beautiful,” Anderson says, walking school corridors. “You’re awesome,” she says dozens of times each day.

“I appreciate you,” she says to the teacher working with a small group of students who are struggling in math, to the second-grader excitedly showing off his research project on dinosaurs, to the teenager who sang a solo in the holiday concert the night before.

Anderson started her career in her native St. Louis and later led Virginia’s Montgomery County schools, a 10,000-student system in southwest Virginia, for four years. In 2009, she moved to Kansas City to be closer to family, leading a charter school there until she took the job in Jennings.

Anderson’s husband, an ob-gyn, and her two college-age kids are based in Kansas City, four hours away. She keeps an apartment in Jennings, but many days she wakes up with her family at 2 a.m. on Missouri’s western border and drives to work on the state’s eastern border, arriving by 6 a.m. Then she is in constant motion, pairing her business suits and pearls with a pair of white tennis shoes as she pops in and out of schools and classrooms.

She doesn’t go to meetings, and she doesn’t drink coffee. God gives her the energy she needs, she said.

“This work is faith-filled work. You have to believe that your presence makes a difference, that your effort makes a difference in someone’s life,” she said. “Whether you wrap that in Christianity or not.”

Each morning at 7 and each afternoon at 3, Anderson picks up a stop sign and serves as a crossing guard, ushering children across one of the district’s busiest intersections. On chilly mornings, she brings a thermos of hot chocolate, doling out the steaming treat in tiny paper cups and using the moment to check in with children. “How do you know the needs of the community if you’re not in the community?” she said.

One recent Friday morning, she noticed a little boy had been crying — his brother had hit him, he said. Anderson admonished that brother when he strolled past a few minutes later. “You’re supposed to take care of him,” she said. “Go make it right. I’m watching.”

Her energy has helped persuade teachers to buy into initiatives such as Saturday school that require extra hours, said Curt Wrisberg, an elementary school principal who has worked in Jennings for more than 20 years. “If you see her doing it times a thousand, how can we not do it? She’s nonstop,” Wrisberg said.

Employees who don’t meet Anderson’s standards face heat, and some have lost or left their jobs, said Michael McMurren, president of the Jennings National Education Association. But overall, McMurren said, “she’s made Jennings School District a place where students and teachers want to be.”

Philanthropists are giving to Jennings, excited by the story that is unfolding here. The nonprofit foundation that Anderson set up to accept private donations has more than \$80,000 in the bank to pay for the shelter, which can house up to 10 homeless and foster children, and for other efforts.

The shelter emerged from a 90-year-old dilapidated house with no roof. Anderson charged her senior administrative staff members with overseeing the renovations, and she said she gave them 30 days for work to be completed. Concept to reality in one month.

And they did it.

“We need to have the urgency for other people’s children that we have for our children, so we move at warp speed,” Anderson said.

The shelter project cost an estimated \$50,000. Donors also provided all the furniture in Hope House, and a local organization specializing in foster care helped find Shelly Watts — an experienced foster mother who moved in around Thanksgiving.

Some of the kids who live at the shelter are likely to be in the child-welfare system, and Watts will receive money from the state to care for them. But there’s no state money to feed or clothe homeless kids such as Gwen. Jennings School District is footing that bill, too.

Anderson also is determined to help Gwen get a job.

She stopped by the local McDonald’s one recent morning to check on the owner’s promise to hire one student. Anderson left with a commitment to hire two, including Gwen.

Gwen had never been able to get a job despite spending her 16th birthday filling out applications. She said she was tired of depending on other people for shoes, underwear and everything else she needed and couldn’t afford. Now, she’ll be earning \$7.65 an hour, starting next week.

She gave her boyfriend a tour of the house on a recent evening. It was his first visit, the only time he would be allowed upstairs.

She pointed out a closet where she puts her shoes and a desk where she does her homework. This is the place where her life could get back on track, where she could plan for a future without worrying about being hungry or cold or on her own.

“This is a beautiful room,” he said. “Yes,” Gwen said. “I like this room.”



Gwen McDile, right, performs during a holiday show at Jennings Senior High School in Jennings, Mo., on Dec. 10. (Bonnie Jo Mount/The Washington Post)



Students deliver food packages at the Jennings School District Community Cupboard in Jennings, Mo., on Dec. 10. (Bonnie Jo Mount/The Washington Post)



Superintendent Tiffany Anderson speaks with a student in Jennings, Mo., on Dec. 10. “How do you know the needs of the community if you’re not in the community?” she said. (Bonnie Jo Mount/The Washington Post)



Gwen McDile, 17, checks messages in her bedroom at Hope House in Jennings, Mo., on Dec. 10. McDile is happy to be living at the home and said recently that she felt like she had as much to eat in the past two weeks than she had in the past two years. (Bonnie Jo Mount/The Washington Post)

## Jennings students protest for change, police agree to demands

By Bridjes O'Neil Of The St. Louis American | Posted: Saturday, December 13, 2014 6:30 am

At 6:30 a.m. on Thursday, December 11, about 80 students from the Jennings School District prepared to march from Jennings Senior High School to the city's police department. They chose to protest outside of normal school hours – in a manner that would not disrupt classes, said Jennings Superintendent Tiffany Anderson.

They first set off down Cozens Avenue toward City Hall. From there, they caught a school bus to Jennings Station Road and West Florissant Avenue, where they resumed their march. Anderson led the march with a bullhorn in hand and a pair of sneakers on her feet.

The district became the latest to participate in protests following grand jury decisions, both here and in New York, not to indict white police officers in the deaths of unarmed African Americans.

"We had class last week when all the protests were going on and students were very emotional and concerned," Anderson said.

Anderson met with students and asked them to come up with reasons why they were protesting.

"We tell them, 'Protest without progress is just noise.' And we'd rather not make noise this week," she said.

At the police station, Lt. Col. Troy Doyle with the St. Louis County Police Department facilitated positive dialogue between police and students. Doyle was joined by Sgt. Ray Rice and Officer William Munson, both with the St. Louis County Police Department. All of the officers are African-American men. Jennings contracts for police services with the county.

"We grew up in North City and North County," Lt. Col. Doyle said. "Some of us have went through the same things in regards to being harassed by the police. We can relate to their feelings."

Anderson described Lt. Col. Doyle as a "trusted member" of the community and said the students looked forward to sharing their experiences with him.

Kievonn Monger, 15, a sophomore at Jennings Senior High School, was one of those students. In a phone interview with *The St. Louis American*, Kievonn spoke of a recent encounter he had with a police officer in Jennings.

"He pulled up on me very aggressively and almost hit me with the car," Monger said.

With one hand on his gun, the officer demanded to see the boy's hands, stating that he fit the description of an armed young, black male wearing his same attire. When he was told to put his hands on the hood of the car, he said he felt like "less than a person."

"I don't agree with this stereotypical mind frame," he said of the incident.

At the police station, students – primarily eighth graders and high school students from Jennings Junior and Senior high schools – presented a list of demands. They demanded better community engagement, a platform for students to voice their concerns, an increase in the department's minority hiring to at least 15 percent by next year, and body camera use by November 2015. Lt. Col. Doyle said the demands weren't unreasonable.

They also demanded the appointment of a Special Prosecutor for police-involved fatal shootings and a change in shooting tactics.

"They don't have to shoot to kill," Monger said.

Police invited students to enroll in the teen police academy next month and agreed to conduct quarterly-scheduled meetings. With regards to appointing a Special Prosecutor, Lt. Col. Doyle advised students about the importance of voting for elected officials they want to hold office.

When asked whether the demands would be implemented throughout the entire St. Louis County, Lt. Col. Doyle said that's the plan. But as of right now, his main focus is North County.

To be in a position to make change is one reason why Monger said he still wants to be a police officer. For now, he said he hopes that police officers learn from their mistakes so that more young men won't have to die.

Lt. Col. Doyle stressed that everyone in law enforcement is not bad. But he said it's important to identify bad officers and eliminate those people from the force. The community need to see more minorities in supervisory roles within the police department, he said, and not just for appearances sake.

"People put black faces in places for the appearance," Lt. Col. Doyle said, "but don't give those people the authority to make change."



### Jennings Superintendent Tiffany Anderson marches with students

Jennings Superintendent Tiffany Anderson led district students on a protest march to the city's police department before school on Thursday, December 11.

# ROAD TESTED

Removing Roadblocks to Learning, Teaching, and Leading



TIFFANY ANDERSON

## Three Ways to Engage Parents in High-Poverty Settings

All parents want to see their children succeed. Low parental involvement is generally not an indicator of low interest, but rather of community barriers that prevent schools from effectively engaging parents. As a school leader who has served in several high-poverty environments, I have found that it is possible to remove many of these barriers and engage families in meaningful ways.

### Make Allies and Ask Questions

To begin building a positive rapport with your families, identify parents who have relationships across the community. Express how valuable their input is to your school's success and ask them to participate in a focus group. It is often hard for parents to explain why other parents are not involved, but asking specific questions can help identify barriers to engagement:

- What are the challenges you face daily? (Our parents have expressed concerns about finding jobs, feeding their families, and even washing laundry.)
- What is the most common complaint you hear from other parents about the community or its schools?
  - Are you active in any community events or organizations? If so, what are they and why are you involved?
  - Is the school or district a welcoming place?
- What are the top three neighborhood issues that parents face in the district?
  - Where do you get information about the neighborhood?

- What businesses do most families in the community frequent?

Gathering feedback and discussing solutions with these parents has helped our district generate further questions, conversations, and surveys to extend to all of our families. The more information our schools have, the more strategic we can be in providing families direct assistance through resources, education, and employment.

### Creatively Publicize Information

If your families do not often read the newspaper, have access to the Internet, or read materials that come home, consider advertising school events in other venues. In addition to using traditional methods of communication, our district places flyers at the local chop suey restaurant and in our community grocery stores. We also notify families of upcoming events through text messages, automated phone calls, and public service announcements on local radio stations.

### Become a Vehicle for the Community

When concerns about crime in our community were increasing, our district decided to sponsor a town hall meeting. We leveraged the opportunity to not only address the issue of crime, but to also engage families in sessions on achievement, community services, and school volunteerism. There are many ways to foster parental engagement, but we have been especially successful through events like these and by providing our families with basic resources.

To make your schools a true vehicle for the community, consider offering the following services:

- Host job fairs and workshops for parents on topics such as computer literacy, job placement, healthy cooking and eating, and earning a GED. These workshops, led by volunteer staff and community members, can be offered at PTA meetings or during school hours (which has the added bonus of increasing family visibility within the

Community  
News



school). Schools can waive admission fees for workshops in exchange for school volunteer hours.

- Provide bus passes for students and parents to ride to school together, or provide bus passes or cabs for parents to attend school events.
- Allow parents to wash clothing with supplies provided by the school in exchange for volunteering (one load of laundry equals one hour of volunteering in the school).
- Offer employment when possible to families within the community.
- Collaborate with community agencies such as the YMCA, neighborhood watch, local library, and recreation center—and offer to host events sponsored by these groups.
- Partner with a local thrift store or food pantry—or open one in your school—to supply families with clothing and regular access to groceries. Our district operates a school-based pantry that is run by students and staff members and stocked by the St. Louis Area Foodbank.
- In addition to providing a full meal at parent activities (workshops, parent-teacher conferences, book clubs, etc.), provide a bag of groceries to parents in attendance. We offer groceries to the first 30 families who show up at an event, and we always have more parents in attendance than groceries. Most of our elementary schools receive more than 100 families at these activities.
- Help build home libraries by providing a book to families at every parent function or every time a parent volunteers at the school. We prioritize funding for this initiative in our school operating budget, and also through donations and grants.
- Partner with social services to provide resources to families within the school such as family counseling services, mental health supports, and welfare services.

The key to high parental involvement is removing barriers by building genuine relationships that result in a culture of understanding, support, and collaboration. As our district has discovered, when we support our families, our families have been instrumental in supporting our schools. **EU**

*Tiffany Anderson (andersond@jenningsk12.org) is the superintendent of the Jennings School District and an adjunct professor at the University of Missouri.*

## Videos in the Classroom

→ continued from page 3

insights with classmates in real time. Tucker recommends extending these conversations with an online discussion platform like Collaborize Classroom to allow students the time and space to explore video content in more depth. Those conversations can be woven back into the classroom with small-group discussions for deeper learning, she notes.

Providing discussion questions and teaching students “how to take ownership of that discussion and effectively drive it forward” can pave the way for more substantive discourse around a video, says Tucker.

“Most young people do not know how to have an academic conversation about complex topics. They text, tweet, update profiles, send Snapchats, etc. Those brief informal conversations have their place in our lives as social beings, but they are not ‘academic’ conversations.”

To reverse this tendency, Tucker might ask students to read an excerpt from *The Canterbury Tales* and answer the question, “What elements of courtly love do you see evidence of in ‘The Knight’s Tale’ parts 1 and 2?” After they post their response to the online discussion board, students reply to two peers’ comments, “making connections, asking questions, and building on ideas shared.” The same collaborative activity can be achieved with a video clip, Tucker says.

## The Opposite of a Good Video

Although it is clearly a powerful learning tool for a generation that’s wired to watch, video can lose its appeal when it is overused in the classroom or lacks a real purpose. “As you plan your lesson, ask yourself if a particular topic or concept is best taught through inquiry, discovery, or direct instruction,” says Sams. “Not everything should be taught through video, so be strategic about why you’re using the medium to deliver a particular topic.”

Also, try not to use video as “filler,” which is something Sams admits to doing early in his career. “I would find some video in the library that sort of pertained to a topic I was teaching, pop it in, and hope for the best.” When that approach fell short, he learned quickly that “the opposite of a good video is off.”

By avoiding those pitfalls and investing in the development of skills that students must learn to process videos differently, teachers can turn passive consumers into active listeners. **EU**

—SARAH MCKIBBEN

## Jennings school recognized by state as 'highest performing'



Photo by Wiley Price

### Allen Willis, Jaelyn Overbey and Chloe Lovely

Fairview Primary Elementary teacher of the year Jaelyn Overbey works with third graders Allen Willis, 9, and Chloe Lovely, 8. The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has recognized Fairview as a "highest performing" and "high progress" Title I reward school.

Fairview Primary Elementary students have been celebrating ever since they received their state standardized test scores in August.

"We really knocked it out of the park," said Chanua Ross, principal of Fairview, a Jennings school that served pre-K through third grade last year and this year now goes up to sixth grade.

Last year, Fairview Primary scored 80 percent proficiency in math and 67 percent in English. Their scores soared above the state's average of 56 percent.

Now they have more to cheer. Recently, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) recognized Fairview as a "highest performing" and "high progress" Title I reward school. Fairview was the only Title I school, or disadvantaged school, in the St. Louis region to receive the recognition.

The school's high achievement is an inspiration to the Jennings School District as well as other schools in low-income neighborhoods, said Tiffany Anderson, superintendent of Jennings Schools.

"It signifies that a school that is struggling with the challenges of a high free/reduced lunch student population and underserved communities can meet the high mark," she said. "It shows that it's possible. If you have high expectations, they can do it."

Anderson feels Fairview's secret lies in the school's strong parent involvement, long tutoring hours, curriculum and wrap-around services.

One thing Ross and Anderson have learned is that they have to be just as creative with parents' engagement as with their students'. At every PTO meeting, parents receive a free 20-pound grocery bag from the schools' food pantry. For many parents, this is a big help and makes the meetings a higher priority for them, Anderson said. Fairview was also the only school to install a washer and dryer on campus last year. Parents can exchange laundry loads for school volunteer hours.

"Parents are an important piece," Ross said. "We need that piece. Our parents see that this is a school of high expectations."

Last year, the district started "Saturday School," where students who are struggling can come in for tutoring on Saturdays. Tutoring is also available every day until 6 p.m., and the school serves dinner for students who decide to stay.

Anderson said many schools in underserved communities find that students are far behind academically and aim the curriculum to meet the students where they are. The state recognition validates her belief that students will meet high expectations, she said.

In Jennings, teachers have been teaching at one grade level above, so third graders are learning fourth-grade curriculum. And even though second graders don't take the state tests, they prepare for them.

"That means teachers have to be skillful at making sure students stay engaged consistently and instruction is moving forward at a fast pace," Anderson said.

This year, the Fairview Intermediate students, grades four to six, moved into the Fairview Primary building, and Ross became the principal of both schools. In total, there are now about 450 students. Now as a joined campus, Ross said, teachers will be able to collaborate and share best practices.

"We've become one great big family," Ross said. "We have the feel of one campus. The biggest thing is collaborating and working together."

This year, Fairview also started a pilot program called the Gentlemen of Distinction class. This is a multi-age classroom for young men and led by a male teacher. Though only started this year, Ross said she has already seen an improvement in behavior and performance of the 11 students in the class.

"We are about changing lives and preparing students to be good citizens," Ross said. "I definitely see an impact on their lives."

The district also offers several family-support services, including mental-health counseling and a homeless center for parents. About 150 families in the district are homeless, Anderson said. It's important to keep retooling and reworking how to address the needs of these families, she said.

"The biggest message to the community is that our students are just as smart as any other student in Missouri, and we can achieve at the highest levels," Ross said.

For the students, the recognition validates this message, which teachers try to instill every day, Ross said.

"We always tell them that we believe in them," Ross said. "Now the message is black and white with the scores. I don't think it would have taken this for them to get the message, because this is the message they receive every day in the classroom."



PHOTOS BY ERIK M. LUNSFORD • elunford@post-dispatch.com

Dr. Tiffany Anderson, the Jennings School District superintendent, talks to a student after class last week in Jennings. Most mornings and afternoons, Anderson can be found doing crossing guard duty in various parts of Jennings to connect with the community.

## Insurance exchanges on track for Oct. 1

**Across the country** States have begun marketing enrollment information about plans.

**In Missouri** A hands-off approach has left community groups to take the lead.

BY VIRGINIA YOUNG  
vyoung@post-dispatch.com  
573-956-6181

**JEFFERSON CITY** • Across the country, states are featuring celebrities, quirky songs and football game-day ads to promote the Oct. 1 debut of the online health insurance exchanges.

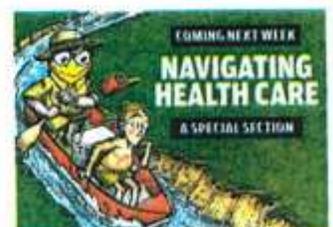
Minnesota's multimillion-dollar campaign, for example, stars Paul Bunyan and Babe the Blue Ox in zany situations in which the lumberjack unexpectedly needs medical attention — and health insurance.

It's been much quieter in Missouri. A coalition of health care providers, community groups and faith-based organizations will try to get the word out this fall to the more than 800,000 uninsured Missourians.

Their message: "Using the Missouri Health Insurance Marketplace is Easy!" declares a glossy handout prepared for the Cover Missouri coalition.

The decidedly low-profile campaign here stems from state voters' overwhelming passage last year of a law barring the governor from setting

See EXCHANGES • Page A15



## SURROUNDED BY STRUGGLES, JENNINGS SHINES

### Bringing budget in line

Superintendent eliminated central office positions and applied for more grants, pouring money back into classrooms.

BY ELISA CROUCH • ecrouch@post-dispatch.com > 314-340-8119

**JENNINGS** • Just two years ago, Sean Charleston didn't understand the point of school. He was sometimes suspended. He earned D's. He blew off homework.

But then he ended up in Karen Thompson's biomedical science class that the 20-year veteran teacher had begun teaching at Jennings Senior High School. Sean loved the class and saw that Thompson cared about his future. Now, he is determined not just to graduate high school, but college.

"That's the only way I'll be successful," said Sean, now a sophomore.

Sean's transformation is happening on a larger scale throughout the Jennings School District.

The north St. Louis County school system — which once found itself on the brink of losing state accreditation — is climbing back toward academic respectability. Parents are showing up in greater numbers to open houses and parent meetings.

See JENNINGS • Page A5

### Raising expectations

College prep track targets junior high students with longer days, extended year — and kids and parents are excited.



When Sean Charleston (left) ended up in biomedical science class with teacher Karen Thompson (center), he became determined not just to graduate high school, but college.

Success offers hope that school improvement is possible amid poverty, broken neighborhoods that are prevalent in parts of North County

Attendance is up. Discipline problems are down. Middle schoolers are visiting college campuses. That means are showing moderate gains.

Many credit the progress to Tiffany Anderson, the superintendent who wants better shoes with business suits and is not afraid to try new things. She's gotten rid of more than two dozen teachers and principals who weren't cutting it and hired about 30 new teachers. She has trimmed central office staff to five by moving for classrooms, an important step for students in an overcrowded middle school program, and another for students who need help buying books.

Most mornings and afternoons, Anderson can be found doing evening guard duty in various parts of Jennings to connect with parents and the community. She checks in with shop owners and with neighborhood leaders. Whenever there's a face she doesn't know, she introduces herself.

"If you don't have good relationships, you can't move it quickly," Anderson said. Her approach appears to be working.

The apparent reversal of Jennings' long-term trend map out of the educational crisis taking place in the St. Louis region that has about 2,000 students in unaccredited districts boarding buses each morning in search of better schools.

After broadly, the pockets of success offer hope that school improvement is possible amid the trappings of poverty and broken neighborhoods that have become increasingly prevalent in parts of north St. Louis County.

The Jennings district is outperforming the three lowest-performing school systems in the state.

To the north is Riverview Gardens, which last accreditation in 2007 and is run by a state-appointed board. To the south is the Normandy school system, stripped of accreditation in 2012. And to the east is St. Louis Public Schools, which regained provisional accreditation last year, but could lose it unless scores for this year are good enough.

And yet, when district performance ratings were released last month, Jennings far outshone all three. It scored nearly 50 percent of total points possible — just a few points shy of the 70 percent needed to be in the state of accreditation. Normandy scored 31 percent, Riverview Gardens 32 and St. Louis 24.

To be more, Jennings remains a struggling district. Eighty-seven percent of its approximately 5,500 students are eligible for a free or reduced-price lunch. The vast majority of students are below grade level in main subject areas, but 30 percent ranked at or above grade level in math this year. Thirty-one percent demonstrated grade-level proficiency in reading. Proficiency rates even fell in some grade levels at some schools.

But overall, student achievement is on an upward trend, which is why the district did so well on its state report card. The percentage of those who earned the lowest possible score on the Missouri Assessment Program is declining in several subjects.

"It's really exciting," said Maureen Clancy-May, area supervisor for the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. "They're certainly not sitting back. While they may not have large numbers of students exceeding targets or on target, they have been instrumental in moving students out of the bottom achievement levels."

Anderson is starting her second school year as superintendent. She said the district is filled with potential. She says she will get out and help students achieve. She also is increasing performing arts at all schools. There's a piano lab at the middle school. Client classes in elementary schools. Band and dance instruction at the high school.

"I tell teachers we are dispelling a myth," Anderson said. "We are dispelling a myth of what kids can't do."

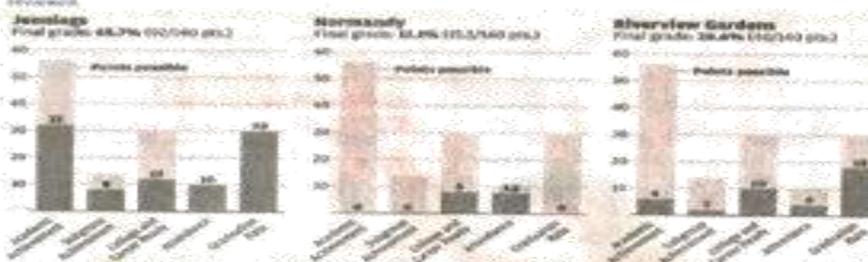


**"While they may not have large numbers of students exceeding targets or on target, they have been instrumental in moving students out of the bottom achievement levels."**

Maureen Clancy-May, Area Supervisor for the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

**GRADING NEIGHBORING DISTRICTS**

The Jennings School District has avoided the state accreditation problems of neighboring Normandy and Riverview Gardens schools. A recent state report card has revealed Jennings for recent improvements in academics, even as the district is still falling short of some standards. Below is a comparison of how the three districts were reviewed.



**Grading notes**

- Jennings started most of its academic growth by showing improvement in math and reading scores. The results in science and social studies dipped.
- Normandy started most of its academic growth by showing improvement in math and reading scores. The results in science and social studies dipped.
- Riverview Gardens started most of its academic growth by showing improvement in math and reading scores. The results in science and social studies dipped.

**PROGRESS AMID STRUGGLES**

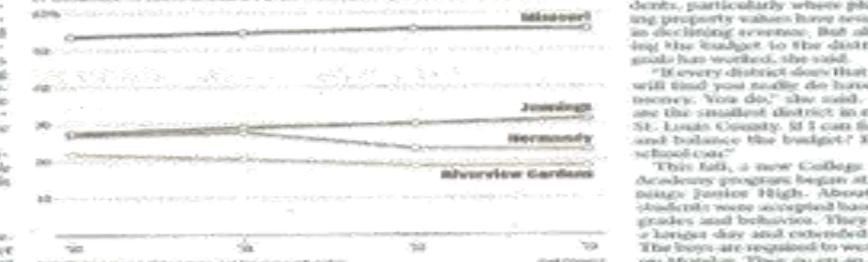
The Jennings School District has outdone three of its neighboring districts in a new state rating system. The 100 percentage-point scale looks at test scores, attendance and other factors, and rewards districts for improvement.



Source: Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

**A LONG WAY TO GO**

The Jennings School District's overall annual performance score is far higher than those of Normandy and Riverview Gardens, but when it comes to one that those of Normandy and Riverview districts have a long way to go. Below are the percentage of students in those districts who tested proficient or advanced in communication arts in 2013, compared with the state.



Anderson got her start as an elementary school teacher in the Riverview Gardens and Kirkwood school districts. She's held administrative positions in St. Louis Public Schools and in Rockwood. She's served as a superintendent in Virginia, and led a high-performing charter school in Kansas City. Last year, Anderson took a look at Jennings' budget.

The middle focuses on getting middle school students into high school one year ahead. At the high school, 54 students are taking college credit courses in math, science, English and Spanish — an expanded opportunity. The goal is to eventually help students earn an associate's degree by the time they complete high school.

Behind the high school's charge is Daryl Burdort, who had been named Missouri's assistant principal of the year in 2006 at University City High School.

Last fall, Burdort began at Jennings by telling high school students there would be no more fights. She had the main entrance repainted. She had stalls put up and graffiti removed from restrooms. She recognized that students were interested in medical careers and that they wanted their focus integrated more strongly in science classes.

Burdort also rallied behind the teachers. They needed more support and encouragement.

"I work really hard to remind them they're not just here to teach," she said. "They're here to lead."

Thompson said it's only been recently that she has hit her stride as a teacher, after almost two decades.

"We always had the talented teachers, the talented students," Thompson said. "We just needed someone to corral everyone and give us that vision. That has been the difference."

**"THE KIDS ARE EXCITED"** Parents in Jennings are taking notice.

Tawana Thompson was apprehensive when her daughter entered kindergarten at Woodland Elementary two years ago. But now she's excited that children are being taught to play musical instruments. She's happy with the new gifted program. And she would love to see her daughter eventually in the College Prep Academy.

"I'm seeing more parents at the PTO meetings and the open house," Thompson said. "The kids are excited, and they're taking it home."

It had been discouraging to watch Jennings decline, parents say. They had begun to question why their children weren't learning. Former school board member David Green said he was optimistic when Anderson arrived.

"We have a district located in the wrong direction. We could have been a Normandy or a Riverview Gardens," he said. "I've been here 15 years and I've never seen this much excitement or this much accomplishment."

Scott Charleston, the student from Woodstock's Honorable class, said he's now waking up at dawn some days to study.

"It's a passing grade," he said. "I thought since I was just passing, that's cool. But my grade point average, I've got to get that up. College look at that!"

His aunt, Kim Kingston, who has been raising him since he was 4, said teachers such as Thompson had "set him on the right track."

She sees that kind of change across the high school. "They got rid of the troublemakers or something," she said. "Now it seems stable."

**EDUCATION BY THE NUMBERS** Find your school's MAP scores, district performance, and other graphics and more. [stloday.com/education](http://stloday.com/education)

## Blog: National Partnership for Action

### How an Underrepresented School District Meets Students' Needs so They Can Excel

Posted on 2/23/2016 by [Dr. Tiffany Anderson](#)

The mission of the Jennings School District (JSD), which I oversee as Superintendent, is to ensure that each student develops a passion for learning through challenging curricula; rigorous academic standards; innovative, stimulating educational environments; and a passion that education is a life-long pursuit. I consider that to be a standard for any school district. Some people may consider that standard to be particularly challenging for Jennings, a predominantly African American school district bordering Ferguson, MO, with nearly 3,000 students—97 percent of whom qualify for free or reduced-priced lunches. When I came here in 2012, JSD was academically one of the lowest performing districts in the state, was flirting with becoming unaccredited and had lacked full state accreditation for two decades.

Upon my arrival, I found a community full of potential, yet far too many of our students were not prepared for school. I don't mean academically. Too many students weren't getting their basic needs met. Too many lived in food-insecure households, lacked stable housing and did not receive proper health care. With fundamental needs going unmet, it is easy to understand why JSD students were underperforming.

I believe that it is necessary for schools to ensure that students are prepared to learn. Schools are the center of the community. So we set out to help our students perform better academically by improving relationships and tending to social determinants of health, factors that directly affect students' learning.

JSD opened a food pantry to provide 8,000 pounds of food per month to students and their families. The district ensures that parents attending monthly Parent Teacher Organization meetings go home with bags of groceries, which can feed a family of four for two weeks with produce, non-perishables and vegetables. We started a homeless shelter, opened a free medical and mental health clinic to care for students ages 13 to 24, and installed washing machines and dryers in our schools that students can use in exchange for providing community service. We also made academic changes, aligning the curriculum to state standards, improving the skill and abilities of our teachers, starting Saturday school and hosting a college-prep program. Additionally, we reworked our budget to invest in early childhood education, teacher training, and music and art classes, all while cutting administrative costs and lower-priority items.

As a result of these and other changes, JSD became fully accredited by the state of Missouri late last year. Since 2011, we have boosted student attendance and have increased graduation rates from the low 80 percent range to 93 percent as of 2015. Missouri Governor Jay Nixon recognized JSD's achievements in his State of the State address, and in December 2015, [The Washington Post](#) # profiled the improvements in our district.

It is important to share successes so that others can understand that what has been done in Jennings is doable and to remind educators, policymakers and elected officials in all districts that it is everyone's job to ensure that students' basic needs are met so they can learn. Good work does not beget good work unless we share stories of where and how it is being done. But even when others duck their full responsibilities—such as the state falling to fully fund its share of school budgets—educators need to understand that it is up to us to help ensure our students come to school prepared.

We have to think outside the box; however, schools cannot do it alone. That is why partnerships are incredibly valuable. They reinforce the fact that we have a collective responsibility to support communities and schools. Together, we can do much more than what we can accomplish as a single school district. In our situation, the St. Louis Food Bank has been a partner in our efforts to provide four tons of food each month from our pantry. Washington University in St. Louis supports the pediatrician and clinic at our high school and our training for staff in JSD's trauma-informed outlook. Missouri Baptist Foster Home helps provide foster parents and care to our students residing in our homeless shelter, while multiple universities partner to provide dual-credit opportunities and paid student internships.

Much of supporting schools and students has to do with changing the mindsets of adults. Schools can do a lot to help level the playing field for those students whose basic needs are not being met. We want to place 100 percent of our students in college or in a job upon graduation. We take ownership of looking at every one of our students as if s/he lives in our own home. Our challenge then becomes how to leverage the resources to support them. It can be done. We are doing it in Jennings, and we are showing that it can be replicated in any community of any size or composition.

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#### About the Blog

The NPA works to achieve health equity -- the highest level of health for all people. This blog is a venue for professionals from all fields and sectors to share their thoughts on pressing issues, news and events pertaining to health equity. Follow and participate in this candid discussion.

#### About the Author

A public school educator for more than 20 years, Tiffany Anderson, EdD, has served as Superintendent of Schools in the Jennings, MO School District since 2012. This summer, Dr. Anderson will be leaving Jennings to lead the Topeka, KS School District.



#### Recent Blog Posts

- [How an Underrepresented School District Meets Students' Needs so They Can Excel](#)
- [Achieving Health Equity and Longevity for Men in Communities of Color](#)
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# COMMUNITY

POST-DISPATCH

**A LOOK BACK**

In the 1940s in St. Louis, orphans, crippled children and children who were otherwise underprivileged didn't go ignored during the Christmas season. **B3**

## School-based food banks are on the rise across St. Louis

By Jessica Bock [jbock@post-dispatch.com](mailto:jbock@post-dispatch.com) 314-340-8228 Dec 23, 2012



Jennings Community Cupboard volunteer Lonnie McJames wishes client Sha'Keela Martin happy holidays as she picks up a box of food for Christmas dinner on Thursday, December 20, 2012, in Jennings. School social workers in Jennings used to spend hours tracking down food. Now, the district has its own food pantry thanks to a partnership with the St. Louis Area Food Bank. Photo by Laurie Skrivan, [lskrivan@post-dispatch.com](mailto:lskrivan@post-dispatch.com)

The three social workers responsible for students in Jennings used to spend hours trying to find food for kids and their families.

So administrators set out to create their own school food pantry, that now, through a partnership with the St. Louis Area Foodbank, has led to full shelves at the district's alternative school on Florissant Avenue.

"We see children all the time that come to school hungry," said Shelia Nicholson, director of student services for the district of about 2,800 students, 92 percent of whom qualify for free or reduced lunch prices. "This is taking some of that load off of the social workers, and providing a service for students and their families."

The Jennings Community Cupboard opened this fall and serves any family who has a child in the school district. Its ties to the Foodbank allow the district to bring in a steady stream of food.

The poor economy of the past few years has had schools searching for ways to keep their students fed. For some children, subsidized school breakfasts and lunches are their best meals of the week. To help them through the weekend, many schools now have programs that fill backpacks with food to last until school begins again Monday.

Less common are the school-based food pantries like the one in Jennings, although the idea is catching on across the country.

In 2010, 24 food banks operated more than 437 school pantry locations nationwide, giving out the equivalent of 8 million meals, according to Feeding America, a national network of food banks. That has grown to 57 food banks participating this year, serving a total of about 18 million meals.

The Jennings location is the first school-based food pantry through the St. Louis

### Area Foodbank.

Through money from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families through the state, the St. Louis Area Foodbank began the pantry in Jennings, with a hope to add more school food pantries in the next few years.

The food bank also supports agencies that provide backpack programs, but the food pantry is another avenue to reach families who need food, said Matt Dace, senior vice president of the St. Louis Area Foodbank.

"They're helping to stock the shelves of the homes of the kids they are responsible for teaching," he said. "It's easier for a parent to grab a 10-pound bag of potatoes than a child to lug it home in their backpack."

St. Louis Public Schools also have a few pantries, including one at the International Welcome School, where churches or other organizations provide food for kids and their families. And the Maplewood Richmond Heights School District has its "Weekend on Wheels" program, which began in 2011-12, delivering the food in rolling suitcases to the homes of 13 needy families every Friday.

At Jennings, students at the Educational Training School help operate the food pantry. One recent day, Tammy Jones, 19, helped bag up macaroni and cheese, onions, cereal and canned goods for Demetrius Harris, 32.

He has four children ages 5 through 9 in Jennings schools that he's trying to feed, in addition to his wife and his aunt, who the family now lives with after being evicted last year from their rental. Harris lost his job the previous year.

"If you have kids, there is no way to explain when you run out of food," said Shirley Caldwell, who was picking up food with her daughter-in-law, Lucretia Chissem, who has three kids of her own but also has taken in others.

The pantry has received thousands of pounds of food during the last 2 1/2 months from the St. Louis Area Foodbank, including sweet potatoes and chickens during the holidays. The school-based pantry also has a grant to order fresh fruits and vegetables.

"We see this as a way to provide the care and support people who are having a tough time need," Nicholson said.



ABOVE: Amanda Browley smiles as she leaves the Jennings Community Cupboard on Thursday with a frozen turkey for Christmas dinner. LEFT: Jennings Community Cupboard volunteers Quinton White, 16 (left), and Lonnie McJames prepare boxes of food for clients to pick up. BELOW: Barbara Booker waits for a box to be packed for Christmas dinner. Photo by Laurie Skrivan, [lskrivan@post-dispatch.com](mailto:lskrivan@post-dispatch.com)





**IKEA St. Louis opens**

Promotions are ongoing at new Midtown location.

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# THE ST. LOUIS AMERICAN

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COMPLIMENTARY

## 'This is not the time to be relaxed in our schools'



Photo by Maurice Meredith

Tiffany Anderson, 2015 Stellar Performer, shared her moment in the Salute spotlight with Jennings' students Jasmine Richardson, Angel Cole and Andrew Cole. Left: Salute emcee Carol Daniel of KMOX.

## Top 2015 Salute awardees challenge capacity crowd to 'save our children'

By Chris King  
Of The St. Louis American

The St. Louis American Foundation's two top awardees at its 28th annual Salute to Excellence in Education Scholarship and Awards Gala left no doubt that it's all about the children — and the adults who must be provoked to teach them more creatively and effectively.

Both 2015 Lifetime Achiever Alice F. Roach and 2015 Stellar Performer Tiffany Anderson brought children to the stage and directly addressed them and their future needs, challenging the audience to get more involved in addressing those needs during the sold-out event on Friday, September 25.

Roach had her daughter Kim bring her grandbaby Mya to the edge of the

See AWARDEES, A7



Photo by Maurice Meredith

2015 Lifetime Achiever Alice F. Roach

## More than half-million in scholarships awarded

'This is a direct investment in our community and its future'

By American staff

Scholarship awards drew admiring whoops from a capacity crowd of 1,400 at the 28th annual Salute to Excellence in Education Scholarship and Awards Gala, held Friday, September 25 at America's Center in downtown St. Louis — and it's easy to see why.

"This year's total for scholarships and community grants is \$620,500," said Donald M. Suggs, president of the St. Louis American Foundation, which produces the black-tie event. "This funding is a direct investment in our community and its future."

With more than a half-million dollars being awarded this year, the foundation, together with its education partners, has fostered over \$4 million in scholarships and community grants since 1994.

■ "Think of the burdens that have from these parents and families with this life-changing support."

— emcee Carol Daniel

There are now minority scholarships endowed in Suggs' honor. DeAngela Burns-Wallace, assistant vice provost for Undergraduate Studies at the University of Missouri-Columbia, presented three Suggs scholarships.

Chlotte Crim, a graduate of Nerinx High School majoring in biomedical engineering, received the 2015 Donald M. Suggs Scholarship at Mizzou. The scholarship is worth \$57,000 and includes a study abroad option to study anywhere in the world for one semester.

Burns-Wallace also presented the University of Missouri-Columbia Donald M. Suggs Dissertation Fellowship awards to Ambra Green, a third-year doctoral candidate in the Department of Special Education, and Veronica Newton-Burke,

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## AWARDEES

Continued from A1

stage at America's Center in downtown St. Louis, and a black-tie audience of 1,400 listened as she told Mya what to tell the children of the future.

"We apologize for everything that is happening right now, and tell the children we will take care of them," Roach said.

Mya cheered and applauded her grandmother's words.

Roach is now administrative director of the Parsons Blewett Memorial Fund, though she dedicated most of her professional life to St. Louis Public Schools in many leadership roles, including coming out of retirement to serve as chief of staff for current SLPS Superintendent Kelvin R. Adams. She addressed the superintendent as well.

"Dr. Adams, we need some Ninja-type, radical teachers," Roach said. "This is not the time to be relaxed in our schools. We've got to save them. We can't be comfortable while our children are getting killed."

Without naming the St. Louis County municipality where it began, Roach made

reference to the Ferguson unrest, and without naming their report, she spoke with the same urgency that governs the Ferguson Commission.

"Our nation is in crisis, our city is in crisis, but wonderful things are born out of crisis," Roach said. "This is an opportunity for us. Wake up!"

**'Whatever we can do, you can do'**

2015 Stellar Performer Tiffany Anderson is superintendent of the Jennings School District. Jennings neighbors Ferguson, and her district was impacted deeply by the Ferguson unrest. She even became a protest leader, in her own way. She led Jennings students on a march to the police station in Jennings, where St. Louis County Police Lt. Col. Troy Doyle facilitated a negotiation with students over police policy.

But Anderson's primary work is on the community roots of the unrest: poverty and how it limits educational options and attainment. In *The American's* 2015 Diversity edition this July, she published a long essay that explains her strategies for, as she wrote, "improving communities by improving schools."

She works to involve the community in the schools and

to factor out the effects of poverty in any way she can. She has established many community partnerships to make good on her promise that "if you can just get your child to school, even if they don't have any clothes or food or supplies, we can take care of the rest." Every district school even has a washer and drier that parents can use for free in exchange for volunteer time.

Anderson established a creative partnership with St. Louis Community College where ambitious Jennings students can take classes at the college and graduate from high school with an associate's

degree. She brought two of these college-track Jennings students, Angel and Jasmine, on stage with her.

"It's their award," Anderson said of the students, speaking of them before she spoke of herself, which she scarcely did.

Angel and Jasmine were joined onstage by Andrew, a Jennings third grader. Like Mya the grandbaby, Andrew was adorable and composed under the bright lights, on the big stage, with an audience of 1,400 adults staring at him.

"He wants to be a math teacher," Anderson said of Andrew.

Andrew, the third-grade

future math teacher, nodded confidently in blazer and slacks.

The superintendent responsible for instituting the programs helping these students to succeed boasted of the students, but not of herself or her programs. She openly encouraged an audience mostly comprised of educators to do what she is doing.

"Whatever we do, you also can do," Anderson told the audience. "I can help you do it. When you leave here, you can help somebody else do it."

Roach, who concluded

the awards procession, would reaffirm this suggestion, but with much more fire.

"Wake up!" Roach said. "What is it you are going to do? Because these children are expecting you."

The St. Louis American Foundation presented Roach with a \$2,500 educator grant, which she donated to New Cose Brilliant Church of God to fund scholarships. The St. Louis American Foundation gave Anderson a \$1,500 education grant, which she donated to Jennings School District. The Regional Business Council also contributed \$10,000 to the district.

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# Improving communities by improving schools

## Fighting the cycle of oppression and intergenerational poverty in Jennings

By Tiffany Anderson  
Superintendent of Jennings Schools

Schools are the center of the community and when schools are transformed in positive ways, communities are transformed. The continued rise of poverty is not surprising when policies and practices that could contribute to eliminating poverty are not addressed well. The foundation of systematic oppression is rooted in practices that contribute to a system becoming self-perpetuating because the conditions are institutionalized and habits are formed that are not interrupted.

However, if habits are changed and practices that previously contributed to maintaining impoverished communities are replaced with practices that remove barriers instead of creating them, many more schools nationally would be transformed. This would ultimately give an opportunity for a new system to be created.

By creating new systems of success in school districts, we can begin to break the cycle of oppression and poverty. Jennings School District remains a work in progress, but the strides that have been made dispel myths about possibilities in urban schools. Recently, my husband and



Photo by Lawrence Hyatt

Jennings Superintendent Tiffany Anderson led district students on a protest march to the city's police department before school on Thursday, December 11 to negotiate with St. Louis County Police leadership.

I attended a Disney movie that described the enforcement of systematic oppression so simply. The main movie character in the film

"Tomorrowland" described the act of feeding two wolves. One was light and hope, and the other was hopelessness and despair. Too often we feed

despair and hopelessness and we give rise to the conditions creating hope and despair. The question in the movie was - which wolf are you going to

feed? When I began as superintendent in Jennings in 2012, we choose to feed hope and light, resulting in an entire

community working together to improve the conditions that give rise to hope and light.

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**SCHOOLS1**

*Continued from page 3*

As a wife of one of the decreasing number of OBGYNs who still accepts Medicaid and the parent of an amazing daughter who is majoring in public health at Saint Louis University, I often see the clear correlation between the investment in people and successful schools. The investment in teachers contributes to their efficacy and ultimately their positive outlook for students for the future.

The impact of the investment in mental, physical and social public health care for families in high poverty schools has a direct impact on parental school involvement and student performance. Health care for the poor is too often the emergency room and if schools are going to improve, they must invest fully in all aspects that contribute to the whole child and family developing.

**Changing districts from within**

In 2014, Jennings School District, which borders Ferguson, reached a 91 percent four-year graduation rate, which is often unheard of in communities with 98 percent minority students and with over 80 percent eligible for free lunch. In 2015 in Jennings, 100 percent now receive free lunch under the new free lunch plan.

In various ways, we give the message to our community that we expect that our students graduate prepared for the future and our practices are aligned to that message. It is imperative that district leaders set high standards and be unapologetic when working to reach those. New policies are also helpful but the practices and habits are most important.

In Jennings, we reduced staffing expenses in central office and redirected funds to support in-school discipline



From left to right, Dr. Tiffany Anderson; Woodland teacher Mrs. Wright Hardin; Billy Thompson, program director for Little Bit Foundation; a Woodland Elementary family; Mrs. Wooden, Jennings director of early childhood and after school programs and Curt Wisberg, principal at Woodland and Hanrahan Elementary. The Little Bit opened a clothing boutique at Woodland Elementary in 2014 providing new clothes and food weekly to Hanrahan and Woodland students.

models to prevent students from being placed out of school for minor infractions because we believe in restorative discipline practices. Compared to 2011, more students remain in school and more receive mental health counseling when there are infractions that require for students to be removed from a classroom.

That is an example of a change in mindsets and practices regardless of missing reform policies and funding to tackle that issue. Changes in school systems must come from within the system using the resources available. Waiting on politicians to change or fund policies can be a slow process, and the urgency

of improving systems of support for schools is critical. Additionally, politicians are so far removed from the schools, that well-intended policies

**In Jennings, we reduced staffing expenses in central office and redirected funds to support in-school discipline models to prevent students from being placed out of school for minor infractions.**

often adversely impact high-poverty schools.

Therefore, school leaders have to focus on internally creating new habits, changing mindsets and new practices become the outgrowth. In every

school turnaround I have led, we examine habits first and work with a team to create new habits by changing mindsets.

Examples: In 2012, we

opened the school district's food pantry. In 2013 we began employing 30 percent of staff as residents and alumni, and we expanded mental health services at every school. In 2014, we made a commitment

to expand the work with local partners in placing every 2015 graduating student in a postsecondary institution or in a job.

The school system has a direct impact on systematic oppression, because the school has direct influence over the outcomes for youth within the community it serves. Since 2012, in Jennings violent crime statistics are down while it has risen in surrounding communities, and housing values in Jennings are up based on assessed valuation. The school system has directly impacted the health and well-being of the families in Jennings and in return, the social, mental and physical

health of the community overall has improved.

Feeding a system of positive support and possibilities can create a new system reflecting back hope, access and opportunity. Schools that do not become directly involved in implementing restorative practices that positively contribute to the physical, mental and economic health of the entire community will not improve in sustainable ways at high levels.

I have been actively involved in eliminating achievement gaps in schools for 21 years, with 18 of those years being in leadership and the majority of that time has been as a superintendent. As a native of St. Louis, I returned to work in Jennings School District to demonstrate that a complete turnaround model in a school district could impact and transform an entire community.

The transformation did not require removing the majority of people serving the district in past years, despite what most underperforming schools systems do when systems have new leaders. The majority of the staff members and the board in Jennings have remained in the district, but mindsets about Jennings have changed.

Discussions are focused on high-performing models of success and are filled with a focus on possibilities for a better future. Every board meeting is focused on an academic state standard. Staff development focuses on standards and social justice training, and central office staff is highly visible daily in schools.

And it is paying off: Jennings moved from meeting 57 percent of the state's accreditation standards in 2012 to meeting 78 percent in 2014.

**Dismantling racism to improve schools**

The first training I have given leaders since my first

See **SCHOOLS2**, page 5

SCHOOLS2

Continued from page 4

year as a superintendent many years ago in Virginia is on dismantling racism. That training is given to leaders in every system I have led. Privileged individuals having an understanding of equity and the importance of increasing access and opportunity for the underserved is essential in changing mindsets. Reform begins with beliefs, and the belief system to bring the unheard voices

to the table to improve access and opportunities has to be unified and clear for all leaders.

The approach in Jennings to the unrest in Ferguson is an example of the unified work in this area. During the Ferguson unrest, the Jennings educators focused on the message of showing the importance of education, and they reinforced the importance of this message by staying in school and creating a list of demands they wanted addressed for the Jennings community. Students and administration marched to the police station before school to meet with top police officials.

In 2015, students presented three demands to police officials in that meeting. The demands were to increase minorities on the police force, increase community policing and require body cameras. St. Louis County Police leaders agreed to all three demands.

In 2015, the local police department's minority recruitment expanded, community policing expanded, body camera purchasing began and the Teen Police Academy tripled in enrollment, with Jennings teens making up the majority of the academy.

Partnering to address poverty

In Jennings we view unemployment and housing problems as part of our responsibility to address and we began employing eligible alumni and residents as one strategy. We also began community service cleanup efforts, and we are currently examining ways to repair homes in need through our schools.

We also partnered with the St. Louis Food Bank to provide 8,000 pounds of food to families monthly.

Any family in need of groceries uses the school system as their source for free groceries. The food bank focuses on produce and vegetables that are often the first items removed from the diet in a high poverty household.

The district also partners with agencies

to create recreational facilities in the community to improve health outcomes. Unlike many high-poverty districts, in Jennings middle-school students have recess because we believe physical activity and the promotion of physical health is vital to reducing obesity and chronic conditions in our community.

Since the community is limited in recreational facilities and has no local library, in 2013 the school system began opening on Saturdays until noon and during the week until 6 p.m., where we serve dinner at all schools. Likewise, in 2013 we redirected funds to opening a pool at the high school and building new outdoor recreational facilities at the high school, which allows the community members to utilize those spaces.

■ In Jennings, we redirected funds to ensure we maintain a free full-day preschool and kindergarten in all elementary schools.



Mona and Marcia Samuels with Dr. Tiffany Anderson and Dr. Boyd, Jennings assistant superintendent. Mona and Marcia Samuels, basketball stars who worked two jobs to help support their mother who was ill, have a full ride to college. The twins were enrolled in Flo Valley while in high school to give them a running start in college.

Achievement Gap is economic gap

The academic achievement gap contributes to an economic gap that will adversely impact the forecast for the future if it continues to widen at the current rates. Therefore, the achievement gap is a problem that everyone must seriously contribute to fixing. Simply put, the illiterate student who does not successfully graduate and get a job will become an adult that contributes to the rising poverty and is much more likely to contribute to statistics of crime and incarceration.

According to research by DeNavas-Walt on income, poverty and health insurance,

22 percent of children in our nation (or 16 million children) live in poverty. As low-skilled jobs that previously supported middle-class households 50 years ago become minimum-wage jobs, the working poor has increased and affordability of postsecondary school decreases. As the income gap rises, the opportunity gap also rises.

Interestingly, in 1964 although President Johnson focused on investments in early-childhood programs like Head Start and on stabilizing families, but currently those same programs are often reduced by states. As a result, many urban districts don't have quality early-childhood care and preschools or Parents As

Teachers programs are cut.

While Missouri has funded many priorities this year, the continued federal funding gaps adversely impact high-poverty schools overall. Currently, some federal grants provide funds to schools based on poor performance, and those who improved lose eligibility. It is our hope that behaviors and mindsets change in this regard.

In Jennings, recognizing funds are limited and are low compared to needs, we redirected funds away from needs that we could temporarily eliminate to ensure we maintain a free full-day preschool and kindergarten in all elementary schools, despite the cuts.

The fact that prisons are

predicted based on the illiteracy rate in elementary schools is a clear indicator that we understand the correlation, but steps to change the outcome have not been successfully taken.

As Ronald Edmonds, a researcher on effective schools, stated way back in 1982, "We can, whenever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of importance to us. We already know more than we need to do that. Whether or not we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact we haven't so far."

Tiffany Anderson is superintendent of the Jennings School District.

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# STUDENTS



# FIRST

# Transforming Schools & Communities

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BOARD OF EDUCATION & ADMINISTRATION**

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