

BELIEVE AND READ

**ADVANCING
STUDENT
LITERACY FROM
PAGE ONE**

*BELIEVE AND READ
PROVES POWERFUL
IN HELPING ALL
STUDENTS REALIZE
THEIR FULL POTENTIAL*

A SPECIAL EDITION OF THE CATHOLIC SCHOOLS CENTER OF EXCELLENCE MAGAZINE

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BELIEVE AND READ

ON THESE PAGES...

We share the story of Catholic education: how a history of excellence and a future of hope continue to shape generations of virtuous leaders.

Whether behind the scenes or front and center, we are passionate supporters of Catholic schools in their pursuit to develop the whole child — mind, body and soul.

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Welcome



CSCOE PRESIDENT

Brian Ragatz

As a graduate and former principal of a Catholic school, I've seen the remarkable ways our students are set up for success in body, mind and soul. That includes providing a foundation for one of the most important skills students will need throughout their lives — literacy.

I'm happy to join the Catholic Schools Center of Excellence amid exciting initiatives like Believe and Read. Our vision is that every Catholic school student reads at or above grade level by third grade. Just imagine what this would mean for their continued learning and growth!

When we searched for excellence in the area of literacy, we ultimately discovered Groves Academy in our own backyard. Entering our third year partnering with this leading literacy organization, we are already thrilled with the results. We continue adding schools to the initiative, which now includes 33 Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis. More schools will join next year!

This special issue of the CSCOE magazine highlights the heart and soul of Believe and Read. In every story, we hope you're inspired as much as we are. The future of Catholic education is bright! †

Why Groves Academy

Groves Academy is visionary in changing the way children learn to read, paving the way for successfully reading to learn. That's why the Catholic Schools Center of Excellence is partnering with the Twin Cities-based education nonprofit to bring its evidence-based literacy teaching methods and curriculum to Catholic grade schools in the Twin Cities metro area.

Groves' approach aligns well with Catholic schools — working with each child to help them reach their full potential. Each year, Groves' partner schools significantly reduce the number of students who are at high risk for not reading at grade level.

Through the partnership, students learn to read and spell using a curriculum based on the science of reading. Teachers collect reading data on their students and provide additional instruction to students who struggle. In addition to a weekly classroom coaching session by a Groves literacy coach, all teachers attend a variety of Groves professional development workshops to increase their depth of knowledge.

A message from Katharine Campbell, director of Groves Literacy Partnerships

We look forward to another terrific year with our Catholic elementary schools in the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis! We love working with our Catholic school teachers, a group highly committed to using best practices in their classrooms and consistently showing deep dedication to their young students. Groves coaches appreciate the wonderful professional relationships they have developed with Catholic school teachers. Their engagement in the partnership, as well as children's improved reading outcomes, are energizing!

We know that nationally, many children are not learning to read in their classrooms because the instruction is not based on the science of reading. Our goal at Groves is to make Believe and Read available throughout the country to all students in kindergarten through third grade. Imagine our future workforce if everyone could read at grade level. The opportunities for these children are limitless!

'BELIEVE AND READ WORKS'

"Ellie did not learn the same way as our son, so when she started in kindergarten, she could recognize two letters and knew none of their sounds. Through the Believe and Read framework, she's confident, writing sentences and starting to read on her own."

Kate, parent,
Our Lady of Grace
Catholic School
in Edina

"Our biggest 'aha' moment is when we would read stories before bed, and our daughter would stop us because she wanted to read the words she knows. It was amazing to see her progress from the beginning of the school year until now."

Missy, parent,
St. Michael Catholic School
in St. Michael

"Already in kindergarten, our son has great phonemic awareness. We love that strong foundation, and it's been so much fun to see him take off with this and how much progress he's made in one year."

Laura, parent,
St. Jerome School
in Maplewood

"We cannot say enough about how grateful we are to get our son to a place where his confidence has shifted. Thanks so much to Believe and Read!"

Krista, parent,
Maternity of Mary-St. Andrew
Catholic School
in St. Paul

BELIEVE AND READ

An exciting chapter in student literacy

By Jessica Trygstad

What started as a pilot program at Holy Spirit Catholic School and St. Peter Claver Catholic School, both in St. Paul, and Our Lady of Grace Catholic School in Edina, has become a powerful literacy initiative in 33 Catholic schools in the Twin Cities.

Powered by the Catholic Schools Center of Excellence (CSCOE), Believe and Read brings the methodology of Groves Academy, a national expert in reading instruction, to schools through professional development and teacher coaching. Catholic schools' participation in Believe and Read is optional, but CSCOE hopes to make it accessible to all 79 Catholic grade schools in the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis.

Nationwide, the number of children not reading at grade level by third grade is 60 percent, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. While local Catholic school students are faring better — the average number of struggling readers in kindergarten to third grade is closer to 20 percent — Catholic school stakeholders aren't satisfied.

With Believe and Read, "we will be able to reach every single child and improve their literacy and fluency at a very young age," said Gail Dorn, one of CSCOE's founders.

In the first two years of the pilot, which began in 2017, every student was reading at or above grade level by the second year. And from fall 2019 to the beginning of 2020, the number of students identified as at-risk decreased by 77 percent.

Believe and Read's success caught the attention of leaders at Cretin-Derham Hall High School in St. Paul. In 2019, it pledged \$1 million over five years to improve literacy in Catholic grade schools through the initiative. President Frank Miley expressed that "early literacy is a transformative response" to today's educational challenges.



'Unbelievable amazement'

Groves Academy helps schools implement a systematic approach to phonics in early grades. Its literacy coaches work with teachers over a three-year period using a "train the trainer" model. Teachers become self-sufficient and continue the methodology and curriculum, resulting in sustainability and consistency.

In addition to students' regular reading lessons, teachers incorporate a daily 30-minute phonics lesson to ensure they're grasping the necessary reading rules. Students also "sky write" and tap their fingers to reinforce calisthenic, auditory and visual components of reading to build better connections in the brain, explained Jennifer Thomas, a Groves Academy literacy coach. Believe and Read takes the skills apart and brings them down until students master them.

"Students are going to have skills they learned in kindergarten or in first grade to decode that really long word versus relying on memorization," said Emily Moore, a kindergarten teacher at Our Lady of Grace.

Research shows that when students can't read, they have difficulty learning, affecting them for life. With Believe and Read, all students benefit. Struggling readers become proficient, and good readers become stronger. Assessments help teachers meet individual learning needs, a hallmark of Catholic education.

After Meg Schneeman's son, Henry, finished kindergarten at Holy Spirit Catholic School, she described reading as "a battle" and feared his learning would suffer and he would never read for enjoyment. That was before Believe and Read.

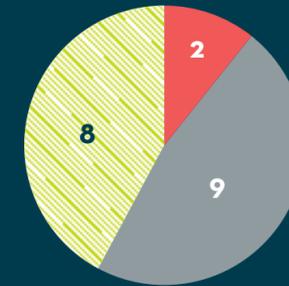
Now entering fourth grade, Henry likes to read chapter books, especially Greek mythology.

"I am amazed at what a great reader he is," Schneeman said. "He doesn't shy away from complex texts anymore, nor does he try to avoid reading with all of his procrastination tactics. He's incredibly expressive when he reads aloud, and his confidence has just continued to increase. There are not enough words to express my gratitude and unbelievable amazement at what Believe and Read did for Henry."

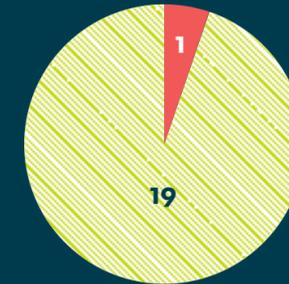
As a high school reading tutor and parent of two children who attend St. Peter Catholic School in North St. Paul, Krysten Knecht knows the importance of reaching students while they're young. She's seen the downward impact when schools are not equipped to provide excellent reading instruction.

"I would recommend any parent who has a struggling reader or who desires for their child to have gold-standard reading instruction to strongly consider enrolling their child in one of our Catholic schools using Believe and Read," she said. †

YEAR 1 Grade 1



GR 1 Fall 2017
(19 students)



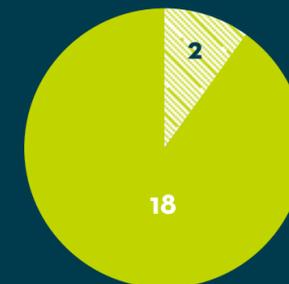
GR 1 Spring 2018
(20 students)

SUCCESS BY THE NUMBERS

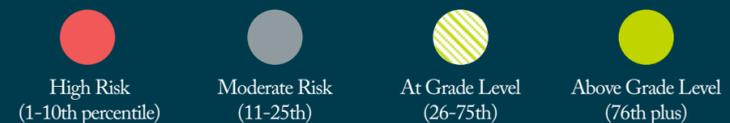
YEAR 2 Grade 2



GR 2 Fall 2018
(20 students)



GR 2 Spring 2019
(20 students)



Aimsweb assessment data analyzed using Hasbrouck-Tindale norms based on 6.6 million U.S. students. Two-year progress as reported by Holy Spirit Catholic School, St. Paul, MN.

★ *Learning to Read, Reading to Learn*

By Maggie Sonnek

The unique partnership between the Catholic Schools Center of Excellence (CSCOE) and Groves Academy to bring Believe and Read to Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis continues to equip students with the tools they need to excel.

When Principal Vicki Marvin of St. Dominic School in Northfield learned about the three-year program, she jumped in with both feet — and so did her teachers and students. When they began Believe and Read, 79 percent of the first- and second-grade students were reading at or above grade level. Just four months later, teachers saw improvement.

“Eighty-five percent of first- and second-grade students were reading at or above grade level, and that was just a few months after we started the initiative,” Marvin said.

She said much of the success comes from the continuous coaching.

“Unlike one day of professional development for teachers, the coaching was consistent and helped us all keep the program top of mind,” she said.

Marvin said the data will attract more families. The same rings true for Terese Shimshock, principal at St. Peter Claver Catholic School in St. Paul.

“Parents of our prospective and current students want to make sure their children have a safe place to learn, where they are loved and cared for as individuals,” Shimshock said. “When we share information about this program, parents are immediately engaged and interested.”

Maggie Quast, principal of Maternity of Mary-St. Andrew Catholic School in St. Paul, also shares information on this leading literacy program with prospective families.

“I tell parents it’s essential that students in kindergarten through third grade learn to read so that when they’re older, they can read to learn,” she said. “Fluency and comprehension are tied back to effectively learning how to read at a young age. And that’s exactly what this program does — it helps lay the foundation for reading.”

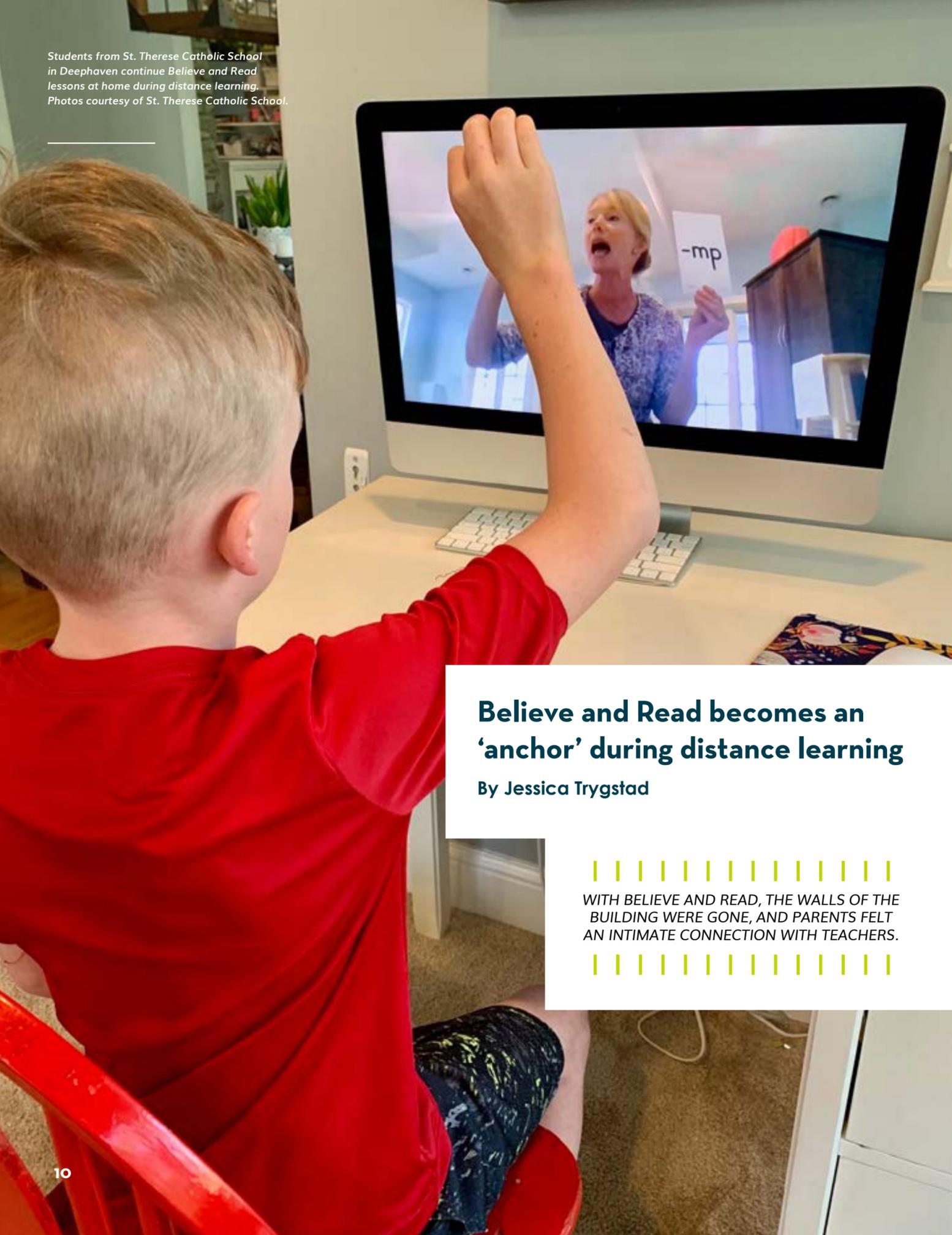
As teachers and students throughout the archdiocese prepare for a new school year, another set of schools, including St. Ambrose of Woodbury Catholic School and St. John Paul II Catholic Preparatory School in Minneapolis, eagerly anticipate beginning Believe and Read.

The program continues to be successful and help close the achievement gap because of support from CSCOE, administrators and teachers, like those at St. Peter Claver.

“If we can equip our kids with the fundamental skills to read and write, they will be successful,” Shimshock said. †



A student from St. Peter Claver Catholic School in St. Paul taps a word during a Believe and Read lesson.



Believe and Read becomes an 'anchor' during distance learning

By Jessica Trygstad

WITH BELIEVE AND READ, THE WALLS OF THE BUILDING WERE GONE, AND PARENTS FELT AN INTIMATE CONNECTION WITH TEACHERS.

St. Therese Catholic School in Deephaven was one of 17 Twin Cities Catholic schools excited to start Believe and Read in the 2019-2020 school year. In Adam Groebner's first year as principal of the infant to eighth-grade school, he advocated for bringing the literacy initiative to St. Therese after seeing the benefits from his work at Our Lady of Grace Catholic School in Edina.

"One of my favorite pieces of Believe and Read is the consistency," Groebner said. "Now the methodology is bringing consistency across our classrooms and grade levels, beyond Believe and Read."

The Catholic Schools Center of Excellence is pioneering Believe and Read, an initiative that brings Groves Academy's literacy methodology to kindergarten through third-grade Catholic school students to improve their reading skills.

Groebner said student engagement has been higher with the curriculum. During Believe and Read lessons in second grade, for example, students at all reading levels would eagerly and actively participate.

And then the coronavirus pandemic reached the U.S., causing schools across the nation to close their buildings and shift to distance learning.

Groebner was again grateful for the consistency of Believe and Read, which helped the St. Therese community transition to distance learning and continue to thrive with the literacy curriculum and methodology.

"It really provided the teachers and students with a routine that they could quickly transition to," he said. "The strong structure of the program was easy to continue remotely, and our teachers did that in different ways. Some did daily live virtual lessons, some recorded videos, and others did both."

Consistency in transition

Alison Dahlman, principal of St. Peter Catholic School in North St. Paul, discovered the same

benefits of Believe and Read, which became a successful pivot to distance learning. In the first year of the initiative, she said the curriculum provided a clear path in and out of the classroom.

"It was important to us that the Believe and Read curriculum maintained the trajectory of the initiative," Dahlman said. "Teachers created beautiful video lessons to continue that virtually, and they delivered it at the same pace as they had in the classroom. Students didn't miss a beat once we pivoted to distance learning.



"Because it's so methodic and routine, it's desirable when things are so chaotic," she continued. "Believe and Read was an anchor in the instruction for kindergarten to second-grade students. And it was an anchor for teachers and families."

Dahlman saw other benefits during distance learning. She discovered that parents developed a greater understanding of and

appreciation for the program with their children learning the daily lessons at home. Students were able to interact with the material in a new way, and it became real for parents, who observed how teachers and students used the curriculum.

"With Believe and Read, the walls of the building were gone, and parents felt an intimate connection with teachers," Dahlman said.

Krysten Knecht, whose son, Finn, was in first grade at St. Peter during

distance learning, was thrilled to have a front-row seat during his Believe and Read lessons. She said his teacher's instructions were clear and built on students' knowledge.

"Throughout the weeks of distance learning, his reading and especially his spelling skills continued to improve," Knecht said, "and his confidence at reading out loud and tackling new words were noticeably better." †

STUDENTS DIDN'T MISS A BEAT ONCE WE PIVOTED TO DISTANCE LEARNING.

FOR THE LIFELONG LOVE OF READING

Believe and Read equips all students with the skills they need to read at or beyond grade level. This includes exceptional learners facing literacy challenges, as well as students surpassing expectations. See how two schools in the archdiocese use Believe and Read to ensure every child thrives.

STORIES BY JESSICA WEINBERGER



OVERCOMING READING CHALLENGES

Just one year into the Believe and Read program and St. Jerome School Principal Anne Gattman is a believer. She saw students at her Maplewood Catholic school who struggled with literacy in the fall start reading by early spring.

“The instruction they’re receiving is very guided,” explained Gattman. “Maintaining consistency and structure is helping them thrive.”

St. Jerome is home to many English language learners, including Karen, African and Latino families. The program’s multi-modal focus that includes hearing words and moving arms to create letters especially supports students facing reading challenges.

They also benefit from repetition that provides additional exposure to master new concepts. Together with guidance from teachers who receive coaching directly from Groves Academy, students have the tools to succeed.

St. Jerome is grateful for the Catholic Schools Center of Excellence’s partnership with Groves Academy and the impact it’s already making on all students — especially those at risk for falling behind.

“This is a program we could never afford on our own. It is only because of CSCOE,” Gattman said. “It’s making a huge difference for our kids.”



CONTINUING EXCELLENCE

Holy Spirit Catholic School in St. Paul was one of three pilot schools that signed on to the Believe and Read literacy program in fall 2017. Now, staff and parents alike are seeing the fruits of the three-year program, especially with readers who were ready for an additional challenge.

“For our advanced readers, the program allows them to go further, to read more complex information, and it really supports those early readers in a more complete way,” said Holy Spirit Principal Dr. Mary Adrian.

She noted that students may be strong site readers but lack the phonetic skills to decode words effectively. By learning the meaning of prefixes, suffixes and word stems, young readers can increase their comprehension of unfamiliar words. Students then gain the confidence to read more challenging texts with a better understanding of the language.

The Believe and Read program offers support to already strong readers that builds additional literacy skills. It then paves the way for a higher level of academic success and future opportunities.

“It opens doors for advanced readers to continue to excel and challenge themselves,” Dr. Adrian said.

faith focus

By Father Kevin Finnegan
Pastor, Our Lady of Grace
Catholic Church

Parents want the best for their children — close friends, good health, a rewarding career, people to love and a deep faith in the Lord. And you also want your children to do their best — to be good people who are kind, considerate and caring. The combined importance of developing a young person's mind, body and soul is probably one reason you chose or are considering a Catholic education for your children.

Our Catholic schools educate the whole child. This means meeting each student where he or she is and then growing together in a faith-based environment. The Believe and Read literacy program, in which Our Lady of Grace Catholic School participates, is an important tool in this growth. It equips and challenges every student as they achieve literacy.

Just think of what a great gift literacy is! It's the ability to read anything: books, street signs, websites, and, of course, the Bible. Parables, teachings and history come to life for children when they can immerse themselves in sacred Scripture. Reading about God's everlasting covenant with us, including the words of our Savior himself, enables them to develop a close relationship with Jesus Christ.

Even as they learn the same letters, numbers and principles of faith in our Catholic schools, each child's path and God-given talents will be different. Yet they are all called to greatness, and that starts with literacy. With this priceless gift, they can know, embrace and share God's abundant love and mercy on their way to a holy and blessed life. †



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Did you know ...

- ❶ Catholic school grads tend to be more civically engaged?
- ❷ Catholic school grads tend to be more committed to serving others after they graduate?
- ❸ Catholic school grads tend to be more respectful of diverse viewpoints?
- ❹ Catholic school grads are more likely to vote?
- ❺ Academic achievement overall is higher at Catholic schools?
- ❻ The crime rate is lower in neighborhoods with Catholic schools?
- ❼ Catholic schools tend to be communities with higher levels of teacher commitment, student engagement and student achievement?
- ❽ Catholic school graduates are more likely to earn higher wages?
- ❾ Latino and African American students in Catholic schools are more likely to graduate from high school and college?
- ❿ Students at Catholic schools exhibit more self-control than their peers in other private or public schools?

❶ <https://www.educationnext.org/bowling-together/>, <https://play.google.com/store/books/details?id=JT2uuu6V3-8C> • ❷ <https://ace.nd.edu/advocates/why-catholic-schools/research-on-the-case-for-catholic-schools> • ❸ <https://ace.nd.edu/resources/catholic-school-research/researched-case-for-catholic-schools> • ❹ https://ace.nd.edu/files/ACE-PEA/Articles/_Catholic%20Schools%20Charter%20Schools%20and%20Urban%20Neighborhoods_%20by%20Margaret%20Brinig%20and%20Nicole%20Stelle%20Garnett.pdf • ❺ <https://ace.nd.edu/resources/catholic-school-research/researched-case-for-catholic-schools> • ❻ <https://ace.nd.edu/resources/catholic-school-research/researched-case-for-catholic-schools> • ❼ <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/35575> • ❽ <https://fordhaminstitute.org/national/research/self-discipline-and-catholic-schools-evidence-two-national-cohorts>

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