

STJ LEAD SCHOOL

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

BACKGROUND

What is St. John's new LEAD School?

St. John is proud to be the only school in West St. Louis County to offer LEAD, which is an acronym for Learner- Centered, Empowering, Action-Oriented, and Discovery-Driven. LEAD is transforming education with an approach that is focused on:

- Personalized learning tailored to each student's unique gifts, strengths, and individual needs.
- Modern, interactive learning in a warm, comfortable environment.
- Cultivation of the whole person – academically, emotionally, physically, and spiritually.
- Life success skills development that prepares students to be communicators, collaborators, and critical thinkers.
- Active hands-on-learning with plenty of time for play and being outdoors and “just enough” screen time.
- A supportive community where students are encouraged to stretch themselves, dig deeper, and feel comfortable with appropriate teacher and parent involvement.

Where does LEAD come from? How are the teachers trained for this kind of learning?

Our LEAD approach is based on decades of educational research and has a foundation in Self-Regulation, Project-Based Learning (PBL), and Social Emotional Learning (SEL) educational models. A St. John School team visited four highly regarded schools across the country that have adopted some element of our LEAD program to observe classrooms, interview educators, and talk to parents. Our teachers continue in their professional development by visiting fellow schools who are also experiencing success in the PBL model, as well as reading and receiving training on practices like Gold Standard PBL, LAUNCH cycle and Formative Five. If you would like to dig deeper into the academic research supporting LEAD-like approaches, see enclosed document called “*The Case for LEAD.*”

Is LEAD being used in all grades at St. John School?

LEAD was adopted at St. John School in 2018 for Grades 3-5.

In light of that success, in the 2019-2020 academic year, we are expanding our LEAD program.

- **Kindergarten to Grade 2** – As we introduced during Kindergarten enrollment this year, this will be called Early LEAD. These grades will fold age-appropriate LEAD practices into single-grade classrooms.
- **Grades 3 and 4** – To build on the success our students experienced in 2018-19, these grades will be exclusively LEAD classes. We will no longer offer a conventional classroom option.
- **Grades 5 and 6** – Families have the choice of continuing with a LEAD class or transitioning to a conventional middle school setting with age-appropriate aspects of LEAD woven in.
- **Grades 7 and 8** – To provide continuity for these students who are already near their transition into high school, these grades will be primarily conventional middle school with age-appropriate aspects of LEAD woven in.

OUTCOMES

What have been the results of LEAD?

LEAD promises the following outcomes:

1. Academic achievement at or above conventional classrooms.
2. Superior quality of life for students and their families.
3. A set of real life success skills that cannot be taught in conventional classrooms.

Since introducing LEAD this school year, we've seen positive progress. The LEAD class had notably higher – by at least five percentiles – STAR test scores in reading and math, and demonstrated exceptional growth in social-emotional skills. Plus, they're performing above grade level and are progressing faster than conventional classroom students. We're also seeing LEAD students experience lower anxiety, more confidence, fewer behavioral problems, and greater well-being. Our teachers and administrators will continue collecting data to ensure that the program meets or exceeds academic standards.

HOW IT WORKS

How do you determine each child's personalized needs - and tailor to them?

LEAD begins with a learner assessment. The learner assessment covers the following areas: personality type, multiple intelligence preferences, and predominant learning style. This approach allows us to place students with teachers and peers who are compatible and helpful throughout the learning process. Gaining this deeper understanding of students allows St. John to support the growth of the whole student: intellectually, emotionally, socially, and spiritually.

How do students plan their own days while still accomplishing the curriculum?

No one likes to be micromanaged, that's also true for kids. While there are standards and expectations for what students need based on the maturity and insight of their teachers, students get the opportunity to have a voice throughout their day in when and how things get done. It makes for a much more enthusiastic environment, with more motivated and confident kids.

What do you mean by “success skills”?

We've all known people who are dangerously smart, but they aren't successful in life. So while we prize academics, our approach focuses on the building up and nurturing of the whole person – mind, body, and spirit. We teach real-life success skills, like collaboration, critical thinking, decision making, and communication that are sought out by future professors, employers, spouses, and even society as a whole.

Will my child be encouraged and challenged?

Absolutely. LEAD offers a personalized approach that is tailored to each student's unique gifts, strengths, and individual needs. We are not content with the state of education in our country (America spends more on education than almost anyone else, and our results don't show it). Nor are we content with raising students who are content with the status quo. We create growth-minded students, who are learning the keys to being life-long achievers, while doing so in a highly flexible, nurturing, and supportive environment.

How do you handle group dynamics in a multi-age classroom when some work is completed in a collaborative environment?

We have found that the multi-age environment has been beneficial for most students. While the older students sometimes take a leadership role naturally in this environment, they also help ensure that all students have a voice when working collaboratively. The classroom environment and PBL framework also pushes students to actively listen to one another and respect each other's point of view. In younger grades (“Early LEAD” K-2), we still value interaction across age groups, but we recognize that the developmental and learning needs of these younger students require more time spent in their single-grade classrooms.

THE SPECIFICS

What are the class sizes?

Class sizes average 16 students. Within a large studio model, you might find up to 32 students with two teachers. This setup allows for more flexibility and small group opportunities for students, which gives teachers the ability to provide individual attention as students pace through the curriculum. Single-grade Early LEAD classrooms can see class-sizes up to 22.

How about the physical environment?

We think of classrooms as studios. Students move about throughout their day in a learning environment created for flexibility and collaboration. No more desks in rows – there are a variety of different kinds of places to sit and work, with nurturing educators helping students find the perfect balance between flexibility, comfort, and performance.

How is technology used in LEAD School?

Technology is an important aspect of today's society, but we do not think screens should consume students' days! Most older students spend less than 90 minutes a day with a screen, it's far less for our Early LEAD students. The rest of the day is spent with students collaborating, investigating, learning from each other, solving problems, completing engaging projects, and getting outside.

When they are online, students' time is focused on customized learning paths designed just for them, mainly in math and reading. The online application in these areas provides students with immediate feedback when practicing new concepts and allows St. John School to track important learning metrics.

Will students complete any work via pencil and paper?

Yes. For example, students complete math fact practices on paper, spend time journaling, and also utilize pencil and paper for some of their writing curriculum.

How do students complete Science and Social Studies standards if they do not have specific classes for those subjects?

Social studies and science standards are met through the Project Based Learning (PBL) model. Teachers map out content through the year, which allows students to work within the PBL framework while also being exposed to and accomplishing grade-level content standards.

Is there homework in LEAD School?

Students are able to work on some content at home, if they choose to do so. However, LEAD does not require work outside of the school day. Our educators are available, if parents desire to better understand what their child is working on and can further discuss their achievement.

How are students graded or assessed?

Effective measurement can happen in a number of ways. LEAD provides an achievement report that ensures all state grade-level standards are being met without assigning traditional grades (in fact, many of our students quickly begin working ahead of grade-level). STAR testing delivers progress monitoring and student growth data. Early results revealed notably higher STAR test scores in reading and math, as well as greater improvements over the course of the first semester, as compared to conventional classrooms test scores in that same period of time.

WHAT ELSE?

Is LEAD just the latest educational fad?

Decades of research has shown the educational community that there are more effective ways to educate students. Yet, in the same span of time, education has only changed incrementally. All the best schools are moving toward these approaches, but the rate of change is too slow (think red tape and bureaucracy) to benefit this generation of children. St. John School is uniquely positioned with the courage and flexibility to pursue what educational research has shown us is best, without losing an entire generation of learners. If you would like to dig deeper into the academic research supporting LEAD-like approaches, see enclosed document called "*The Case for LEAD.*"

Can the LEAD School accommodate a child with a learning plan?

Yes. A student who has difficulty learning will be best served with an individual education program or other learning plan that includes accommodations or modification to the curriculum and work environment. These features can be successfully accomplished in the LEAD environment, where students receive individualized attention from teachers.

How are religion and spiritual development taught?

Religion and memory work are part of the LEAD program. St. John students attend chapel during the week and prayer is an integral part of the day. The curriculum will cover specific Christian topics, and students are able to direct conversations and learning based on the challenges and spiritual development that is most relevant for them. Students have a choice when determining their memory work, and they routinely write in their reflection journals.

How is diversity taught or experienced? How do students engage in caring about others or in their community?

The PBL model organically allows students to develop empathy as the group addresses various societal challenges, seeks out understanding in collaborative work, and hears from experts who discuss issues and programs in the community. While students are actively taught to embrace the unique gifts and features of classmates and others, they are engaging in activities that further their understanding and awareness of the world around them.

What happens after LEAD? How will students be prepared for high school or college, e.g., sitting in a 500-person lecture hall?

LEAD prepares students to self-regulate, think critically, and self-advocate when necessary. These skills equip students no matter what environment is next for them. Think about it: A traditional classroom is asking students to comply with behavior and work completion. Our LEAD School students have moved beyond compliance. They understand how they can be empowered in their work. This knowledge produces outstanding work and leadership in any environment. In the schools we visited prior to implementation, students posted high success rates when they moved to the next level of education. If you would like to dig deeper into the academic research supporting LEAD-like approaches, see enclosed document called *“The Case for LEAD.”*

stjstl.net/LEAD

**For more information about LEAD School go to stjstl.net/LEAD
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