

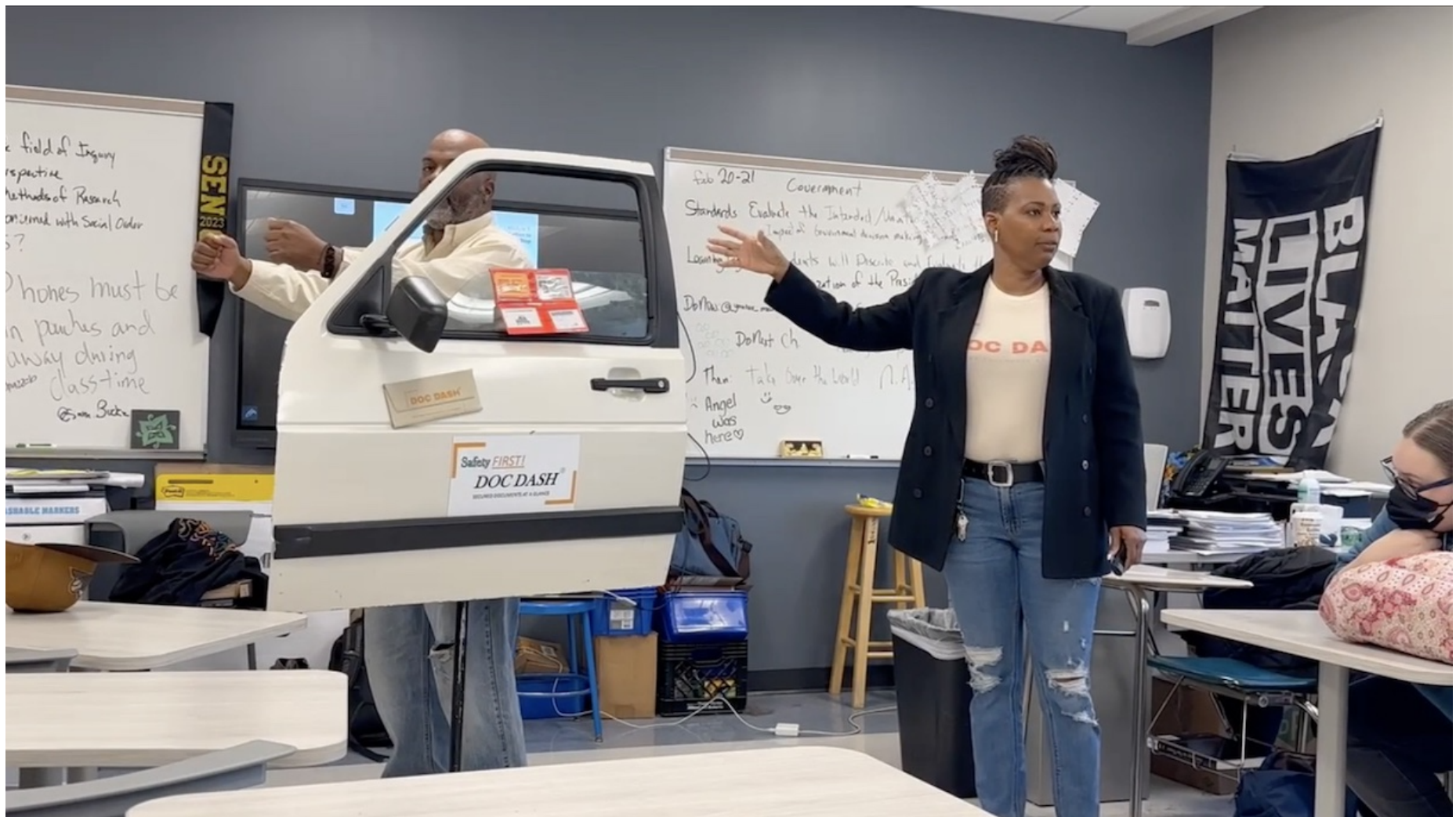
ALERT TOP STORY

Normandy High School

St. Louis company trains high school students for police encounters

Blythe Bernhard

Feb 21, 2024



WELLSTON — A few years ago Kimberly St. Clair's children were hesitant to play tennis at the park because they were scared of a police officer nearby. The mother of four said they had the choice to be paralyzed by the fear, or inspired by it.



Caryln Guthrie, 18, right, plays the role of a police officer during a traffic stop with classmates, from left, Aden Norman, 17, Charlie Brown, 17, and Amya Williams, 18, as part of the Doc Dash program on Thursday, Feb. 15, 2024, at Normandy High School. Doc Dash trains people in safe encounters with police, particularly during traffic stops.

Laurie Skrivan, Post-Dispatch

St. Clair became the founder of **Doc Dash**, a program to train people in safe encounters with police, particularly during traffic stops. The Webster University graduate wrote the curriculum and invented the accompanying billfold to hold relevant documents over the driver's side window during a stop.

Every student at Normandy High School will receive the Doc Dash role-play training this month as part of a \$30,000 grant from the Missouri Department of Transportation.

“It felt good because even though it wasn't real, I would know what to do in an effective way to cooperate with police and go on with my day,” said senior Daiona Triplett, 17, who played the driver Tuesday in a traffic stop scenario.



Kimberly St. Clair, founder of Doc Dash speaks to seniors and freshmen on Thursday, Feb. 15, 2024, at Normandy High School in St. Louis. Doc Dash focuses on a proactive procedure of communicating with police and first responders during traffic stops or medical emergencies, while displaying state required motor vehicle documents.

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Daiona said she is concerned about police and other adults stereotyping students from Normandy High School, where Michael Brown graduated from before he was killed by a Ferguson police officer in August 2014.

Doc Dash is “very beneficial because as Black people, we should know what to do.”

St. Clair starts each hourlong class wearing a dark hoodie and sunglasses to teach the class about first impressions during a police encounter. The instructor then takes off the sunglasses and hoodie and puts on a blazer.

“If I give you a different impression I’m taken more seriously,” St. Clair said. “(Police) have a job to do. They have a split second to deduce what is going on. We want them to make the right deduction from our behavior and appearance.”



"I learned to keep my hands seen at all times. I had never thought of what the police might think," said Caryln Guthrie, 18, who roleplayed a driver during a traffic stop as part of the Doc Dash program on Thursday, Feb. 15, 2024, at Normandy High School.

Laurie Skrivan, Post-Dispatch

Of course wearing a hoodie does not make someone a threat, she said. Her 16-year-old son with autism prefers to wear hoodies for a sense of security and to muffle loud noises. But she also has trained him to always say, "Be patient with me, officer, I'm on the autism spectrum" if he

interacts with police.

Her son's flat affect and lack of emotion can also be jarring to people who don't know about his background, she said. Inspired by her son and a friend who suffered speech loss due to a stroke, St. Clair invented the hanging billfold to allow drivers to quickly and clearly state any relevant medical conditions because "you don't have time to relate those nuances." The prototype pouch with clear windows for the driver's license, insurance and other information was trademarked and patented in the last couple years.

When pulled over, St. Clair recommends rolling down all windows so the police can see in the car, and turn on the overhead light if it's dark outside. Take off sunglasses and hats. Keep your hands visible, and hang the Doc Dash over the window.

"I'm not saying police haven't given us reason to fear," St. Clair said. "But we're not criminals so we're going to have a positive engagement."

Erica Ivy, who teaches AP English at Normandy High, said she was grateful her students received the training.

"The kids are phenomenal. They're intelligent," Ivy said. "They have a lot of life experience that people don't acknowledge. For me, that's tragic that you can look at a child or a teenager and think something about them automatically. But also I think having her come in to talk to the kids, now they have a plan and it can put them more at ease."

St. Clair said she plans to bring the Doc Dash program to other schools and police departments around the region.



"Always keep it inside the door so you don't have to reach for anything," said Kimberly St. Clair, founder of Doc Dash, who speaks to seniors and freshmen on Thursday, Feb. 15, 2024, at Normandy High School in St. Louis. Doc Dash focuses on proactive procedure of communicating with police and first responders during traffic stops or medical emergencies, while displaying state required motor vehicle documents.

Laurie Skrivan, Post-Dispatch



"She taught me you cannot be defensive when you are talking to the officer," said senior Charlie Brown, 17, who plays the driver during a mock police traffic stop part of the Doc Dash program on Thursday, Feb. 15, 2024, at Normandy High School in St. Louis. Doc Dash focuses on a proactive procedure of communicating with police and first responders during traffic stops or medical emergencies, while displaying state required motor vehicle documents.

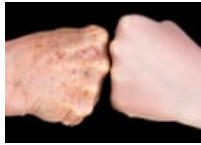
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Education reporter

