

Sumner High School Advisory Board

The Sumner High School Advisory Board was formed in 2021 as an auxiliary board comprised of community members who serve, support, and advance the Board's mission: To build an innovative model of community-based public education that drives student enrollment, academic achievement, and social engagement at Sumner High School.

The Board's vision is for Sumner High School to continue its tradition of Black excellence by fostering the next generation of trailblazing cultural leaders and community activists. Ultimately, Sumner High School will become an anchor that supports revitalization of The Ville neighborhood.

To get in contact with the board, email our Chairman Aaron Williams at williams.am86@gmail.com

Advisory Board Members

Aaron Williams, Chairman

Aaron Williams is active in The Ville neighborhood and as a leader in community-driven initiatives in St. Louis. He is Co-Founder and Board Chairman of 4theVille, incoming Chair for the Urban Land Institute St. Louis District Council, and a board member of Northside Community Housing, Inc. and Loyola Academy of St. Louis. He was raised in a historically Black neighborhood in Kansas City and attended the first Black high school in the city. He, and his 4theVille team, was among the principal organizers that assembled the Sumner Recovery Proposal and advocacy work to prevent Sumner High School from closure in 2021.

Tom Ridgely, Vice Chairman

Tom Ridgely is Producing Artistic Director of the St. Louis Shakespeare Festival. A Drama Desk-nominated director, he has developed or presented work at the Public Theater, The Old Globe, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival, Shakespeare Society, Red Bull and more. He also co-founded Waterwell in New York and served as its Artistic Director from 2002-2018. There he created and produced more than a dozen world-premieres and adaptations of classics that were award-nominated and widely recognized, and became known for building innovative community partnerships. He was one of the principal organizers that assembled the Sumner Recovery Proposal and advocacy work to prevent Sumner High School from closure in 2021.

Michelle Dezember, Secretary

Michelle Dezember is the Director of Learning and Engagement at the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis and also serves as the President-elect for the Board of Directors for the Museum Education Roundtable. She values creating responsive programming that addresses social need with care and leverages the role that art can play in shaping personal and collective

possibilities. She has held roles as Chief Program Officer at the Aspen Art Museum, Interim Director and founding Head of Education at Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art (Doha, Qatar), and as an educator and programmer in museums in California, New York, and Barcelona, Spain.

Nicole Hudson, Treasurer

Nicole Hudson is Assistant Vice Chancellor for the Academy of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at Washington University in St. Louis. She was previously deputy mayor for racial equity and priority initiatives for the City of St. Louis. Prior to joining the mayor's office, Hudson served as communications director for the Ferguson Commission, appointed in 2014 by Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon to study the underlying root causes that led to the unrest in the St. Louis region following the death of Michael Brown Jr., and to make policy recommendations based on the identified issues. In this role, she led communications both during and after the commission's work, with the development of the Ferguson Commission report, "Forward Through Ferguson: A Path Toward Racial Equity." She went on to serve as lead catalyst for Forward Through Ferguson, a nonprofit organization charged by the Ferguson Commission with facilitating implementation of the report, where she was responsible for strategy, funding, partnerships, community process and daily management of the organization. She is a board member for Invest STL, co-developer of STL Sandbox, and her father is a proud Sumner alum.

Warice Blackmon-Davis

Warice Blackmon-Davis is State and Federal Compliance Clerk for St. Louis Public Schools, and she has served the district for approximately 29 years. She is a proud alumna of Sumner High School, and has also attended Maryville University, Forest Park Community College, and Harris Stowe State University. In 2010, the Superintendent placed Warice on a special assignment at Sumner to support the school in meeting the goals he set to prevent Sumner from being shuttered. Through her efforts, the staff and administration were successful and Sumner remained open, and she is especially proud of having rallied the support of over 50 alumni and community volunteers. She is founder of Sumner's Ladies of the 80s and has actively supported the Sumner Alumni Association's efforts since 2006. Ms. Blackmon-Davis is a board member of 4theVille community organization and a member of the Ville Collaborative.

Michael Blackshear

Michael Blackshear is a retired School Administrator & Sumner Alumnus and native of St. Louis, MO. He holds a Master's Degree from St. Louis University, College of Public Service in Educational Leadership and a Educational Specialist Degree from Lindenwood University, where emphasis was "Identifying the characteristics, variables, qualities, and traits of schools that improve the academic achievement of African-American students." He worked for thirty-seven years as an educator at schools including Our Lady of Mount Carmel Elementary School, Normandy Senior High School, Hazelwood East High School, North Technical High School, and Cardinal Ritter College Preparatory High School. He has received several awards, including Iota Lambda Apple for the Teacher Award, Leon C. Henderson Legacy Award, Cardinal Ritter College Prep Alumni Association Legacy Award, St. Louis American Excellence in Education award, and more.

Thomasina Clarke

Thomasina Clarke is a retired Drama Instructor with St Louis Public Schools and a lifelong resident of the Ville. She is a published poet and has performed in productions with The St Louis Black Repertory Theatre Company, Shakespeare Festival St Louis, Unity Theatre Ensemble and Hot City Theatre Company. In 2021, she directed *Shakespeare in the Streets – The Ville* about the history of The Ville neighborhood. She is 4theVille Board Treasurer.

Charles E. Berry Jr.

Charles E. Berry Jr. was born and raised in St. Louis, married father of twin daughters, one son and two lovely granddaughters. He is an entrepreneur and philanthropist who has owned information technology companies providing services to Fortune 500 companies in the Saint Louis area. He was previously the owner of a video production company, providing commercial and private recording and editing services. He is a musician working exclusively for an internationally known entertainer and has traveled the world over. He is Vice President of a real estate and property management company. He joined the Sumner Advisory Board member with the goal of revitalizing Charles Sumner High School and returning it to its previous level of excellence.

Jacqueline Vanderford

Jacqueline Vanderford is a retired educator, having taught for forty years, and Sumner Alumnus. She is Co-Founder and Former President of the Sumner Alumni Association.

Alison Ferring

Alison Ferring is an artist, philanthropist and community volunteer. For over 20 years, she had a studio practice on Washington Avenue. From 1989-1991 she was co Director of MJF Arts, an alternative gallery space on Washington Avenue. In 1997-1999 she curated art shows highlighting St. Louis artists in the Mayor's Office. In 2002, she was in the inaugural class of the Contemporary Art Partnership Docent program, a collaboration between the Saint Louis Art Museum, the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis (CAM), and the Pulitzer Arts Foundation. She has served on numerous boards, including as a founding member of the Shakespeare Festival, founding member of SOS Women's Fund, Vice Chair of Laumeier Sculpture Park, and St. Louis Public Library Board and Foundation Board, where along with Tom Schlafly she co chaired the campaign for the renovation of the Central Library. She also co chaired the Endowment Campaign for CAM. Currently, she is focused on early childhood education and is the Development chair for Flance Early Learning Center. Other past boards include COCA, Places for People, Voices for Children (now CASA). She recently joined the board of the St Louis Art Museum where she serves on the Collections Committee.

Dr. Jerome Morris

Dr. Jerome E. Morris is the E. Desmond Lee Endowed Professor of Urban Education (in conjunction with St. Louis Public Schools), and he directs the Race, Class, Place, and Outcomes Interdisciplinary Research Group at the University of Missouri-St. Louis (UMSL). Morris is a co-founder of Education for Liberation—a national coalition of teachers, community

activists, researchers, youth, and parents. He serves as the Vice-President of the American Educational Research Association and partners with St. Louis-based community organizations such as Good Journey Development Foundation and Southeast Ferguson Community Association. Dr. Morris is the author of *Troubling the Waters: Fulfilling the Promise of Quality Public Schooling for Black Children* and *Central City's Blues: Race, Place, and Life in the Housing Projects of the Urban South*.

Cameron Conner

Cameron Conner is specialist for Jobs for America's programs (JAG) at Sumner High School. The program is a nonprofit employment program with the goal of helping students to graduate from high school and to make successful transitions and decisions to post-secondary education and meaningful employment.

Stephon Riggins

Stephon Riggins is a student at Sumner High School, where he serves on the Student Body Government and is active in the arts programming.

Dana Love

Dana Love is a parent of a Sumner High School student.

Dr. Sean Nichols, Ex Officio

Dr. Sean Nichols is Principal of Sumner High School. He is an educational leader, advocate, and transformative cultural leader who was born in Camden, Mississippi, on March 15, 1971. After completing high school, Nichols attended Tougaloo College, earning his B.A. in Economics in 1993; his teaching certification in 1996 from Harris Stowe State University, his M.A. degree in education administration in 2003 from University of Missouri-St. Louis; his Ed.S. degree in education administration in 2005 from University of Missouri-St. Louis and his Ed.D. degree in educational administration in 2019 from University of Missouri-St. Louis.

Staff

Jermaine Smith, Sumner High School Special Programs Director

As Special Programs Director, Jermaine Smith is responsible for coordinating the arts pathways and collaborating with numerous teaching artists and arts organizations that engage with Sumner High School students. He is a tenor who is closely associated with the role of Sporting Life, which he recently made his debut at Atlanta Opera, Metropolitan Opera Artist Contract, Teatro San Carlo in Napli, Italy, Seattle Opera and Tanglewood Music Festival with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. He has performed internationally in Japan, Germany, Sweden, Austria, The Netherlands, Italy, Spain, Sicily, The Grand Canary Islands, and Paris, and nationally at Union Ave Opera, Opera Pacific, Washington National Opera, Los Angeles Opera, St. Louis Symphony and Opera Theatre of Saint Louis. Mr. Smith is an alumnus of the New England Conservatory of Music and University of Missouri-St. Louis.