

Ascension • St. John Paul II • St. Peter Claver • St. Pascal Regional

Safety is key to trauma-informed education

Children must feel safe before they can learn, and relationships with trusted adults are key to that safety.

Ascension Catholic Academy (ACA) has partnered with the Minnesota Institute for Trauma-Informed Education (MITIE) to increase staff knowledge and skills.

A program of the University of

St. Thomas, MITIE was founded to develop, support and advance the field of trauma-informed education.

The three-year partnership is funded by a significant grant from the Sauer Family Foundation. It will provide all ACA staff an arena to convene and learn about trauma-informed practices. **Turn to Page 7**



As a reward for good work or in an effort to relax,

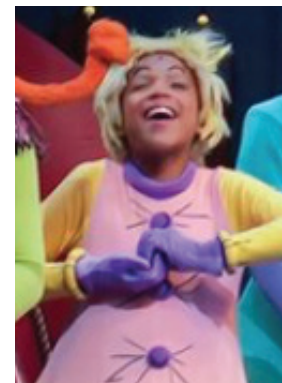
They're off to see the lizard!

There's a new therapist at St. Peter Claver Catholic School, and despite his rather rough exterior, scholars and teachers love him. Meet Fred, the bearded dragon. Middle school teacher Lauri Flatley has created a habitat for Fred in a corner of her classroom, and he's become an all-school support lizard. **Turn to Page 4.**

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Jackie Carter works to ensure the success of our teachers. **Page 6**



Ascension scholar takes to the stage

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JPII alumna is living her dream: food science

Malaya credits the rigorous education she received for her success in high school and beyond. **Page 8**

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Visit our website:
ACAmn.org



Principal Benito Matias with Etosha Kemp, assistant principal of school culture.

ASCENSION

Building a beloved school community takes time and intentionality. Having Etosha Kemp as an assistant principal helps, too!

Ms. Kemp is the driving force behind many community-building initiatives. These include a wide array of after-school clubs available to scholars and our monthly family gatherings.

We celebrated Black History Month in February with Motown Karaoke. With Ms. Kemp’s “gentle encouragement,” even I got up and pretended I was as smooth as Lionel Richie by singing “Easy.”

We had a St. Patrick’s Day dinner, and still to come is an ethnic dinner to celebrate both Cinco de Mayo and Asian Pacific Month.

These are the times that make school more than just a place to go; it becomes a place to belong. I’m sure I’m not the only one looking forward to getting together again!

Benito Matias
Benito Matias, Principal



Brave karaoke participants at the February family gathering.

Ascension’s very own citizen of Whoville!



Our talented scholars display their creativity in so many areas but few as publicly as Cortlan.

The 7th grader performed in the Children’s Theatre

Company production of “How the Grinch Stole Christmas” this winter. He was cast as the baby Grinch and as one of the Whoville children.

His journey to the stage began with an acting workshop through the ACT Pass program, which provides significant discounts for students pursuing theater education. Encouraged by his instructors and family, he decided to audition for The Grinch.

ST. PASCAL REGIONAL



The things we learn from our scholars: Fifth grader Alicia C. sorted out her stuffed animals, and on Valentine’s Day she brought them in to share with St. Pascal Kindergartners. Each child picked one to take home, and the rest will be shared in the Kindergarten classroom. What a generous way to model love!

Inna Collier Paske
Inna Collier Paske, Principal

ST. PETER CLAVER

More than 50 students from the University of St. Thomas (UST) are volunteering at our school this semester!

Literacy Tutors are working in our afterschool program. This completes our “K-5 Reading Sandwich” of Reading Partner volunteers in the morning, teacher Instruction in the middle of the day and UST tutors after school. We are seeing great improvements in our early readers already.

Terese Shimshock
Terese Shimshock, Principal

ST. JOHN PAUL II

“Your school is such a JOYFUL place to be!” a visiting principal shared. I couldn’t agree more. It is a true joy to work with the JPIL scholars every day. We are a community of constant learning. We have top-rated curriculum for reading and math, robust resources for specialist subjects and learning technology that helps bring classroom lessons to life.

This year, our professional learning is focused on math. Chris Sullivan, our outstanding middle school math teacher, has been leading monthly sessions on math instruction as part of her graduate work. Though I have been an educator for 23 years, I learn so much from each session!

We are also blessed to be able to offer Title Math services for grades 4-8 for the first time in eight years.

Our after-school enrichment opportunities have grown to include choir, book club and an expanded chess club to go along with yearbook, adventure club and conservation crew.

As we are enrolling children for 2025-26, we are pleased with the growth we have had for the past few years. We have two sections each of grades K-2. Our hope is to have two sections of each grade in the next 5-8 years!

Tricia Menzhuber
Tricia Menzhuber, Principal



Our motto at JPIL is “Be a SAINT,” but we have plenty of angels here, too. These scholars participated in our Posada celebration, a reenactment of Mary and Joseph’s search for a place to stay in Bethlehem. The Posadas are a tradition in Latin America.



Teacher Lauri Flatley points out Australia, where bearded dragons live in the wild, to middle school scholar Aayden.

Bearded dragon is a calming presence

Fred's here? Yay!" Aayden wasn't celebrating the arrival of a classmate. The St. Peter Claver (SPC) fifth grade scholar was happy to see Fred the bearded dragon, sunning himself in his classroom habitat.

Fred lives with middle school teacher Lauri Flatley. He is a good, calming pet for the whole school, Principal Terese Shimshock said. She credits Flatley with promoting the benefits of "Lizard Therapy."

"When someone holds Fred, you can just see their body relaxing," Shimshock said. "Not only scholars, teachers need it, too."

She was thrilled when Flatley, in her first year teaching at SPC, proposed setting up a reptile habitat in her classroom. The habitat has a lamp that mimics sunlight and another that provides heat. There's a shallow bowl of water and a couple of small rugs. There's a privacy shelter, a heating pad and a ramp to climb. Flatley recently set up a small artificial Christmas tree for climbing, although Fred mostly enjoys climbing on the people who hold him.

Fred has the perfect personality for his job, Flatley said. He is relaxed and curious; he likes hanging out with — and on — people. There is never an expectation that scholars interact with the reptile, and trying to scare classmates uncomfortable with Fred is strictly prohibited for everyone's safety.

In mid-February, Fred was just coming out of brumation, which is similar to hibernation. He was thinner than usual because of that, but he is becoming more active again. Flatley brings Fred to school ensconced in a heated blanket that plugs into her car. The warm blanket goes into an insulated carrier that is wrapped in another blanket.

It's fun to watch scholars interact with Fred, Flatley said. "Holding him does help scholars calm down because they can't be wild with him in their hands," she said. "It brings them out of themselves, having to care for another creature."

Brayden, a second grade scholar, has a "Fred Pass" that he uses every morning. His teacher, Maria Osterbauer, said that Brayden once had his own bearded dragon and that she thought Fred would give Brayden "a little extra boost to feel excited about learning." It's clear that Fred, climbing up Brayden's chest and over his shoulder, is comfortable with the relationship as well.

Jahazirr, who loves all animals, is another second grade scholar who regularly visits Fred. For her, it's a special treat at the end of the week.

"We all love Fred in second grade," Osterbauer said. "I have talked with the whole class about how he is a special tool to help us learn. We also tie Fred into discussions about equity: Everyone gets what they need to be successful here at SPC."

Gelila, a 5th grade scholar, also likes to hold Fred. She is not afraid of him but wouldn't want a bearded dragon as a pet: "They eat bugs, and I don't like bugs. I'm more afraid of bugs than Fred!"

Fred loves to climb to the top of Brayden's head, and he sprawls out on Flatley's shoulders.



As an instructional coach at Ascension Catholic Academy (ACA), Jackie Carter's ultimate goal is to ensure teachers have what they need to be successful. Before moving to her current role in 2023, she taught at St. John Paul II for three years.

She's the coach for ACA's teaching team

What did you enjoy most about teaching?

As a teacher, my scholars brought me the most joy. It started with their morning greeting of choice: a smile, hug, fist bump or thumbs up, and continued throughout the day. I loved witnessing the expression of wonder and the joy on their faces when, through their hard work and reflective thinking, they learned something new. It was especially touching when scholars from previous years stopped by to say hello and share a moment. These interactions truly highlighted the joys I received as an educator.

How would you describe your current role at ACA as an instructional coach?

A significant portion of my role is coaching teachers in our phonics program, Believe and Read. This program provides early literacy skills to our K-4 scholars. ... Teachers receive one year of weekly lesson modeling or observations, one-on-one weekly coaching sessions focusing on whole and small group instruction, and monthly after-school professional development.

Another aspect of my job is to provide and manage various professional development (PD) opportunities throughout the year. ... My largest focus is placed on back-to-school professional development in the fall, aimed at preparing teachers for a successful school year.

Finally, I have the privilege of collaborating on a one-to-one basis with teachers from each of our schools to work on individualized coaching needs. These teachers may be new to the profession, new to the Academy or are simply seeking additional support to effectively navigate their curriculum or Academy practices that are new to them.

How do you define success in this role?

If I have done my job well, teachers

and scholars will feel supported, and a partnership of learning and growth will have taken place. Through careful listening and thoughtful conversations, we will collaborate on new strategies, analyze scholar data to guide instructional practices, and refine teaching methods that will lead to better student outcomes.

What are your short-term and long-term goals?

My short-term goals include continuing to improve my communication skills so that I can convey ideas clearly. I also want to practice active listening and asking open-ended questions to better understand the needs and goals of the teachers I coach. Building a strong foundation in these skills will enhance my capability to support and guide others effectively.

My long-term goal is working toward having an excellent teacher in every classroom. By focusing on professional development and continuous learning, I can be a part of the team that will have a significant role in fostering an environment where every classroom benefits from excellent teaching.

Jackie Carter taught at St. John Paul II Catholic School for three years before becoming an instructional coach.



Learning about trauma will benefit scholars and staff

Continued from Page 1

"MITIE's goal is to provide statewide professional development opportunities to all who work in these capacities (education and health), thereby increasing the number of people who can confidently identify trauma responses in their students and clients and provide opportunities to become emotionally regulated and socially and academically successful," said Eyenga Bokamba, MITIE director.

ACA President Patty Stromen is grateful to the Sauer Family Foundation for the opportunity to bring this training to all staff. "We have known for a long time that with the scholars and families that we serve comes a lot of trauma," she said. "But it's not only for those living marginalized lives. Trauma is part of the human condition."

Because MITIE offers professional development opportunities to elevate the whole person, positive relationships and community empowerment, all Parish and ACA Central Ops employees are participating in this training.

According to the University of St. Thomas School of Education, teachers, school staff, parents and caregivers who are equipped with a basic understanding of trauma and

WHAT IS TRAUMA?

The term trauma describes a deeply distressing event and its effects on the person who experienced it. Not every difficult experience is "traumatic," but when an event or series of events is so frightening, intense or violent that a person's brain is unable to process it or cope as usual, we refer to this as a traumatic event.

University of St. Thomas
School of Education

the tools to respond to trauma signs can help students of all ages to:

- Identify and articulate their emotions.
- Learn what triggers their stress responses.
- Practice deep breathing and other techniques for emotional self-regulation.
- Know when and how to ask for help.

"Hopefully MITIE will benefit Academy teachers by providing space for reflection, tools for learning and support for growth in the area of trauma-informed education" Bokamba said. "The opportunity to learn and grow in a professional setting is key to making changes that support a culture of belonging and success."

MORE ABOUT MITIE

The Minnesota Institute for Trauma-Informed Education (MITIE) at the University of St. Thomas has four primary goals:

- Establish a sustainable model for trauma-informed and trauma-engaged education.
- Conduct trainings, workshops, webinars, conferences, and seminars to expand the knowledge basis of trauma-informed education.
- Create a pipeline of teachers, social workers, and professionals who are knowledgeable about trauma-informed and trauma-engaged education.
- Increase the number of schools that adopt trauma-informed approaches.

READ MORE

Visit the MITIE website to learn more about it.
tinyurl.com/34kkwt8h

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First she learned that food science was a thing, then she studied it, and now she gets paid to do it.

Her dream job is dreaming up new dairy products

When she came to St. John Paul II Catholic School as a 4th grader, Mayala knew two things for certain: She was interested in food, and she didn't want to cook for a living. She didn't know that food science was a college major until a JPPII teacher told her about the possibility.

"I love food, but I didn't want to be a chef. When I took chemistry, it solidified the major for me," said Mayala, who graduated from Blaine High School in 2020.

She earned her degree in Food Science and Technology from the University of Wisconsin – River Falls in 2024. She also received the Chancellor's Award for Students, which recognizes those who have shown outstanding leadership and service on campus.

She is now employed as a food technologist by Organic Valley, a cooperative of farmers that makes dairy products. Based in La Crosse, Wis., she creates fluid dairy products such as flavored creamers and milk. Part of her job is also updating and innovating existing products.

Mayala is grateful for the strong academic foundation that St. John Paul II gave her. "I was two years ahead in math (when she got to high school) because of middle school at JPPII," she said. "My Spanish was also really strong."



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