



# CLEF NOTES

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE CHICAGOLAND LUTHERAN EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION | SUMMER 2026 | [WWW.CLEFCHICAGO.ORG](http://WWW.CLEFCHICAGO.ORG)

## BLESSED *to* SERVE

### THE YEAR IN REVIEW



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## From the Director

### CLEF BOARD

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Dear Friends,

There is joy to be found at our Lutheran schools. Joy from our students. Joy from our teachers and staff. And joy from our principals. Ever wonder why that is? Each person and student is called on to perform important work. They will need to focus and persevere through many unknown and unforeseen events. Yet what is known and what brings joy is their faith and servants' heart imparted through their thoughts, words, and deeds to each student at each of our Lutheran schools.

I am joyful and excited to be Executive Director of CLEF. I am Blessed to Serve. I am very thankful for CLEF's community of donors that help support and foster our mission and vision. I am honored to work with our talented Board of Directors and witness their passion, and dedication for preserving and advancing the beliefs and benefits of a Lutheran education.

But more importantly I am humbled by the faith, dedication and caring shown by our principals, teachers, and staff. I really can't praise them enough. Their impact is immediate and lasting. Day in and day out they let their light shine and show the way to Learning – Good News – For Life. In today's world there is nothing more important or essential.

Each school year we are blessed with the opportunity to "sing to the Lord a new song, his praise from the ends of the earth". Isaiah 42:10 (NIV). I am thankful and blessed to be a part of helping to introduce young minds to the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ. There is no greater mission.

In His Service,

Janet Klotz  
Executive Director



## 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.*

**AQUEITY®**  
We're on top of IT



LUTHERAN HIGH SCHOOL ASSOCIATION  
OF GREATER CHICAGO



**thrivent®**  
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# CLEF's Partnership with Walther Christian Academy

By Tim Bouman

**Walther Christian Academy is a culturally diverse and inclusive Christian middle and high school, rooted in the Lutheran tradition.** Walther nurtures and prepares learners to fulfill their unique God-given potential through academic excellence, spiritual growth, and service, leadership and enrichment opportunities. It is a wonderful and vibrant ministry, but not without its challenges. Located in a working-class community, Walther attracts many families who are looking for a great Christian school for their children but struggle to afford the tuition. Families love the small class sizes, the caring teachers, the rigorous academic curriculum, and the feeling of safety that they don't always get in the surrounding public schools. But to provide an excellent Christ-centered education we need the funds to pay our excellent teachers and run our programs. Many families want what Walther offers but can't afford the tuition.

Fortunately, Walther has a wonderful partnership with CLEF. **Each year, CLEF provides much-needed funding to fill the gap between what a family can pay and what Walther needs to meet its budget obligations.** About 75% of our students receive a scholarship or financial aid, averaging \$2,700. Each year, there are students attending Walther because of generous CLEF scholarships.

**CLEF not only blesses Walther with need-based scholarships, but also helps Walther attract and retain excellent and talented students.** The CLEF High School Scholarships are offered through a CLEF-established scholarship fund generously supported by the Christopher Family and the Clarence and Marilyn Schawk Foundation. These provide

\$4,000 annually to 16 students (four in each class) who had attended CLEF elementary schools. Competition for these scholarships is fierce, and this helps Walther attract these distinguished scholars who might have otherwise attended a Chicago selective enrollment school.

Finally, CLEF provides Wolf Fine Arts Scholarships that reward our best musicians, actors, and artists. Fine Arts are a strength of Walther's, and CLEF helps us by helping and encouraging our most talented students, some of whom go on to study music or art in college and/or aspire to a career in the arts.

Walther is blessed to have a partner like CLEF, and because of CLEF, more students get to hear the gospel and leave high school firm in their faith and well-prepared for the world.



## 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:



Donations



Employer  
Matching Gifts

thrivent®

Thrivent Choice  
Dollars



CLEF Impact  
Legacy  
Match



Donor Advised  
Funds



Planned Giving



Securities, Stocks  
or Mutual Funds

\*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](http://WWW.CLEFCHICAGO.ORG)**

CLEF is thrilled to announce that the first year of our Impact Legacy Fund campaign has been a resounding success. Thanks to the incredible generosity of our community, we have officially reached—and exceeded—our \$500,000 goal for the year.

# Make an Impact

## A Remarkable First-Year Achievement

This milestone was made possible by 41 dedicated donors who collectively contributed over \$500,000 to secure the future of Lutheran education.

Launched as a vital 10-year initiative, the Impact Legacy Fund is the most significant campaign in CLEF's 30-year history. Its success ensures that CLEF can continue to work with our network of schools and provide high-quality, Christ-centered education to nearly 2,000 students across Chicagoland.

## Your Impact, Tripled

One of the most extraordinary aspects of this campaign is the 2:1 matching gift from a special, anonymous donor. For every dollar contributed by our community, this donor contributes two more, effectively tripling the impact of every gift.

## Celebrating a Milestone Year: The Impact Legacy Fund Surpasses Its First-Year Goal

**Because we met our \$500,000 goal this year, we have unlocked \$1 million in matching funds, resulting in a total investment of \$1.5 million for CLEF's long-term sustainability this year alone.**

Over ten years, this bold \$5 million campaign is designed to create a \$15 million impact.

## Deep Gratitude for Our Community

We are deeply grateful for your visionary commitment. Under the leadership of our Steering Committee Co-Chairs Terry Pfortmiller and Carl Hibben, Board President Mike Welch, Executive Director Janet Klotz, and the Development Director Michael Cleavenger, we have seen what is possible when our community unites with a shared belief in the potential of young minds.

As we move into the second year of this life-changing mission, we invite you to continue this journey with us. This is a transformational moment for CLEF. Together, we are building something that will last for generations to come.

## How to Participate

*If you would like to join the Impact Legacy Fund or learn more about making a multi-year pledge, please contact Development Director Michael Cleavenger or Executive Director Janet Klotz at (630) 595-9310.*



## Admissions

Amanda Hays  
Admissions and  
Marketing



## Professional Development

Jennifer Heinze  
Principal 360 Coordinator  
and Coach

### Continued Growth for CLEF Schools

Amanda Hays

The 2025/26 school year was a time of growth, learning, and continued improvements for CLEF's Admissions and Marketing Coordinators! Every month, the team met to engage in professional development sessions led by speakers from various Lutheran schools across the country. Topics included conducting a competitive analysis, improving the tour experience, word of mouth marketing, social media outreach, and so much more. We had speakers join us virtually from Texas, California, Indiana, and Illinois. These sessions provided useful insight from professionals in the same field as our Coordinators, and our team implemented positive changes based on these sessions throughout the year. We are excited for a summer of continued growth for our schools and look forward to the 2026/27 school year!



**St. John's Lutheran**  
Empowering. Enlightening. Enriching



### St. John's Investment in Leadership

Jennifer Heinze

One of the hallmarks of a thriving school is leadership's ability to plan not only for today, but also for the future. This is one of the greatest investments a school can make! **At St. John's Lutheran School on Montrose Avenue, that commitment to intentional leadership development has created a strong foundation that continues to benefit students, families, and the congregation.**

Several years ago, Principal Dan Green and Teacher Michelle Runge -- a member of his Principal Advisory Board -- recognized the importance of preparing the school for long-term success. Together, they participated in CLEF's Principal 360 program, where they developed a School Strategic Plan designed to strengthen St. John's while preparing for the future. Their work was not simply about addressing present challenges—it was about building leadership capacity and creating a roadmap that would guide the school through the years ahead.

That intentional planning proved invaluable. When Mr. Green retired, Teacher Runge was well prepared to assume the title of Principal Runge, and step into the new role immediately. Because she had helped develop the school's vision and strategic initiatives through the P360 program, the leadership transition was both natural and seamless. The school maintained its momentum, allowing faculty, students, and families to continue forward with confidence.

One unique aspect of St. John's partnership with CLEF has been the dual role of one key staff member, Jenna Scifo. Initially, Mrs. Scifo joined St. John's as its Admissions and Marketing Coordinator (AMC). Now, however, rather than serving solely in an admissions role, she also functions as an instructional coach as part of the school staff. This dual role has strengthened both recruitment efforts and classroom instruction, supporting teachers while helping new families discover all that St. John's has to offer. The results have been remarkable, with enrollment growing to more than 170 students.

**The partnership between the church and school also plays a vital role in the culture of St. John's.** Pastor Jacob Ehrhard is a visible and active presence throughout the school, participating in activities, supporting students and staff, and reinforcing the school's Christ-centered mission. His commitment to Christian education was recognized by CLEF this past May at the annual Recognition Dinner, when Pastor received the Above & Beyond Award -- presented to individuals whose faithful service has made an exceptional impact on a school.

**The continued success of St. John's demonstrates what can happen when schools intentionally invest in leadership and work together toward a shared mission.** Through strategic preparation, innovative staffing, and strong pastoral support, St. John's has built on its tradition of excellence while positioning itself for continued growth. As enrollment continues to increase and the school community flourishes, St. John's stands as an example of how committed leadership and collaborative partnership can create lasting opportunities for students and families.



## A Message from Dr Patricia Braun "Nurse Pat"

# Protection, Prevention and Being Proactive

Summer is one of the BEST times of the year to think about a child's/children's immunization status as we prepare for a new school year. Parents want to do what is best for their children. Preventing disease, which can cause school absences and interrupt learning in the classroom, is an important factor in health and wellness for individuals, families, and school communities. Children must receive required immunizations and be up to date as they prepare for another school/academic year.

### What are the advantages / reasons to immunize students?

**First,** immunization can save lives. Several debilitating and deadly diseases that have impacted children as well as adults, such as polio, are no longer in existence because of the development of safe, effective vaccines.

**Secondly,** vaccination is safe and effective. Scientists, doctors, health care professionals carefully review vaccine safety before they are even available and subsequently periodically for their continued effectiveness and well-being to the child. Serious side effects to vaccination is rare and the disease prevention received from vaccinating far outweighs any possible side effects.

**Third,** immunization of a child protects others. In recent years, with less compliance in vaccine preventable immunizations, we have seen resurgence of cases of, for example, measles and whooping cough reported and experienced in our United States. Children too young, those with weakened immune systems (from diseases like leukemia, chronic conditions etc.) may not have the protection and need to be kept safe. It is important that those children who can get immunized do so to protect not only themselves but classmates, educators, friends and family members from the spread of disease.

The **Fourth** reason for making sure children are immunized is that it saves families and schools time and money. Children who are not up to date with immunizations can be denied attending school. Important academic lessons, time in the classroom can be lost. If a vaccine preventable disease would result in a child who is not immunized, they have the risk of developing a disease disability/ side effect prompting

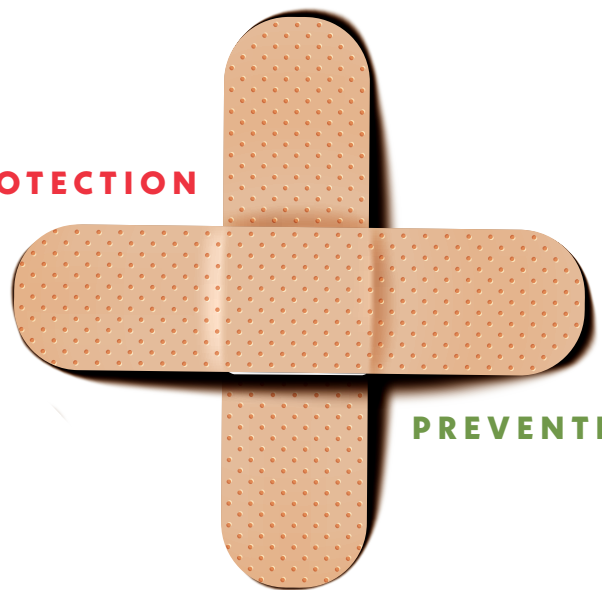
unwanted and extended medical bills, loss of time at work for a parent and need for additional caregiving. Most insurance will cover the cost of receiving vaccines and low-income families or those without insurance can qualify for the Vaccines for Children Program that provides vaccines at no cost. Information on this program can be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines-for-children/vfc-information-for-parents> OR they can contact their child's primary health care provider.

**Finally,** immunizing children protects the future of all. Vaccines reduce and/or eliminate disease. Diseases such as smallpox for example have been eradicated and vaccination against is no longer needed. If vaccination continues to be met and is complete, children/ classrooms/ schools will remain safe and education will continue in a healthy and effective way. Summer time is a great time for Parents to be reminded about need for their child's immunizations, for parents to review, touch base with their child's primary care provider to review if their child is up to date with needed vaccines and for schools to promote compliance toward a healthy school environment as we look toward the 2026-2027 school year. Please feel free to notify if questions.

**PROTECTION**

**PREVENTION**

**BEING PROACTIVE**





**Dr. Leslie Smith**  
Director,  
Principal 360

# Blessed to Serve

*'As each of us has received a gift, use it to serve one another.'*

**The Chicagoland Lutheran Educational Foundation recognizes this simple truth: We are blessed by God NOT simply to receive, but we are blessed to serve – our neighbor, our students, our community, and the mission Christ has entrusted to all of us: to Love God with all of our heart, with all of our soul, and with all of our mind, and to love others as we love ourselves.**



**On April 11, 2026, we came together at our annual Gala to celebrate God's faithfulness and the profound generational impact of your investment in CLEF that ensures quality Lutheran education for hundreds of children attending our 19 schools throughout Chicagoland.**



Your generosity ignites a ripple effect that touches lives forever and impacts future generations to come.

**THANK YOU** for making the difference...and for believing in the life-giving, world changing power of Lutheran education!



**One such example of the life-giving, world changing power of Lutheran education is Dr. Terence Swims, a 2006 graduate of Walther Christian Academy, AND Walther's newest principal at CLEF's only Lutheran High School.**

Terence's mom, wanting the best for her son, first enrolled him in the neighborhood Lutheran elementary school where Terence was seen, valued, and appreciated for the unique masterpiece that God created him to be. Soon after, however, life's circumstances found Terence back at the local public school for three long years, leaving Mrs. Swims even more determined to return Terence to the guidance and care of nurturing Lutheran school teachers who recognized her son for the extraordinary young man that he is.

Fortunately, Terence soon found his way back to St. Paul Lutheran School in Melrose Park and then on to Walther Lutheran High School, now known as Walther Christian Academy.

Terence had found his new home, and eagerly embraced all that Walther had to offer – marked by strong academics and his involvement in sports, music, theater, student government, clubs, and campus life.

It was at Walther where Terence found everything he needed to discover and develop his unique God-given gifts, talents, and abilities.

In Terence's words, "Walther was everything I needed it to be; it nurtured my gifts, built my talents, and provided me the space and opportunity to experience who I felt God created me to be."



This special environment provided Terence with the confidence to start the Gospel Choir, "Voices of Praise," and the Walther Praise Team, that would go on to lead worship at chapel, sing in concerts, and travel to perform and share God's message. Both are still thriving today!

**Terence proudly proclaims that "Walther has always been and continues to be a place where students are nurtured!"**



Before graduating from Walther, Terence was inspired to use his unique gifts to step into the spotlight on the musical theater stage. Seeking the support and guidance of Mrs. Kathleen Rose, the musical director, his hard work and successful audition quickly paid off with a lead role and a show stopping performance in the Broadway classic - Guys and Dolls.

This school year, Dr. Terence Swims proudly returned to Walther Christian Academy where he serves as principal alongside Head of School, Mr. Tim Bouman. **Dr. Swims was first blessed to receive as a student**, and as a result of the opportunities provided to him through the generous contribution of donors like you, **he is now blessed to serve as the principal**, investing in the next generation of learners and leaders!

**Visit:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tBilzFLmrP4> to watch Blessed to Serve: The Power of Lutheran Education, Dr. Terence Swims' inspiring story that showcases the power of Lutheran education, reminding us of what it means to be blessed to serve!



**Sue Lorr**  
Executive Assistant to the Director



## BLESSED *to* SERVE

### 2026 SCHOLARSHIP GALA

What an incredible evening! On Saturday, April 11, CLEF welcomed more than 250 supporters to Brookfield Zoo's beautiful Bramsen Tropical Forests for our 2026 Scholarship Gala, Blessed to Serve.

**Together, we celebrated the life changing impact of Christian education while raising an extraordinary \$234,000 to support scholarships and educational opportunities for students throughout our Chicagoland schools.**

Guests enjoyed an evening filled with fellowship, inspiring student performances, exciting auctions, and heartfelt stories that reminded us why the mission of CLEF matters so deeply. From bidding on unique packages to generously supporting our Fund a Need initiative, every guest played an important role in the evening's success.

This year's silent and live auctions featured an exciting array of unique items and unforgettable experiences that energized the evening, inspired enthusiastic bidding, and generated tremendous support for CLEF's mission.

A special thank you goes to the many businesses, organizations, and individuals who generously donated auction items. Your contributions created an outstanding auction experience for our guests and directly supported the success of the evening. We are truly grateful for your partnership and generosity. If you are interested in donating an item for next year's Scholarship Gala, we would love to hear from you. Please contact Sue Lorr at [suelorr@clefchicago.org](mailto:suelorr@clefchicago.org) to learn how you can be part of this special event.

**Most importantly, the Gala was a beautiful reminder of what can happen when a community comes together with a shared purpose.** We are deeply grateful to our generous sponsors, donors, volunteers, board members, staff, and every guest whose support makes Christian education accessible to more students and families.

Because of your generosity, students across our CLEF Chicagoland schools will continue to grow academically, spiritually, and personally in Christ centered learning environments.

Thank you for helping make the 2026 Scholarship Gala an overwhelming success. We are truly **Blessed to Serve**, and we look forward to continuing this important mission together.





A GALA TO REMEMBER!

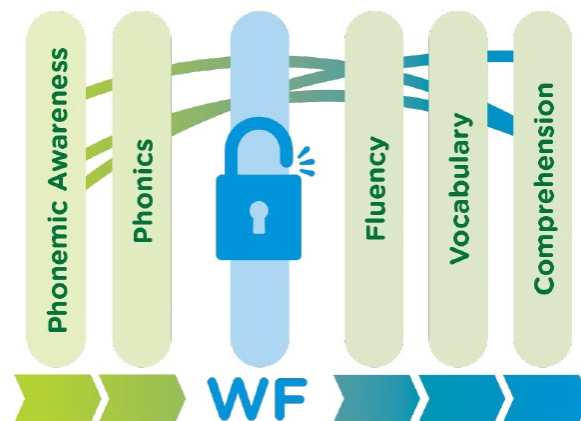


## Good Shepherd Christian Academy Students Included in Reading Fluency Program

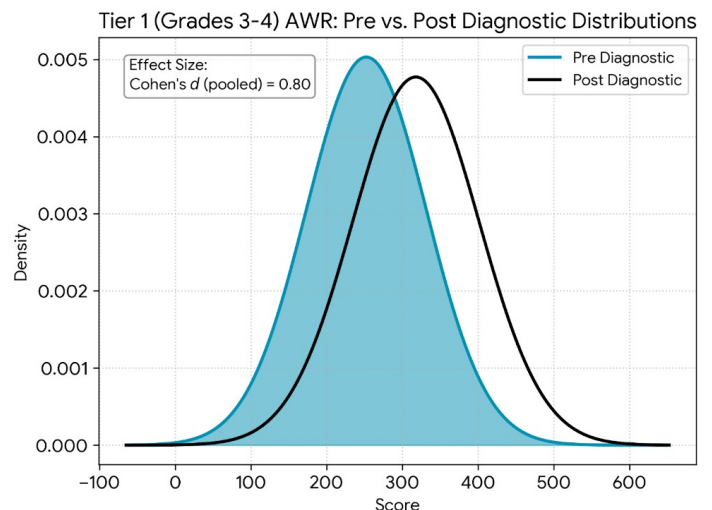
In this current school year, CLEF invited Good Shepherd Christian Academy to include Grades 3-8 students in a reading fluency program called WordFlight. WordFlight is a web-based instructional program which strengthens, through structured lessons and repeated reviews, automatic word recognition, one of the steps in the sequence of building blocks of reading fluency. Reading fluency is the bridge between decoding and comprehension, the ultimate goal of literacy instruction. This research report unlocks the results of this pilot initiated by CLEF.

As students complete a grade level, they naturally and appropriately expand their skills and understanding, demonstrating growth over the course of a school year. One common way to measure the strength of that growth is by looking at the distribution of performance, often represented by the classic bell curve. In education, one year of academic growth for elementary and middle school students is typically defined as 0.3 standard deviations. This is sometimes reported as an effect size, meaning that one year of academic growth equals and effect size of **0.30**.

**1 year of growth = 0.30**



WordFlight is organized into 24 units of study. Upon completion of 24 units of study, students take a Post-Diagnostic to chart their growth in automatic word recognition. Students in Tier 2 (Grades 5-8) also receive scores for decoding from the Diagnostic. The results of the Post-Diagnostic for GSCA students are depicted in the following graphs.







Chicagoland Lutheran  
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## **PREPARE TO BE AMAZED!**

**A New Kind of Diversity - United in Purpose**



**NETWORKING  
CONFERENCE**

**Concordia University Chicago  
River Forest  
Tuesday, August 11, 2026**

**Check-in: 8:00 – 8:40 a.m.  
Conference: 8:45 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.**



**Dr. Tim Elmore  
Keynote Speaker**

CLEF is thrilled to introduce Dr. Tim Elmore as our dynamic keynote speaker. Tim is Founder of Growing Leaders, an Atlanta-based non profit organization created to develop emerging leaders.

**We look forward to a meaningful day of learning and camaraderie.**