

CATALYST

ST. MARCUS SCHOOL MAGAZINE • SPRING 2026



Passing the Ball
Forward
p. 7



Dear Friends,

I enter 2026 with a deep sense of gratitude to God and to you. Despite the ongoing challenges that stem from the very nature of the work, I often find myself smiling - outwardly or inwardly

- as I marvel at what God is doing here. I had one such moment on a frigid January morning as I approached the Karl J. Schlueter Campus. It was still dark, but the exterior column and interior classroom lights were on. The building literally glowed in the light of dawn, and I felt welcomed, embraced, and grateful. I smiled as I thought of the 300+ children who would follow me into the building and the community we continue to positively impact. Thank you again for opening these doors to our scholars so they can learn, thrive, and grow as disciples of Christ.

On December 26, 2025, the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel published a story by education reporter Alan Borsuk titled, *Some Positives Coming Out of Milwaukee Education in 2025*. In the article, Borsuk highlighted six organizations or initiatives that have had an impact. His list included **"The veterans who keep on succeeding."** Here's what he wrote:

Important education advocacy in Milwaukee has come for a couple decades from three schools: Milwaukee College Prep, Bruce Guadalupe, and St. Marcus Lutheran. Sure, they're controversial to some people because two of them are charter schools, and one is a private school in the voucher program. But they demonstrate that commitment to excellence, rigor, and building character can pay off year after year.

This year's evidence: In the recently released state report cards for schools, Bruce Guadalupe and St. Marcus each received five-star ratings. One Milwaukee College Prep campus got five stars, and the other three got four stars.

I was thankful and encouraged by this recognition.

Borsuk skillfully packs a lot into two small paragraphs. Consider the meaning behind the four key words that he uses:

Advocacy - Is defined as the act or process of supporting a cause or proposal. The cause we have been advocating for is access to high-quality education for every single child in Milwaukee - private, public, and charter. The voices of these three schools have provided important advocacy because our success makes us credible.

Decades - St. Marcus now has fifteen decades under its belt and over two decades of delivering exemplary education in the current era. We are here for the long haul and radically committed to further progress in our city.

Controversial - I would be ashamed if we were not controversial. As the influential American community organizer, Saul Alinsky, once said, "The first rule of change is controversy." We are badly in need of more controversy in Milwaukee's educational landscape, the kind that challenges inequity, disrupts the status quo, and demands better outcomes for our children.

Demonstrate - This word captures an essential element of St. Marcus' vision - our call to be a national model. Cities across America are desperate for examples of central city schools that demonstrate that "commitment to excellence, rigor, and building character can pay off year after year."

Borsuk's words reminded me of our vision statement: "We are a national model of biblical living, individual and community transformation, and exceptional educational outcomes. We are salt and light to the glory of God."

Throughout this edition of the Catalyst, you will read stories that epitomize our commitment to excellence and our commitment to having a transformative impact on our students, their families, and our city. Thank you for partnering with us to make this vision a reality for so many throughout our city.

To read Borsuk's full article:



tinyurl.com/mkeedu2025

God Bless,

Henry Tyson, Superintendent

RISE: A Night of Families Learning and Growing



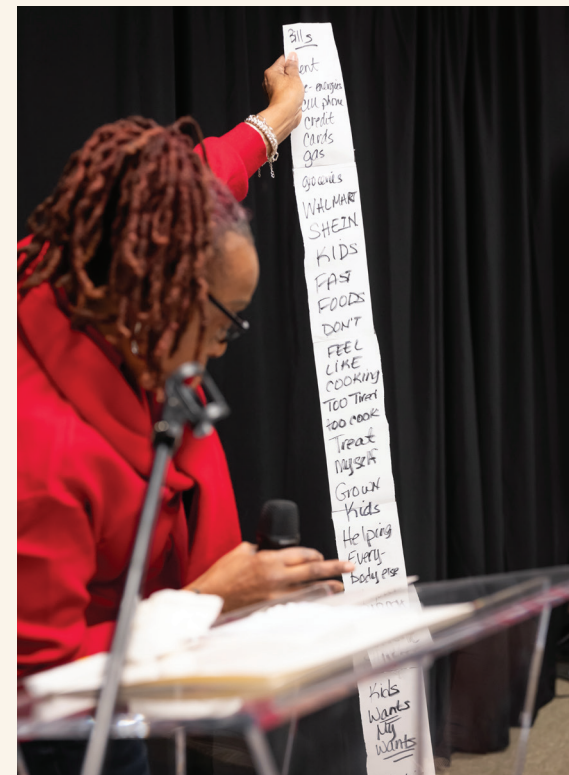
This year's RISE (Resilient Individuals Seeking Elevation) event brought together sixty-two parents, marking the highest attendance the program has seen, reflecting steady growth in engagement. The atmosphere was open and attentive. Parents came ready to listen and learn, and many arrived prepared to speak honestly about their own lives. Some had been part of St. Marcus' financial empowerment programming for years, while others were stepping in for the first time. **What connected them was a shared understanding that progress is possible and that support matters.**

The heart of the evening came through stories shared by five parents (pictured above): Dody, Carrie, Shaune, Ityunna, and Alita. Each story was grounded in lived experience and shared with clarity and courage. Together, they offered a picture of what can take shape when families are given guidance, time, and support that remains present.

Shaune's story held the room in quiet attention. After attending last year's RISE event, she felt motivated to take a closer look at her habits around money and to make changes that would create stability for her future. That motivation turned into action.

Beginning in September 2025, she enrolled in financial literacy classes and committed to one-on-one coaching with Moe Lawrenz, St. Marcus' Parent Financial Coach. Reflecting on her journey, Moe shared that "over the course of three months, she completely changed her mindset and spending habits, created a budget and stuck to it, built her savings, and acted on her plan to reduce debt and increase her credit score."

During her presentation, Shaune unrolled a long sheet of paper listing everyday expenses she had chosen to cut back on, the scroll stretching to the floor. Laughter filled the room as parents recognized familiar patterns in their own lives.



The moment landed because it was honest and relatable, offering a clear reminder that small choices, when named and understood, can shift direction.

The night also aligned with moments of celebration beyond the event itself! St. Marcus parent, Netta (right) closed on her first home earlier that same afternoon, and St. Marcus teacher Dody (below) recently closed on her home as well. These milestones were shared as signs of what sustained support can lead to over time.



The growth of St. Marcus' financial empowerment program was evident throughout the evening. When the program began in 2017, sixty-six participants attended financial literacy and homeownership classes across an entire school year. This year, sixty-two parents gathered for a single celebratory event. Since September 3rd, the program has engaged 231 participants.



As Moe shared, "participation grows as we consistently walk alongside parents, building trust through ongoing presence and support." This momentum has been strengthened by the addition of Rosio to the financial empowerment team during a period of increasing participation. Moe shared that "Rosio has been instrumental in increasing attendance because she personally sends reminder text messages to each person who signs up for a class," acknowledging that 31% of parents miss classes simply because they forget. Alongside this outreach, Rosio has taken on a significant share of one-on-one coaching and developed tracking systems that help families stay focused on their goals.

The evening brought the long-term impact into focus - families returning, learning, and taking steps forward within a program rooted in relationship. Thanks to your continued support, financial empowerment continues to grow, one family at a time.

"Participation grows as we consistently walk alongside parents, building trust through ongoing presence and support."





STANDING WITH A Night of Shared Commitment

If you were with us at the St. Marcus Gala this past November, you know the night did not rush. It asked something different. It asked us to pay attention, to stand close to one another, and to the work that holds us together.

That shared presence shaped the evening in lasting ways.

Together, the St. Marcus community raised

\$1,940,220

in support of 1,300 scholars, including a \$500,000 challenge match that was fully met.

Each gift helped close the \$3,000 per scholar gap between the state voucher and the true cost of a transformative St. Marcus education. These resources make space for care that is steady and intentional, the kind that allows scholars and families to grow with dignity and trust.

Our scholars stood at the heart of the night. Their voices, laughter, and confidence grounded the room. Their stories were not presented as symbols or outcomes. They showed up as themselves, shaped by a community that sees them clearly and believes in who they are becoming. Their presence reminded us that education is not transactional, that it is relational, and it is lived.

One of the evening's most powerful moments came when St. Marcus' Parent Financial Coach, Moe Lawrenz introduced Colette, a devoted St. Marcus parent and mother of seven. Moe, who walks alongside many of our St. Marcus parents on their journeys through financial literacy and home ownership, spoke about the privilege of standing with parents over time, witnessing lives change through consistent care and shared effort. Colette's story gave those words breath.

She shared how transferring her children to St. Marcus became a turning point for her family. The support her children received in the classroom extended outward, meeting her with coaching, encouragement, and space to dream again. Over time, Colette paid off significant debt, rebuilt her credit, and became a Habitat for Humanity homeowner after more than twenty years on housing assistance. Members of the St. Marcus community stood beside her in the most literal way, helping build her home with their own hands. As Colette shared, this is what it means to stand with someone.

Today, Colette is a homeowner, a business owner, and a leader within her community. Her children are thriving. Her story reflects what becomes possible when faith is paired with sustained presence.

To everyone who stood with St. Marcus that night, and to those who continue to do so each day, thank you. Your partnership shapes lives, strengthens families, and carries forward a legacy rooted in care.



We stand together. Thank you.



Event
Photos



Event
Videos

Passing the Ball Forward

At St. Marcus, some stories begin long before a scholar walks through our doors. Britain is new to the fifth grade this year, but the school is already part of his family's history. His older brother, London, walked these same halls a decade ago and is now studying engineering at Concordia University, giving Britain a quiet connection to the past even as he begins to make the school his own.



Britain lives with sickle cell disease, a reality that calls for care, patience, and consistency, especially within the rhythms of a school day. Having attended St. Marcus in earlier years, he returned this year after a year away, drawn back to a place where he was known and cared for. His reentry into the community has been shaped by a shared commitment between family and school.

"Britain has been very happy at St. Marcus," his mom, Kelly, shared. "We are working every day on consistency and learning the importance of a schedule with his conditions so that he can continue to learn and grow." That steady rhythm makes space for Britain to show up fully, ready to learn, connect, and participate in the energy of the classroom.

For Kelly, one of the most meaningful parts of this year has been the way St. Marcus has wrapped around their family. "The staff at St. Marcus has been great," she said. "It truly feels like a team, they hear me out and work with me and Britain to come up with solutions." That sense of partnership has created an environment where Britain is supported not just academically, but personally.

That foundation of support made a recent celebration feel even more powerful. In the fall, Britain participated in a special signing day at Marquette University, where he signed a national letter of intent with the men's basketball program through Team IMPACT, an organization that connects children facing health challenges with college athletic teams. During the event, Marquette head coach Shaka Smart told Britain, "This makes you an official member of our program."

Britain later shared with WISN 12 News, "I've been a fan of basketball since I was a baby."



Since that day, his connection with the team has continued to grow. As recently reported by the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, Marquette players have formed a strong bond with Britain, attending one of his recreation league games to cheer him on from the baseline and wearing shirts featuring his likeness as they filled the gym. The moment captured what the partnership has come to mean, a shared

love of the game and a genuine relationship built over time.

Kelly described the experience as both joyful and still settling in. "It's meant a lot to Britain, it's still very new and surreal," she said. "I hope that he's learning that hard work on and off the court is necessary to succeed."



"Hard work on and off the court is necessary to succeed."



She shared her gratitude for the opportunity and her hope that Britain can continue to look up to members of the team as mentors and role models of strong student athlete behavior, carrying those lessons with him wherever he goes.

When Kelly reflects on Britain right now, her pride centers on who he is becoming. "His heart and willingness to not give up," she said. "This year we are learning a lot and working through a lot. He is not giving up and I notice that he is willing to rationalize and discuss when things just don't make sense." Those moments, small and steady, point to growth and resilience, and to a young person learning how to stay engaged even when things feel hard.

The St. Marcus connection is made even sweeter by the way it brings Britain and his brother together. "I love when my boys can share experiences," Kelly shared. "With them being 10 years apart they obviously don't have a ton to talk about or relate to but this is one of the areas they can share and enjoy moments together." From homework help to memories of teachers who now serve in different roles, she delights in listening to those conversations unfold. "It's fun to listen to them share stories."

Britain's story continues to unfold in the everyday moments that make up school life, shaped by a community that believes deeply in him.

At St. Marcus, he is surrounded by teachers and classmates who celebrate his wins, walk alongside him through challenges, and remind him, through every lesson, hallway conversation, and shared smile, that growth, like a great game, happens one step, one play, and one heart at a time.

"Growth, like a great game, happens one step, one play, and one heart at a time."

BOARDING PASS

Summer 2026

DESTINATION:
Discover America

DEPARTURE:
This Summer

EXPLORE

DREAM

DISCOVER

Shortly after school lets out for the summer, scholars will take learning beyond the classroom through our **Discover America** program.

After a year spent studying history, geography, and culture, scholars in grades five through eight will travel with their teachers to museums, historic sites, national parks, and college campuses across the country.



In the coming months, be sure to keep an eye on your mailbox! You will receive a special note from a scholar preparing to depart, sharing what this journey means to them, what they are most excited to see and learn, and how you can support this experiential learning.



These moments are made possible because of friends who believe that learning should be lived, not just studied. Thank you for helping scholars see the world they have been learning about all year, up close - where knowledge comes to life.



A Decade of Supporting Scholars Through Special Education

2025 marked ten years of Special Education at St. Marcus, a milestone shaped not only by growth, but by a deepening understanding of what it means to truly support scholars and families. Over the past decade, SPED has become an integral part of the school's daily life, rooted in relationship, guided by faith, and sustained by a team of 16 individuals committed to seeing each child fully.

At the heart of this work is a posture of compassion and consistency. Rebecca Hannemann, Director of Student Services, describes the team's approach as one grounded in service and care. **"I am most proud of the way our team leads with compassion, consistency, and a servant's heart,"** she shares. **"Each day, they go beyond their assigned roles to truly see and know our scholars as individuals created in God's image."**

That way of seeing shapes how families experience the program as well. Through communication marked by grace and transparency, the team has built partnerships rooted in trust. "Families feel supported rather than judged," Rebecca explains, "and scholars feel safe, valued, and encouraged to grow academically and personally." Over time, that sense of safety becomes the foundation for learning, confidence, and growth.

As the SPED program has expanded, the support offered to over 140 scholars has grown more responsive and more intentional. Increased resources have allowed the team to meet scholars where they are academically, while also nurturing social and emotional development. "Our expanded program ensures scholars receive the care, dignity, and support they need to succeed both in and beyond the classroom," Rebecca says.

One of the most meaningful milestones in the program's evolution has been the growth of Speech and Language services, particularly in response to needs that became more visible after COVID. Rather than pulling back, the team strengthened support. "Seeing students gain confidence in their communication and families feel reassured that their children are being supported is a clear reflection of God's guidance and the faithfulness of our team's work," Rebecca shares.

Speech Language Pathologist Mackenzie Green (below) sees that impact unfold in moments that stay with her long after the school day ends. This year, she completed an Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) trial with a scholar with complex communication needs. "He was successful with his new language device and used it to communicate with his family, teachers, and peers," she says. One moment stands out clearly. "My favorite moment was when he independently used the device to get my attention by selecting the MRS. GREEN button."



She also reflects on a young K3 scholar whose confidence has grown through speech services. "He previously did not raise his hand or participate much in the classroom," Mackenzie explains. "Since working together, he has been raising his hand more to participate in class activities and discussions." For her, these changes are deeply meaningful. "Speech is very rewarding because we see kids grow in their communication skills," she adds, noting that families often engage actively in the process, practicing skills at home and celebrating progress together.

Rebecca Latterman (right), who has served as a speech language pathologist at St. Marcus for five years, has witnessed the program's expansion firsthand. During her time, the speech program has grown from serving roughly twenty scholars to supporting more than ninety. Across that growth, one outcome remains central. "One major way that I see my work impacting students would be by increasing their confidence," she shares.



Some of her most meaningful moments come when scholars with limited verbal communication move beyond basic requests to sharing ideas and feelings. Others come when scholars "graduate" from speech services. "It is amazing to reflect on how far they have come," she says, "and to celebrate that they no longer need me."

Looking ahead, the SPED team remains committed to listening closely and responding with care. As Rebecca Hannemann reflects, the work continues with hope and purpose. **"It is exciting to envision a future where every scholar is empowered to discover their God given purpose, connect, and thrive within a community rooted in faith, patience, and love."**

Ten years in, SPED at St. Marcus continues to grow, shaped by trust, guided by service, and centered on the children it exists to serve.

She describes how fear of being misunderstood can hold scholars back from speaking in class. In speech sessions, skills are paired with reassurance. "We work on communication skills, but we also talk about confidence," Rebecca explains. Over time, scholars begin to speak more freely, take risks, and advocate for themselves.

10
YEARS
shaped by trust
guided by service
centered on children

Conscious Discipline: Learning to Pause Before We Solve

There is a noticeable quiet that settles across classrooms at St. Marcus. It often arrives in moments when frustration or conflict could easily escalate. A scholar pauses. A teacher waits. The room holds. Something shifts. **This is Conscious Discipline in practice, a shared language that shapes how scholars learn to move through hard moments together.**

At St. Marcus, Conscious Discipline is used alongside Love and Logic to create classroom environments that are loving, forgiving, safe, and trustworthy. The focus is on skill building, rather than control or compliance. Scholars are taught how to recognize their emotions, regulate their bodies, and take responsibility for their actions without fear or shame. These practices are woven into daily routines, shaping how classrooms feel long before challenges arise.

One of the foundational ideas scholars learn early is that no one can make you angry without your permission. Laura Tyson, Director of Primary Grades at Karl Schlueter Campus, explains how this belief is practiced aloud in classrooms. When a scholar says, "She made me so angry," teachers gently guide them to reframe the statement as, "I felt angry when..." The emotion is honored, but ownership returns to the child. From that place, reflection and problem solving become possible.

Scholars also learn assertive language that helps them advocate for themselves clearly and respectfully. Laura describes how scholars practice sentence frames such as, "I don't like it when you _____. Next time _____." This language is modeled consistently and reinforced across settings. Over time, it becomes natural. Laura recalls a second grader who reported a recess conflict earlier in the day. Later, that same student approached their peer and used the language they had learned. The other student agreed. The conflict ended. No adult intervention was needed.

When behavior escalates beyond what can be handled in the moment, teachers may use a guidance strategy called Recovery. Recovery is not punitive, it is a brief pause from positive reinforcement that gives a child time to calm their body and regain control. Children remain within sight and sound of an adult and return to the activity as soon as they are ready. The purpose is clear: to stop the conflict, protect others, and allow space for regulation. Afterward, teachers talk with the child about what happened, explore alternative choices, and support them in repairing the relationship. Accountability is held alongside reassurance.

Resilience is named directly in these moments. As Laura shares, scholars are reminded that hard moments are moments and they will pass. When a child cries after a consequence, teachers respond with steady honesty. This is a hard moment. You can handle it.

Ellie Brown, 3rd Grade Lead Teacher (below), sees the long arc of these practices every day.



She describes classroom rituals such as wish wells for absent classmates, welcome back moments, breathing techniques, and Safe Places designed for regulation. Over time, scholars begin to care for one another using the same tools. Ellie notices scholars recognizing when a peer feels anxious, frustrated, or sad, and "offering to walk them to the Safe Place". Scholars take genuine joy in encouraging one another.

Conscious Discipline is intentionally adult first. Ellie reflects that before she could teach self regulation and accountability, she had to build those skills herself. One classroom refrain captures this culture. "Oops, I made a mistake!" followed by, "But you are still beautiful to me!" This language reframes mistakes as opportunities to learn rather than moments to fear.



At St. Marcus, Conscious Discipline is not about perfect behavior. It is about teaching children how to pause, recover, repair, and try again. It creates classrooms where accountability lives within safety, and where scholars learn, again and again, how to meet hard moments with care.



The quiet that settles in St. Marcus classrooms is not empty - it is full of growth. It is in these moments of pause that scholars learn to breathe, reflect, and choose a better path forward. Through Conscious Discipline, children are being equipped with tools that extend far beyond school walls: emotional regulation, respectful communication, accountability, and perseverance. In every repaired relationship and recovered hard moment, St. Marcus is shaping far more than classroom behavior. Scholars are developing the resilience, empathy, and confidence they will carry into high school, careers, relationships, and life.

This life-shaping work is made possible through the generosity of those who walk alongside our scholars - investing not only in classrooms today, but in stronger futures for years to come.

"St. Marcus is shaping far more than classroom behavior."



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St. Marcus is a Christian, high-expectations choice school serving students from grades K3 to 8th.

Using a proven urban education model, St. Marcus seeks to instigate change and provide a community of learning where children and families live, grow, and thrive.

St. Marcus' driving vision is that every family has access to excellent education in the city of Milwaukee.



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