



STL Equity Matters

Welcome to the 23rd edition of our newsletter: STL Equity Matters ...

How it works: We shine a light on how race, ethnicity, and gender are lived in our region.

Who is behind this: This newsletter is brought to you by the [River City Journalism Fund](#), a nonprofit journalism project formerly known as Before Ferguson Beyond Ferguson. This rebranding and new collaboration bring additional resources and brainpower that will boost reporting on local government, the environment, criminal justice, the arts, the business community, and more.

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Local journalism is in crisis. Continuing fallout from the pandemic, the ongoing erosion of print revenue and corporate hedge-fund ownership threaten local newsrooms.

We believe there is a solution.

You can learn more by reading this story in the [Gateway Journalism Review](#).

We are proud to announce that the [Jewish Fund for Human Needs](#) (JFHN) has awarded the River City Journalism Fund a \$2,000 grant to support our work in sharing the stories of marginalized communities.

The announcement notes that JFHN works to fulfill the blessings of righteous acts by awarding grants to non-Jewish agencies helping those in need throughout the St. Louis region.

“We congratulate the River City Journalism Fund and its predecessor Before Ferguson Beyond Ferguson for its innovative approach of providing content for mainstream media with a focus on racial equity,” said JFHN chair Sue Picus and Maharat Rori Picker Neiss, executive director of the [Jewish Community Relations Council](#).

In recent years, our organization worked with the Jewish Community Relations Council to share our work with hundreds of participants in a series of online sessions. RCJF is eager to engage with other agencies interested in advancing the cause of social justice in our times and in our town.

If you'd like to support RCJF, use this button:

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Let's dive in ...



Janai Holt's two older children were automatically enrolled in College Kids — and given \$50 each in seed money — during their kindergarten year at Ashland Elementary. She knows it won't be enough (Riverfront Times photo by *Braden McMakin*)

1. College Kids Comes Up Short

What's new: Freelance journalist Mike Fitzgerald, with support from the River City Journalism Fund, examined one of Mayor Tishaura Jones' signature programs, College Kids, which set up every kindergartner in a St. Louis City public or charter school with a bank account complete with seed money. It is part of a raft of national programs designed to get kids into a college mindset. But Fitzgerald found that the program is failing to reach its goals

Why it matters: College Kids aims to help the city's public- and charter-school families, especially those from the poorest

neighborhoods, save money for college and learn financial literacy.

Falling short: But seven years since the program's launch, Fitzgerald writes, College Kids has failed to attract much philanthropic investment, and all but a relatively few accounts have remained stuck at strikingly small balances. Only 15 percent of accounts have grown past the \$50 seed level. The average account is worth just \$73.

Crickets: Mayor Jones devised College Kids, launched it, and oversaw it for its first five years. She declined repeated requests for comment for this story. City Treasurer Adam Layne, who now oversees the program, remains optimistic about the program over the long haul. "The long-term vision for the program is to make sure that these students have at least \$500 saved by the time they graduate from high school," he says.

Go deeper: Read Fitzgerald's story in the [Riverfront Times](#).



Sara and Erez Haluf of West St. Louis County are planning to sell their home and leave the state to find a more hospitable place for their 10-year-old transgender daughter. (St. Louis Post-Dispatch photo by Laurie Skirvan)

2. 'It All Got Ripped Away'

What's new: With Missouri joining 18 other states in passing a law or policy that prohibits gender-affirming care for minors, parents with transgender children are in a quandary. St. Louis Post-Dispatch reporter Colleen Schrappen reports that some are stockpiling medications and looking for doctors in neighboring states; others, such as the Haluf family (photo above), are "packing up, pulling their kids from school, and saying goodbye to friends and neighbors, cousins and co-workers."

Why it matters: [Under Senate Bill 49](#), which Missouri Gov. Mike Parson signed into law last month, no one younger than 18 will be able to start puberty blockers or hormone therapy, interventions for gender dysphoria endorsed by major professional organizations such as the American Medical Association. Even more stringent measures are on the horizon.

Political refugees: "We are simply trying to protect children," said Rep. Brad Hudson. But many parents don't see it that way.

Sara and Erez Haluf told Schrappen they thought they were buying their "forever home" six years ago in West St. Louis County:

"Their three kids spend summers at the neighborhood pool and play make-believe games in the basement rec room. The Halufs could picture themselves as grandparents there, hosting rambunctious family dinners.

"In July, they are leaving those dreams behind and starting over a thousand miles away.

"We planted ourselves here,' Sara Haluf said. 'And it all got ripped away.'"

Go deeper: Read Schrappen's story in the [St. Louis Post-Dispatch](#).



Gabe Gore was sworn in as St. Louis Circuit Attorney on May 30, 2023. (St. Louis American photo by Wiley Price Jr.)

3. Gabe Gore Hits the Ground Running

What's new: St. Louis' new top prosecutor, Gabe Gore, has drawn the region's attention as he attempts to revive the Circuit Attorney's Office and dig out from a backlog of unattended cases.

Why it matters: Mo. Gov. Mike Parson and St. Louis Mayor Tishaura Jones agree on very little, but they came together in supporting Gore's appointment. He has already received praise for quickly filling vacancies that had left the office depleted

under Kim Gardner's six-year run in that office.

Measured and diplomatic: "It's abundantly clear that Gore is nothing like Gardner," writes Sylvester Brown Jr. in the St. Louis American. "Unlike Gardner, Gore has made no public declarations about tackling racial injustice, investigating police shootings, or enacting policies to address racial disparities within the criminal justice system. He is more measured, more diplomatic, and more fact-based when speaking about those issues."

Go deeper: Learn more about Gore's background and his St. Louis sensibilities in Brown's wide-ranging interview in the [St. Louis American](#).

Read the [St. Louis Post-Dispatch](#) report on Gore's press conference on Wednesday, July 19, 2023.

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READY OR NOT



4. The Heat Is On

What's new: As temperatures increase and rivers rise in St. Louis, some government and nonprofit leaders are preparing for climate-related threats. Other efforts lag badly. A three-part series in the Riverfront Times, "Ready or Not," explores the threats facing the St. Louis region, what we're doing to address them, and whether we can make a difference — before it's too late.

Part one: Climate change could only increase the urban-heat-island effect raising temperatures in St. Louis

Part two: St. Louis mangled its waterways for decades. Now there may be hell to pay,

Part three: St. Louis aims to slash greenhouse-gas emissions — but it won't be easy. The city's new energy standards have serious repercussions for building owners.



Resolution

IN RESPONSE TO RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION

The Francis Howell School District Board of Education pledges to our learning community that we will speak firmly against any racism, discrimination, and senseless violence against people regardless of race, ethnicity, nationality, immigration status, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, or ability. We will promote racial healing, especially for our Black and brown students and families. We will no longer be silent. We are committed to creating an equitable and anti-racist system that honors and elevates all, but one that also specifically acknowledges the challenges faced by our Black and brown students and families.

In the wake of Black Lives Matter protests in 2020, the Francis Howell School District adopted an anti-racism resolution. It is now on the chopping block.

5. Francis Howell School District Plans an About-Face on Racism

What's new: Back in 2020, in the wake of the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis and protests locally, the Francis Howell School Board passed a strongly worded resolution calling racism "a crisis that negatively impacts our students, our families, our community, and our staff." Now the board, with a majority of conservatives, is moving to rescind the measure.

Why it matters: The district has long been fraught with racial tension. One example: In 2013, [thousands protested](#) the arrival of Black transfer students from unaccredited Normandy schools.



From left, Julius Hunter, Dwight A. McBride and Donald Suggs.

6. People in the News

What's new: Two local icons honored. A renowned scholar in the field of race and literacy studies comes to WashU.

Julius Hunter: The George B. Vashon Museum of African American History recently opened a permanent exhibit recognizing Julius Hunter, the longtime St. Louis anchor, author, and raconteur. The Julius Hunter Media Room features a cardboard cutout of Hunter and wall-to-wall, floor-to-ceiling artifacts, awards, framed photos, videos, and other memorabilia highlighting Hunter's broadcast, print, and public-service career, which spanned four decades.

Calvin Riley and his wife, Calra, opened the museum about 10 years ago at 2223 St. Louis Ave., the site of a former mortuary, but the two had been collecting artifacts for decades before that.

By the numbers: Less than 7 percent of the student body is Black.

Reaction: “You are set to scrub our buildings of a resolution that made our Black and brown families feel seen and heard,” Francis Howell teacher Raquel Babb told the school board at a meeting July 20, 2023.

The rescind effort is sponsored by Randy Cook, the board's vice president, who was elected in 2022. Before his election, Cook wrote a [letter to the school board](#) that said he believed the anti-racism resolution was considered by some district staff “to be a mandate to implement sweeping ideological changes within the curriculum,” including critical race theory.

Go deeper: Read education reporter Blythe Bernhard's story on the issue in the [St. Louis Post-Dispatch](#).

Read more about Hunter and the museum in the [St. Louis American](#).

Dwight A. McBride: Dwight A. McBride, a leading scholar of race and literary studies, and president and university professor at the New School in New York City, is joining the faculty of Washington University in St. Louis,. McBride will be the inaugural Gerald Early Distinguished Professor, with an appointment in the Department of African and African-American Studies in Arts & Sciences. He also will serve as a senior advisor to Chancellor Andrew D. Martin.

McBride has served as president of the New School since 2020 and is widely known for his academic achievements and his innovative, interdisciplinary approach to university leadership, according to Erika Ebsworth Goold, in an article published in the Source, a WashU news and information website. McBride has written numerous books and edited volumes exploring race, Black studies, sexuality, and identity politics.

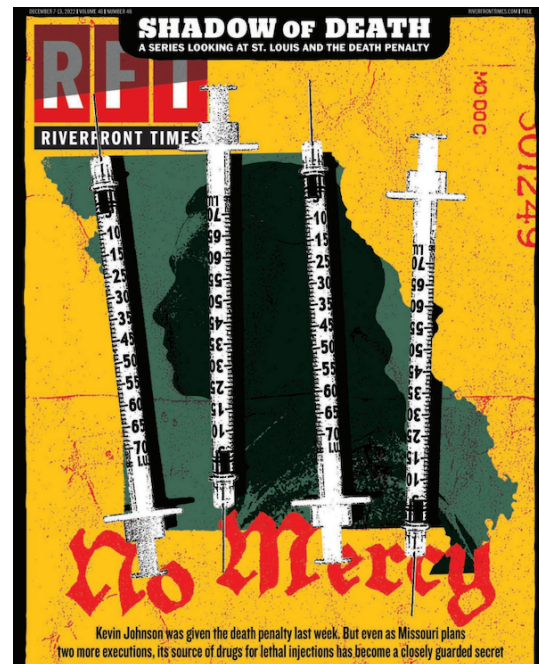
Read more about McBride at [the Source](#).

Dr. Donald Suggs: Suggs is one of five new inductees to join the Missouri Newspaper Hall of Fame in a ceremony that will be held Sept. 22, during the Missouri Press

Association's 157th Annual Convention in St. Louis.

The MPA's announcement lauds Suggs for his nearly 40 years as publisher and executive editor of the St. Louis American, during which he "has helped lead and grow the Missouri's largest weekly newspaper. He has increased access for readers and advertisers, while at the same time serving as a dedicated, energetic and enthusiastic champion of community newspapers and the Black Press."

Read more about Suggs' life and career in the [St. Louis American](#).



What's new: "Shadow of Death," a series commissioned by the River City Journalism Fund, has won the first-place prize from the Association of Alternative Newsmedia — Best Collaboration.

Why it matters: The series, which appeared over several weeks in November-December 2022 in the Riverfront Times, shone a light on the unjust ways St. Louis County has applied the death penalty.

Judge's comment: *"This well-reported package is an excellent example of the importance of good journalism to our society. The death penalty is a complicated topic about which many Americans are conflicted. This series does an excellent job of delving into the complex issues while portraying the players as real, flawed people. Terrific public service."*

Contributors to this series: Ryan Krull, Monica Obradovic, Sarah Fenske, Kathy Gilsinan, Sylvester Brown Jr., and Leyla Fern King

Go deeper: Read the coverage in the [Riverfront Times](#).



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