After months of preparation, planning, and collaboration, twenty-two St. Louis area high school students gathered at the Thomas F. Eagleton United States Courthouse on July 25, 2023 to participate in a full day orientation for the inaugural Supreme Court and My Hometowns program. The “Hometown” students represent 12 different high schools in Missouri and 1 in Illinois and are sophomores, juniors, and seniors at their respective schools. Students started the day with program co-coordinator Rachel Marshall in the Judicial Learning Center exploring the *Tinker v. Des Moines* exhibit which provided them context and precedent for the *Hazelwood v. Kuhlmeier* case they will study this semester. Next on the agenda was a Courthouse tour led by Jeanne Van Rhein that included many behind the scenes areas and both a district and appellate courtroom. As they visited each location, students were able to ask questions and gain a deeper understanding of how a federal courthouse operates. 

*Continued on page 3...*
Professor Lisa Hoppenjans, Associate Professor of Practice and the Director of the First Amendment Clinic at Washington University School of Law engaged “Hometown” students in a deep dive of the first amendment. She began with a discussion of why protecting freedom of speech is important. She then helped the students dissect the five freedoms of the first amendment, reviewed the incorporation of the first amendment, and explained the types of speech that are protected. Professor Hoppenjans also helped guide the students through some key vocabulary such as “prior restraint” and “public forums” which will help the students understand Hazelwood as they uncover what occurred throughout the district trial and two appeals. Students then had the opportunity to apply their learning to various scenarios based on real cases that have come before the federal courts. Finally, building off what the students saw in the Judicial Learning center, Professor Hoppenjans summarized the three main precedent cases for Hazelwood: West Virginia Board of Education v. Barnette (1943), Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District (1969), and Fraser v. Bethel School Dist. No. 403 (9th Cir. 1985). Students were engaged and asked Professor Hoppenjans excellent questions. We are grateful to her for volunteering her time and expertise for our students.

A well-deserved lunch was next on the agenda and the students were joined by members of the St. Louis Chapter of the Federal Bar Association who are volunteering their time as legal mentors. Amongst the mentor volunteers were several Assistant United States Attorneys, a Federal Defender, a Law Clerk for the Eastern District of Missouri, the Assistant General Counsel of the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, as well as numerous attorneys in private practice from Anheuser-Busch, Armstrong Teasdale, Carmody MacDonald P.C., Greensfelder, and Husch Blackwell. Probation Officer Abbie Korte joined the lunch as well and reviewed the upcoming sentencing the students saw that afternoon. The “Hometown” Program would not be possible without the incredible support from the St. Louis legal community, and we appreciate them giving of their time to work with our students.

To close the orientation, students had the remarkable opportunity to see the federal court in action when Chief Judge Stephen Clark graciously welcomed them into his courtroom for a sentencing hearing followed by a question-and-answer session. Students watched the entire court proceeding which provided them with a deeper understanding of the federal court system. After the sentencing, Judge Clark took questions about the trial process, the district court, and what it’s like to be a federal judge. His knowledge, expertise, and patience were appreciated by the students who asked questions for almost an hour! We thank Chief Judge Clark and his colleagues, especially Judge Rodney Sippel, for agreeing to host the inaugural “Supreme Court and My Hometown” at the Eastern District Court of Missouri. Students will return to the Thomas F. Eagleton Courthouse after school throughout the fall semester analyzing each level of the Hazelwood v. Kuhlmeier case and engaging with their legal mentors, local professors and experts, and case plaintiff, Cathy Kuhlmeier. They will then create an exhibit about the case for the Judicial Learning Center to share their knowledge with their peers and the St. Louis Community!