

IBEW Minority Caucus annual coat drive brings warmth



Before the winter chill grips the region, the Electrical Connection is distributing coats in the annual IBEW Electrical Workers Minority Caucus' (EWMC) coat drive. First stop was on Nov. 2, 2021 at the Hazelwood School District where nearly 100 coats for children were delivered by the caucus. The district will distribute the coats to children in need. The annual coat drive was launched in 2004 by Sylvester Taylor, director of diversity, equity and inclusion for the Electrical Connection. "At that time, the IBEW Minority Caucus was mentoring children served by a social service agency and we invited one of the children to a Cardinals October playoff game and he showed up without a coat on what was cold evening," said Taylor. "Navigating life in our distressed neighborhoods and thinking about the future is hard enough without the basic necessities to stay warm in the winter." Since then, the IBEW Minority Caucus has given away 15,000 coats to families in need, 11,000 of them new coats. The Electrical Connection partnership will continue to distribute coats to various agencies to distribute to children in need throughout the fall and into the winter. If you would like to support the coat drive, EWMC is looking for new coats or used coats in good condition that are appropriate for children up to the age of 18. You can drop off coats at the IBEW Local 1 union hall at 5850 Elizabeth Ave. in St. Louis.



HSD School Board Wins Outstanding Local Government Achievement Award

The Hazelwood School District Board of Education has been selected to receive a 2021 Outstanding Government Achievement Award from the East-West Gateway Council of Governments. The Board was selected for its work in diversity, equity, and inclusion.

“This recognition is a testament to the Board’s unwavering commitment to ensuring our schools are safe and supportive environments for all students,” Dr. Nettie Collins-Hart, Superintendent of HSD, said. “The Board has worked tirelessly to provide the tools our district needs to be a trailblazer in the areas of diversity, equity, and inclusion.”

In the summer of 2020, the Board began to develop a vision for addressing long-standing diversity, equity, and inclusion issues in our schools and the surrounding community. The vision resulted in a Statement of Solidarity.

The document includes concrete action steps aimed at ensuring our schools are welcoming and safe spaces for all students. With the statement in mind, the board facilitated the

“Breaking the Silence: HSD Student Voices on Racial Justice and Equity” public forum.

The forum featured emotional stories from 12 HSD students and alumni: Zaria Carson, Janci Finkley, Darnell Tabor, Joel Marriott, Tamia Coleman-Hawkins, Stephanie Hughes, Maximus Florida, Julianna Busse, Cashius Woolfolk, Kelson Parker, Jaylan Butler, and Tyrese Roby.

“The bravery and transparency our students and alumni displayed during the panel was awe-inspiring,” said Diane Livingston, President of the Board. “They are the true leaders of the positive change that is happening in our community.”

The personal stories shared during the forum helped the Board create the district’s first policy on racial equity. The policy empowers district administrators, faculty, and staff to do the work necessary to eradicate any traces of systemic racism and inequity in our learning community. The Board will accept the award during the virtual East-West Gateway Council of Governments Annual Meeting and Awards Ceremony on Nov. 17.



Thanksgiving Break Extended for Self-Care

The Hazelwood School District Superintendent, Nettie Collins-Hart, announced the district will be closed the entire week of Thanksgiving (Nov. 22- 26) for a mental health break and will not make up these days later.

“As a resource-rich district, we utilize proven strategies to address the mental wellbeing of our students and educators on a daily basis. However, as I visit schools and converse with members of our community, it is clear that time is the resource all of us need right now. Time to rest and renew,” explained Collins-Hart.

The extended break will give an opportunity to focus on self-care and family. A wealth of self-care resources can be found on the HSD website. The Ferguson-Florissant School District has also decided to extend the break, as has many of the local parochial schools.

School districts across St. Louis add extra days off this month for mental health



More than a dozen school districts across the St. Louis region will take an extended Thanksgiving break next week in response to high levels of stress among teachers and students.

“They’re just experiencing a lot of anxiety, a lot of stress being educated during a pandemic,” said Superintendent Jim Wipke of the Ladue School District. “Staff is under incredible pressure, they feel the responsibility of trying to catch kids up in terms of academics.”

More than 18 months into the pandemic and its social isolation and political battles, teachers and families called for a break for mental health. What would normally have been a couple of days off around Thanksgiving will now become a full week. The districts are generally treating the two or three extra days like snow days that are built into the calendar and don’t have to be made up. In the **event of actual snow days**, districts now can more readily pivot to online learning.

In addition to Ladue, districts that have added days off around Thanksgiving include Clayton, East St. Louis, Ferguson-Florissant, Gateway Science Academy charter network, Hazelwood, Maplewood-Richmond Heights, Normandy, Orchard Farm, Premier Charter, Riverview Gardens, St. Louis Public Schools and University City.

The added days off have been mostly well received, along with some complaints from parents on social media about the lack of time to plan for travel or child care.

“It gives us all a chance to just pause and breathe. To have a week to relax and refresh,” said Lauren Compton, a family and consumer science teacher at Clayton High School.