

# The Shining Light in East St. Louis

## Sister Thea Bowman Catholic School

By Roberta Trost

*Franciscan Friars Supporting education to inspire, empower, and prepare children for the future in our community and the world.*

Every morning, 125 students are greeted by the principal of the only remaining Catholic grade school in East St. Louis, Illinois. Parents and guardians make the daily sacrifice to ensure their children receive the best possible education to inspire, empower, and prepare them for the future in our community and the world. Sister Thea Bowman Catholic School (STBCS) uses a Holistic Learning Program which has a proven positive impact on our students: 100% of our alumni graduate from high school and 95% enroll in college, university, or trade school.

Our students have opportunities that simply do not exist for most East St. Louis children. Living in the fragile city of East St.

Louis, where poverty and violence are rampant, students often begin with a learning disadvantage. Such factors affect a child's educational and emotional progress. It takes a well-trained staff and exceptional learning opportunities to create an educational program that will transform the lives of those we serve. STBCS helps to eliminate poverty through education.

A strong culture blends respect, Catholic values, and peacemaking skills. We begin and end our day gathered in prayer, giving thanks for our students, staff, and community. Fr. Carroll Mizicko, OFM, celebrates Mass with our students every week in our chapel, and students are always eager



New religion books - We Believe!

to participate in Fr. Carroll's homilies.

Since 2004, academic studies in language arts, science, math, technology, religion, and Spanish have been enhanced with the expressive arts

of song, dance, and violin. Every student, from kindergarten on,

learns to play the violin. We believe that the positive discipline required to learn a musical instrument carries over to the classroom. Students also participate in visual arts and choir as well as in ballroom and liturgical praise dance. To demonstrate our learning, we conduct two performances a year, our Advent Prayer service and Spring Concert. These events allow the community to see and hear the orchestrated effort of over 150 individuals, students and staff.

At the invitation of Miss Jean Widener, Fr. John Eaton, OFM, visits her kindergarten class weekly to teach liturgical songs as well as the basic skills of music. Fr. John and the students share what they learn through song and prayer at the kindergarten Mass for the entire school. We appreciate Fr. John's generous gift of time and talent over the past year.

Our school has benefited immensely from the presence of Br. Tom Eaton, OFM. He and his family have brought STBCS's technology and computer program into the 21st century. Br. Tom's guidance assisted our school with earning a \$65,000 grant that brought over 70 iPads into our school, along with Apple TVs, Legos, Robotics and other technology. (And, yes, Br. Tom and Fr. John are brothers.)

Our Extended Day after school program was enhanced when the Chess Club and Scholastic Center of St. Louis sponsored a chess



Students enjoy playing chess in our after school program.



Violinists perform for community event under the direction of Mr. Phil.

program for grades 3 – 5. Students are eager to finish their after school snack and begin gaming. We started a robotics program, through the Clavius project, where grades 6 – 8 students are engaged in learning about the terminology of programming. They have built their first prototype designs and started programming their robots using a laptop.

The Dream Team is a program which helps prepare our 8th graders to envision their future. Under the direction of the graduate support director, there are numerous weekly activities to guide these efforts. Recently, an actress from the Center for Creative Arts worked with our students to use improvisation as a way to communicate. The graduate support director also assists with pre- and post-test academic skills review and helps to propose solutions to any identified learning gaps. The director follows our 8th grade alumni through high school to ensure student success.

STBCS's annual operating budget is approximately \$1,000,000. All of our parents and guardians are expected to contribute to the financial stability of the school. Typically, 15% of the operating dollars come from our families. Our supplemental fundraising efforts include our annual fund drive, grant writing, and the annual Benefit Dinner. As a ministry of the Belleville Diocese, we receive funding from the annual Catholic Services and Ministry Appeal. In addition, grantors, foundations, corporations, and individual contributors help underwrite the costs of educating our amazing students. With the support of many, our Sister Thea Bowman Catholic School remains a strong and viable Catholic presence in East St. Louis.



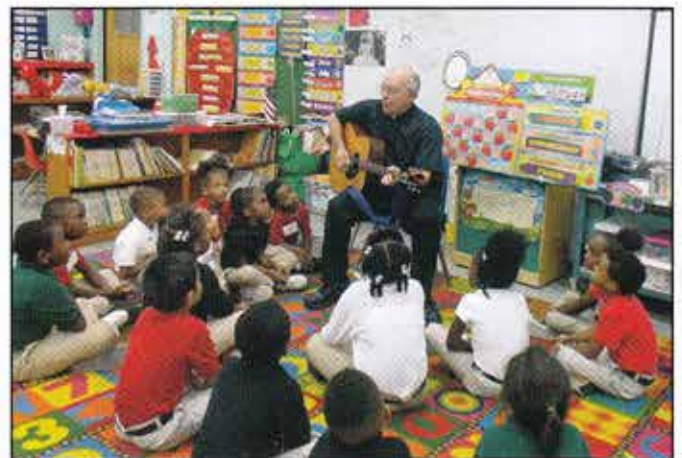
Fr. Carroll Mizicko, OFM, blessing the classrooms in the new school year.



Br. Tom Eaton, OFM with Sister Thea students.



Another great year - 2016 graduates! Off to attend Catholic High School.



Fr. John Eaton, OFM, working with the kindergarten class at Sr. Thea Bowman.

We invite you to learn more about our school. A personal visit and tour can be arranged any time. Visit our website or attend one of our Advent prayer services or Spring Concert. Check our calendar for dates on our website.

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