

A Progressive Approach to Curriculum

A school's course program provides the backbone for every student's learning, and here, St. Benedict Preparatory Schools (SBPS) stand above the rest. In our elementary school, we focus on traditional core subjects, faith formation and enrichment. By utilizing the latest technologies, the best support services and the most pertinent special affiliations, we ensure that every student is afforded the best opportunity to learn and grow. This approach gives every student the chance to excel—regardless of the learner's level.

Having pre-kindergarten through 12th grade within the same system is one of the many SBPS advantages. Not only does this allow us to leverage our educational philosophy across the schools, but it gives us an invaluable opportunity to build upon teachings from one year to the next. This continuity and continued relationship with our students helps to build strong minds and souls.



Early Childhood: Preschool

During these formative years, we focus on developmentally appropriate activities for our young students. This nurturing and fun environment is not only supervised play; it is content-based learning integral to the development of pre-literacy and pre-math skills. We offer center-based activities, hands-on centers positioned around the room where children learn at their own pace. This type of learning assists with the development of social, fine and gross motor skills.

Primary Grades: Kindergarten, 1st and 2nd

In these years, we build upon the pre-literacy and pre-math skills learned in our preschool. Using the Everyday Math program, a comprehensive math curriculum developed by the University of Chicago School Mathematics Project, children develop an understanding of math principles through hands-on activities, games, real-life problem solving, school-family cooperation and an appropriate use of technology. Our children also start to develop rich literacy experiences with the



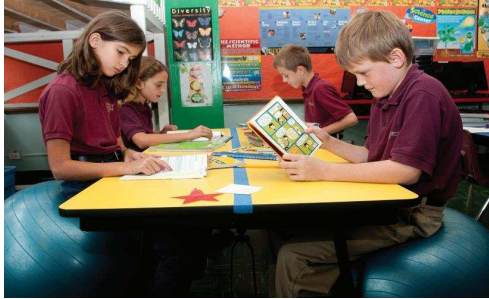
Scholastic Guided Reading program. In this program, the teacher works with small groups of students with similar reading skills. Using this personalized approach, children are better able to apply reading strategies that they already know to new text. The teacher offers support, but the ultimate goal is independent reading.





Intermediate Grades, 3rd, 4th and 5th

Students benefit from reading and math lessons based on their individual needs. The Guided Reading curriculum remains a critical component of learning, as students begin



reading at personalized levels. This “level-led” approach to reading allows teachers to better assess how well your child reads and match books that are challenging enough for the student to make progress. Reading places greater emphasis on novels as critical thinking and writing skills are developed. Likewise, lessons in science and social studies evolve as students begin to study individual topics

more in-depth. The Everyday Math curriculum is continued, as students learn the underlying principles of math and recognize how to apply them.

Grades 6, 7 8 and 9

We believe that one-to-one technology is a key tool in helping meet our students’ learning needs. That is why each middle school student is issued his or her own laptop for school and home use. The laptop is utilized to integrate the core curriculum across various subjects. For example, if students are preparing for a science fair, at the same time they will work on graphs in math class and write a paper on a science discipline in English class. At this level, reading and writing are integrated and novel-based, focusing on the elements of literature. For those students who excel in math and English, we offer a unique opportunity to take high school-level courses. Further, students in middle school can opt to take High School level electives in Art, Spanish, French, Drama and Chorus.



Co-Curricular Classes and Faith Development

We believe students are best served by a well-rounded education. To this end, SBPS offer an array of important co-curricular classes such as Spanish, art, music and



computer. And since we believe that physical wellbeing is as important as educational development, our students have physical education twice a week and also have daily recess in our secured courtyard.

At every level, our children are taught religious principles and those teachings deepen and evolve as the students mature. Whether it’s learning about prayer in preschool, preparing for First Reconciliation and First Holy Communion, engaging in Christian leadership in middle school or preparing for Confirmation, St. Benedict incorporates religious teachings throughout its curriculum. Additionally, older students known as Faith Buddies are matched with younger students, working on weekly faith-based projects.





TERRA NOVA STANDARDIZED TESTING RESULTS REAFFIRM SBPS ACADEMIC PROGRAM PROVEN SUCCESS

In March of every year, students in grades 2 through 7 take the *Terra Nova Multiple Assessment Achievement Tests, Third Edition*, as mandated by the Archdiocese of Chicago. The *Terra Nova Multiple Assessment Achievement Tests* format is different from many other common standardized tests. The difference is that for about 50% of the test, students do not just select a correct response from 4 or 5 given answers, but rather the students must generate or write out a correct response. These written questions often require critical thinking and problem solving skills. The written portion of the test is hand graded by three evaluators.

The test also has a 60-minute test called *InView* that measures cognitive ability (the ability to learn). This test has five subtests that consider sequences, analogies, quantitative reasoning, verbal reasoning, and words and context. These are skills that are used well by “good learners.” Based on how students do on the cognitive skills index, the test is able to “predict” how students should achieve. The cognitive skills index gives the anticipated score (how well the student is expected to achieve on this test); the *Terra Nova Test* gives the obtained score (how well the student did achieve on this test). The hope is that students are achieving as well as anticipated. If the obtained score is lower than the anticipated score, then the school is to look at factors that are preventing the student(s) from achieving: motivation, sufficient instruction time, were objectives and concepts properly addressed, are there supporting materials to reteach this concept, etc. If the obtained score is higher than the anticipated score then the school looks at factors that are influencing the students’ achievement: high personal motivation, strong support from home, good instructional techniques, increased instructional time, etc.

Information is also given that shows how many students in the grade scored at or above the national norm. In a statistically perfect world, we would expect $\frac{1}{2}$ of the students to score at or above the 50% national norm and $\frac{1}{2}$ of the students to score below the national norm. As seen in the latest test results, in all areas, we have very high percentages in these areas, which mean that a high majority of students are achieving and learning well here at St. Benedict Elementary School.

Terra Nova was selected because it measures the test content and objectives considered most pertinent to the instructional programs of the Chicago Archdiocesan school system. It does not measure the full curriculum of a particular classroom, school or system. Within the school, standardized test scores need to be used for two reasons:

- (a) to help develop and evaluate programs and curricula and
- (b) to help teachers identify skills in individual students which are weak or lacking so they may plan effectively for the future.



It is important to remember that achievement tests generally test about 35% of a school's learning program and give an indication of how a student is doing at that moment in time. Some students are excellent learners but do not fare well on formal written tests. Other students may be affected by circumstances at home, their own health that day, or their attitude toward success. The full flavor of what a student learned cannot be fully deduced from test scores alone. (This is why the school has implemented portfolio assessment as well.) It is important and necessary for the teacher and the parents to look at the total education data about each student, not just these test achievement test scores. The school needs to analyze the test results to see what changes, if any, need to be made to the curriculum. This analysis is done over the summer and next school year and during our curriculum/program review and revision.

Parents of students in grades 2 through 7 receive an individual report concerning their child. The Home Report and a letter explaining the data are being mailed home this week.

While we live a society that likes to compare one school to the next, the most important thing we do with standardized tests is compare ourselves against prior performance. Two distinctively positive affirmations coming from the results are: in just about all areas, our Grade Level Equivalents are increasing, as is the number of students at or above national norm.

Our teachers have been focusing on strengthening the instruction of reading and mathematics in the past and currently are working to strengthen our school wide writing practices. For our most recent test scores please visit our website: www.stbenedict.com.