



# CLEF NOTES

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE CHICAGOLAND LUTHERAN EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION | FALL 2025 | WWW.CLEFCHICAGO.ORG

## Welcome Fall!

SAINT LUKE STUDENTS ENJOYING THE FALL DAY!



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## From the Director



Dr. Leslie Smith  
Director,  
Principal 360



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### From Promise to Purpose: Kicking Off a Year of Impact

*A message from Janet Klotz, Executive Director of CLEF*

Each school year begins with promise — the promise of new notebooks, new friendships, new goals. But this year, at CLEF, we're doing more than starting strong — we're moving forward with excitement and purpose!

In 2025–26, CLEF is investing in more than just programs — we're investing in people, partnerships, potential. We're committed to turning intention into impact: helping move schools from "imagining the future" to "shaping it now."

That means:

- **Launching a new family engagement pilot** in several CLEF-supported schools to deepen trust and connection between home and school.
- **Strengthening instructional coaching**, by giving teachers tools to accelerate student growth in classrooms across the city via the Instructional Playbooks and led by Dr. Kevin Brockberg.
- **Investing in leadership development** for principals through an enhanced Principal 360 experience — because strong schools start with

strong leaders. Our P360 Director, Dr. Leslie Smith, continues to broaden the vision for an outstanding expansion of P360. This vision was highlighted on a national stage in early October at the LEA Convocation in St. Louis.

We know the challenges are real — staffing shortages, shifting enrollment, and caring for students' emotional well-being remain part of the landscape CLEF schools navigate. But our commitment is stronger: to remain present, persistent, and prayerful in the work.

This newsletter is your look ahead — at the milestones we strive to achieve and the many ways we can serve together. Whether you are a donor, an educator, a pastor, or a parent, your role in this work matters more than ever.

Let's make this a year where bold ideas turn into measurable outcomes — and where every student is reminded, every day, that they are known, supported, and deeply loved.

In partnership and purpose,

Janet Klotz  
Executive Director, CLEF

### Principal 360, Powered by CLEF, Welcomes Dr. Tim Elmore to the 2025 LEA Convocation in St. Louis, Missouri

This October, CLEF's Principal 360 program was proud to sponsor keynote speaker, Dr. Tim Elmore, at the 2025 Lutheran Education Association (LEA) Convocation in St. Louis, Missouri. This partnership reflects CLEF's ongoing commitment to empowering Lutheran school leaders through impactful professional development and visionary leadership support.

Principal 360's Director, Dr. Leslie Smith, along with CLEF's Executive Director, Janet Klotz, were honored to introduce Dr. Elmore as the Convocation's Keynote Speaker and to present him with the Principal 360 visionary educational thought leader award.

Dr. Tim Elmore, founder of *Growing Leaders* and a nationally recognized author on generational leadership and culture, addressed the group of nearly 3000 educators with insights drawn from his decades of experience mentoring leaders and consulting with schools.

Dr. Elmore and Dr. Smith's professional ties span many years, dating back to her time as the Principal and Head of School at Orange Lutheran High School in Southern California. She was first introduced to Dr. Elmore in 2010 at a conference at Concordia University, Irvine, shortly after he released his landmark book, *Generation iY, Our Last Chance to Save Their Future*. What an impact that book had on Dr. Smith and her leadership and our understanding of each new generation of learners! Dr. Smith was later recognized in 2016 by Dr. Elmore with the Growing Leaders Award at the National Leadership Forum in Atlanta, and she was honored to write an endorsement for his book, *Marching Off the Map*.

Prior to Dr. Elmore's keynote address at the LEA Convocation, Dr. Smith arranged for an exceptional Master Class experience for the Principal 360 alumni, fondly known as the "P360 Masterminds." During that time, Dr. Elmore unpacked counter-intuitive leadership paradoxes that enable today's leader to differentiate themselves and better connect with their team and communities, and each of the 55 participants received a signed copy of

his book, *The Eight Paradoxes of Great Leadership: Embracing the Conflicting Demands of Today's Workplace*. They also enjoyed connecting deeper with Dr. Elmore over lunch together!

As part of the LEA Convocation experience, Dr. Elmore's presentations energized and equipped school leaders with tools which could be implemented immediately — perfectly aligning with the mission of Principal 360 to develop and equip a united network of Lutheran school principals and early childhood directors as visionary educational thought leaders.

CLEF's continued investment in educational leadership development helps to ensure that Lutheran schools across the country continue to thrive in today's dynamic educational environment. CLEF's sponsorship of Dr. Tim Elmore as the LEA Convocation keynote speaker and MasterClass instructor reflects the deep commitment and impact of Principal 360 to nurture confident, effective leaders who are equipped to lead schools with vision, wisdom, and faith.



## CLEF Community Partners



### OUR MISSION

The mission of the Chicagoland Lutheran Educational Foundation is to empower urban Lutheran schools to deliver innovative, quality education in a Christian environment.

## Help Us Support More Students. Give the Gift of Education!

With 19 partner schools in our CLEF network, the need is always great.

Here are the different ways you can help CLEF provide scholarships, services, resources and educational programs:



\*Individuals and corporations who donate through our designated Scholarship Granting Organization (SGO), Empower Illinois, will receive a credit against their Illinois income tax liability equal to 75 percent of their donation.

DONATE TODAY! WWW.CLEFCHICAGO.ORG



**CLEF**  
NETWORKING  
CONFERENCE

Love grows with knowledge and insight  
-Philippians 1:9

*"This is not your typical Networking Conference,"* emcees Jennifer Heinze and Mark Schaetzlein trumpeted, jumpstarting the 26th annual CLEF Networking Conference on August 12 at the Holiday Inn Conference Center in Skokie. A multi-faceted experience beckoned all to network in fast-paced multiple formats in the one-day event, launching the 2025-26 academic year in CLEF schools:

**Network [net-wurk] noun**  
1. an association of individuals having a common interest, formed to provide mutual assistance, or the like:

Rev. Joel Hess, Pastor of St. James Lutheran Church and School in Chicago ignited the Conference with his Keynote on vocation, leading CLEF educators to discover how every role we occupy, when carried out in faithful service to others, is one in which God Himself is at work through us, reaching down from heaven to use our abilities to care for His creation and those made in His image.

Love the interaction!

**Network [net-wurk] verb**  
1. to cultivate people who can be helpful to someone professionally moving to a higher level or position:

Five morning Mega-Sectionals repeated in the afternoon offered an indepth array of options, spurring teachers' professional journeys in

- What is the Science of Reading? And How Do I Implement It in My Classroom? – Jenny Blume M.A.
- Every Child Wonderfully Made: Embracing Diverse Learners in the Classroom – Dr. Kara Bratton
- Courageous Conversations about Race – Louis Johnson M.B.A.
- Trauma, Community, and the Classroom – Pastor Chris Singer
- Antidotes for Anxiety: Early Childhood through High School – Dr. Kim Marxhausen

**2. to distribute widely:**

Woven into the networking were five opportunities for Ed Camps; new to the Conference, Ed-Camps emphasize networking with participantdriven, small-group discourse around multiple topics and themes. In mixed meetings with teachers from other schools, this networking explored simulations as a classroom methodology, probed preschool play, presented vertical math, shared amazing Chicago field trips, and pondered the future of Lutheran schools; the many, many nuanced, networked topics prompted the positive reactions embellishing this article.

Great conversation throughout the day. Highly organized and energizing.

Really Liked being able to talk and learn from other teachers.

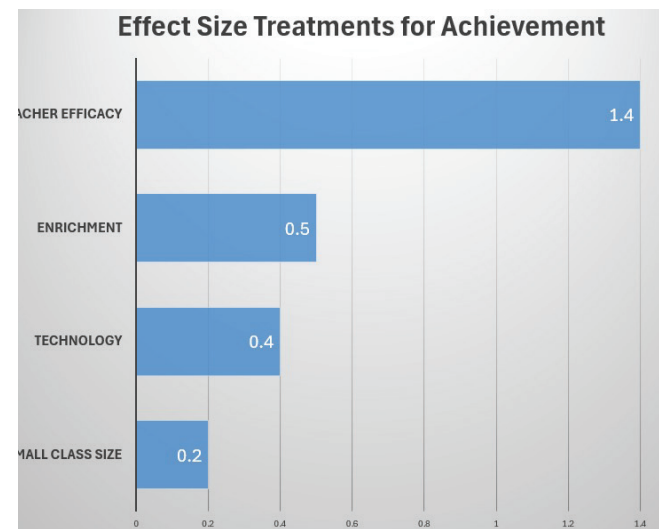
Wonderful concept! Completely engaging and encouraging.

**Instructional Coaching at CLEF**

Dr. Kevin Brockberg

*"The fundamental quest is to understand what the teacher is going through as a classroom instructor, and assist that teacher to accomplish instructional goals,"* one seasoned instructional coach intoned during a meeting of instructional coaches in the Chicagoland Lutheran Educational Foundation. Beginning with the 2019-2020 academic year, CLEF annually funds and places instructional coaches into schools. Currently seven coaches supervise and serve teachers in nine Chicago Lutheran schools. These instructional coaches meet bi-monthly to discuss professional objectives and perspectives in their different coaching settings.

Why does CLEF promote Instructional Coaching in schools? Why not invest resources in some other educational improvement or intervention? Among myriads of approaches to learning and educational practices, which treatments are the best? Would reducing class sizes increase learning? More technology? Move Back to the Basics? Enrichment classes? What is the chemistry of a good school?



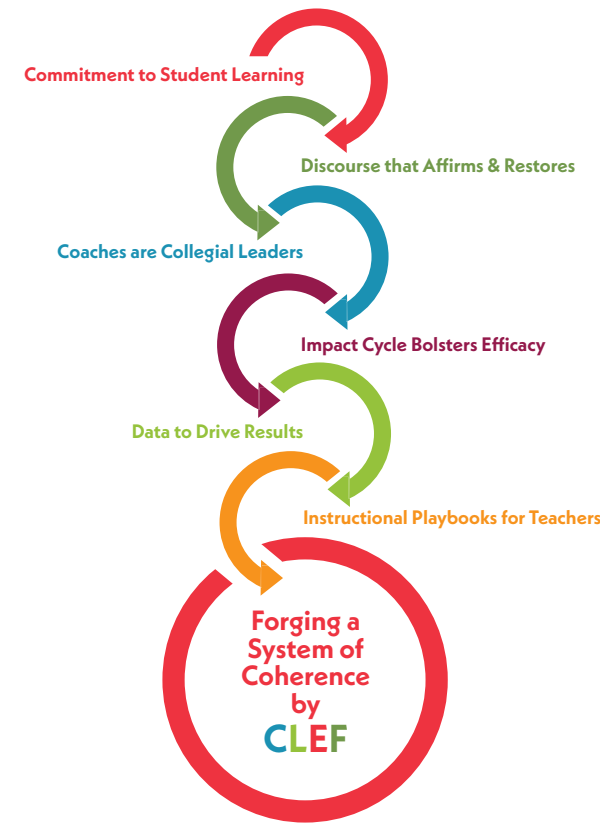
Meta-analyses of 95,000 research studies (Hattie, 2025) addressed 256 treatments, programs, or innovations for improved academic achievement. Among these are small class size, technology, enrichment, and teacher efficacy (the inherent belief that one can succeed in teaching). While small class size shows a small effect, and technology and enrichment medium effects, teacher efficacy rises to an astounding Effect. Nearly 100% of students with a treatment of efficacious teachers will achieve over those without efficacious teachers. With such strong indications that teacher efficacy will lead to improved student achievement, CLEF's continued commitment to Instructional Coaching is coherently grounded in research and sound principles. The aim then of Instructional Coaching must be to bolster teacher efficacy. Effect Size research supports this contention, and leads CLEF to a coherent posture on Instructional Coaching. Goal-setting alone, in the reports of CLEF Instructional Coaches, did not contribute to this degree of efficacy.

**Instructional Coaching: Vectors of Excellence**

Pile-driven into the cultural construct of coherence in the networking of CLEF, six vectors forge the infrastructure for optimal, systematic Instructional Coaching.



**CLEF Instructional Coaching**



**Vectors of Excellence**

**Attributes** Commitment, Discourse, Collegiality, Impact, Data, and Instruction weld together a coherent enterprise of this program. Coaches expressing a *Commitment to Student Learning* is an essential prerequisite for working with teachers. *Affirming and Restoring Discourse* about the observations of a classroom lesson has a large Effect Size of 0.90. *Collegial Leadership* networks with both the principal and the instructional staff. Retaining the framing of the Impact Cycle bolsters efficacy. Feedback from the principal and student metrics are indispensable sources of *Data to Drive Results*. Wrapping into this infrastructure are three Instructional Playbooks for Teachers. These six vectors forge the stage for the coherent enterprise of Instructional Coaching at CLEF.

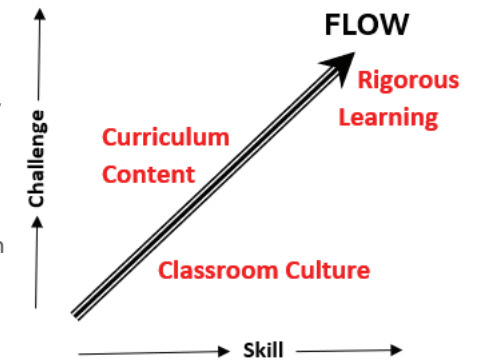
**Symbiotic Roles** Launching into this six-vector enterprise of coaching fuses the instructional coach, principal, and instructional staff symbiotically.

One of four key responsibilities of the **principal** is instructional leadership within the school. The kickstart for the enterprise of instructional coaching is the engagement of the principal, as instructional leader, to formally assess the strengths and weaknesses of each member of the instructional staff along a continuum of skill and challenge. Evaluating every teacher, twice each year, distinguishes each teacher into one of three categories of professional aptitude. Knowing a teacher's trajectory along the continuum can spark and skyrocket (Sonbert, 2021) flowing instruction.

**Instructional Coaching at CLEF**

This assessment, the evaluations of each teacher, serves to equip the **instructional coach** with data, who with fidelity, can pinpoint aspects of instruction to strengthen skills to meet the challenges of learning. Each of the three gradations, Classroom Culture, Curriculum Content, and Rigorous Learning lists benchmarks of excellent instruction. These become the minutia of professional discourse with each teacher.

Given the principal's assessment and then collegial discourse of the instructional coach, the **teacher** is afforded the opportunity to draft professional goals. From this data and input, growth from one stage to the next invites the teacher to consider goals that are compelling, linked to the mission and values of the school, evidenced by the data, and therefore focused on student learning. Achieving competency at each level is gauged by fulfilled benchmarks, contributing to the efficacy of each teacher, so essential to the pursuit of academic excellence.



This triumvirate prospers from well-defined roles, open collegial discourse, and coherent vectors of excellence.

CLEF is embarking on an elevated, coherent system of Instructional Coaching to skyrocket learning within the CLEF enterprise of schools. Elevating our system of Instructional Coaching will bolster the efficacy of all teachers and ensure the growth of every student in the CLEF enterprise of Learning, Good News, For Life!

**Bibliography**

- Hattie, J. (2025). *Visible learning*. Retrieved from [https://visible-learning.org/]
- Sonbert, M. (2020). *Skyrocket you teacher coaching: How every school leader can become a coaching superstar*. Burgess Consulting.



## A Message from "Nurse Pat" Challenges – 2026

Our school year has begun with celebration and excitement to learn, teach and promote academic endeavors in many ways while maintaining a healthy environment in our classrooms and schools.

**While the foundation of our schools, our Christian principles and Faith, guide and encourage behavior to accomplish goals set in the classroom, challenges, particularly health related, are increasing.**

Areas/issues to be focused upon and addressed this school year for students and teachers include

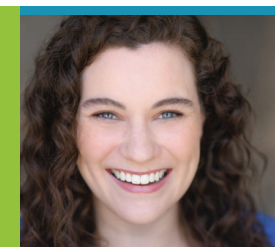
**1) Mental/behavioral disorders** such as anxiety, attention-deficit (ADHD), depression, suicide prevention; behavior disorders such as oppositional defiant disorder and other conditions like autism spectrum, disorder (ASD), obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), eating disorders (obesity, anorexia, bulimia nervosa etc.)

**2) Safety** both in the classroom, and out (i.e. bullying, school intruders), and also in sports, abuse prevention, trafficking, injury management etc.

**3) Infection prevention/spread of disease** (immunization compliance/promotion, proper handwashing, correct coughing, clean classrooms and when students and classroom personnel need to stay home from school etc.

The stated areas of Health mentioned above, although not entirely inclusive, are addressed and positive behavior encouraged and emphasized in the programs provided by CLEF: Superhero, Student Awareness and Parenteach. Providing these programs yearly in the classroom is a very easy and fun way to stress health concepts that promote healthy behavior wholistically and provide students opportunity to practice positive health habits, prompt consistent attendance and focus students on learning.

For further information about each of these programs or information about health issues please notify the CLEF office/ Dr. Patricia Braun. Have a Healthy, Happy, and Productive school year, 2025-2026.



## Admissions

Amanda Hays  
Admissions and  
Marketing

**The 2025/26 school year is off to a great start with over 1,700 students enrolled across the 18 CLEF partner schools. 11 of the CLEF schools have a dedicated Admissions & Marketing Coordinator (AMC) who assists their school's Principal and other key stakeholders with increasing enrollment.**

Every year, the AMCs craft goals for themselves surrounding admissions and marketing. Some of this year's goals include improving teacher tour etiquette, refining the admissions process, and increasing community engagement events and activities. Our AMCs work diligently all year round to meet their goals and to help their schools grow their enrollment. Increasing enrollment is a team effort at Lutheran schools, and the AMCs work closely with their school's Principal, who is the Head of Admissions, to help promote a thriving school. The teachers, staff members, parents, and even students

play a very important role in helping spread positive word of mouth and act as ambassadors for the schools.

With the start of a new school year also comes the launching of the monthly Admissions & Marketing Professional Development sessions that run from September through May. All of the AMCs gather once a month to dive further into an admissions and marketing topic. The first professional development session in September was led by Stacey Walter, the Head of School at Westlake Lutheran Academy in Texas, and focused on conducting a competitive analysis for each school. Some future professional development topics this year will include enhancing the tour experience and improving school & parent communication

We are excited about the new experiences, learning, and growth that the 2025/26 school year will bring the AMC team as well as Lutheran schools in Chicago!



Back-to-school moments at Saint Luke on a beautiful fall morning!

## CLEF Schools 2025 Directory by Location

### CLEF PRESCHOOLS AND GRADE SCHOOLS

- 1 Bethesda International Academy, 6803 N. Campbell Ave.
- 2 Christ the King Lutheran School, 3701 S. Lake Park Ave.
- 3 Concordia on Milwaukee, 3696 N. Milwaukee Ave.
- 4 Concordia on Ravenswood, 4809 N. Ravenswood Ave.
- 5 Concordia on Seeley, 3855 N. Seeley Ave.
- 6 Concordia on Whipple, 3300 N. Whipple St.
- 7 Good Shepherd Christian Academy, 3740 W. Belden Ave.
- 8 Grace Christian Academy, 4106 W. 28th St.
- 9 Holy Family School, 3415 W. Arthington St.
- 10 Little Learners Academy, 3415 W. Arthington St.
- 11 Lutheran Day Nursery, 1802 N. Fairfield Ave.
- 12 Pilgrim Lutheran School, 4300 N. Winchester Ave.
- 13 Saint Luke Academy, 1500 W. Belmont Ave.
- 14 St. James Lutheran School, 2101 N. Fremont St.
- 15 St. John's Lutheran School, 4939 W. Montrose Ave.
- 16 St. Paul Lutheran School, 7621 S. Dorchester Ave.
- 17 St. Philip Lutheran School, 2500 W. Bryn Mawr Ave.

### CLEF MIDDLE SCHOOL AND HIGH SCHOOL

- 18 Walther Christian Academy – STEM Middle School, 900 Chicago Ave., Melrose Park
- 19 Walther Christian Academy – High School, 900 Chicago Ave., Melrose Park





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## Anticipation Builds: Relive the Joy and Look Ahead to CLEF's 2026 Gala

**The excitement is already building for CLEF's 2026 Gala, and it's easy to see why.**

Guests who joined us last year will remember the evening with delight, beginning with specialty cocktails and delicious bites while enjoying exclusive access to the Brookfield Zoo's underwater dolphin gallery. The lively backdrop of dolphins gracefully swimming set the stage for an evening filled with joy, enhanced by live music and a host of unique treasures offered in both the silent and live auctions. The evening delighted more than **275 guests**, creating memories that continue to inspire.

As we look ahead, CLEF is thrilled to announce that our Gala will return to the **Brookfield Zoo on Saturday, April 11, 2026.**

**This year's theme, "Blessed to Serve," will highlight CLEF's enduring mission and commemorate 33 years since its founding in 1993.**

Guests can anticipate another evening filled with fellowship, inspiration, and the kind of experiences that make the Gala one of the most anticipated events of the year. From remarkable auction items to the chance to gather in a spectacular setting, the 2026 Gala promises to be a celebration of impact and community that you won't want to miss.

One auction highlight to look forward to: an exclusive private cruise on an 83-foot motor yacht for you and 19 guests, generously donated by Christopher Lueking. Whether by day or night, this unforgettable experience offers luxury, relaxation, and breathtaking views of Chicago's skyline.



Mark your calendars now for **Saturday, April 11, 2026**, and join us as we come together, blessed to serve, and inspired to carry CLEF's mission forward.