

Ascension Catholic School • St. John Paul II Catholic School • St. Peter Claver Catholic School

Ascension alumna reaches for the stars

Astronaut Mae Jemison, the first Black woman in space, inspired young Sideena Grace to aim for the moon, and she is on target to reach it.

The rigorous academic and faith-based education Sideena received in the elementary grades at Ascension Catholic School was the foundation upon which her dreams were built.

Those dreams led her to Hamline University, where she became the first African American woman to receive a degree in Applied Physics this spring. The dreams brought her to Harvard University, where she spent a summer as a fellow in the Banneker Institute, a research and study experience that prepares students of color for graduate programs.

And finally to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where she will study for her doctorate in Aeronautics and Astronautics. Her goal is to design spacesuits.

"Ascension's tutoring helped me learn study habits, how not to be afraid to ask questions, and it helped me be more productive in school," Sideena said.

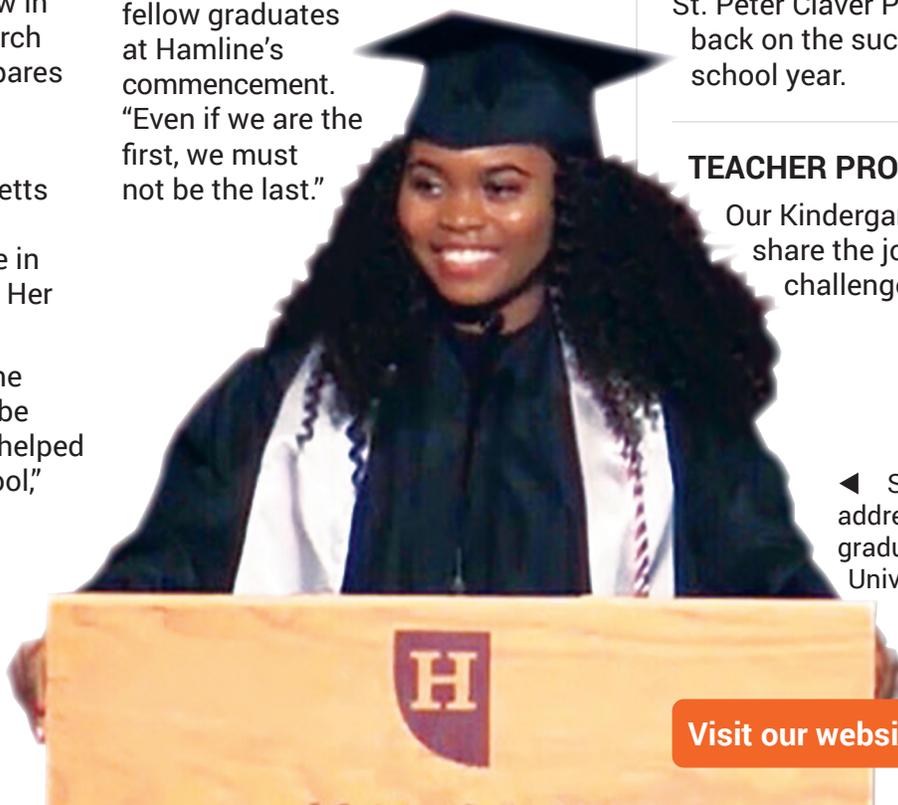
She appreciated the financial aid her family received to attend Ascension, especially after her mother became ill.

"I am a Christian and having a school that was faith based allowed me to be spiritual in an educational environment, which continued the influence from my parent and helped me build my faith," she added.

Giving back is very important to Sideena. She knows the value of not only being inspired but of being an inspiration to others.

"We must enable others to walk on the trail we have blazed," she told her fellow graduates at Hamline's commencement.

"Even if we are the first, we must not be the last."



Scan to watch excerpts of Sideena's commencement speech at Hamline.

INSIDE

MORE ALUMNI PROFILES



Alumnus Alex Alvarado is giving back to St. John Paul II as a tutor.



Yenika Fondungallah says St. Peter Claver helped form him into who he is today.

SCHOOL UPDATES

Ascension, St. John Paul II and St. Peter Claver Principals look back on the successes of this school year.

TEACHER PROFILES

Our Kindergarten teachers share the joys and challenges of their jobs.

◀ Sideena Grace addressed fellow graduates at Hamline University.

Visit our website: ACAmn.org

ST. PETER CLAVER

At a small school, opportunities for collaboration can be rare. This is one of the many benefits of belonging to Ascension Catholic Academy.

As we have implemented a rigorous new curriculum in English Language Arts, our teachers have shared their experiences and insights with staff at St. John Paul II. Teachers learning from each other leads to better instruction all around. This has shown such great benefits that we will extend this collaborative model to all three Academy schools in the area of math in the coming year.

As part of our MNSAA strategic plan, we deepened our use of individualized learning plans for scholars. These plans were flexible enough to span across both in-person and distance-learning models that we experienced this past school year. Our team used these plans to ensure that the academic, social-emotional needs, and food and rent insecurities were being addressed throughout the school year.

SPC has an exciting new partnership with the Friends of the Boundary Waters. Members of the group came to school to teach middle schoolers about ecosystem connections and wilderness skills. They also conducted a workshop for all SPC families at Lake Phalen. Next year, they hope to take scholars to visit the BWCA.



Terese Shimshock, Principal



ST. PETER CLAVER



ST. JOHN PAUL II



ASCENSION

ST. JOHN PAUL II

Our academic successes are getting attention near and far.

- Our new Believe and Read program in grades K-3, through Groves Academy, was recognized as being effective in person, online, and doing both at the same time! Our teachers' tips and strategies have been shared by Groves with other schools.

- St. John Paul II was chosen by the Canopy Project to be an example of models that work in urban settings for schools across the country. In particular, the Canopy Project highlighted our commitment to blended learning (use of technology in personalizing learning for each and every scholar), scholar goal setting, and care and support for the social-emotional learning of each scholar.

- Our model of shared learning and live distance learning has been lifted up as an example for other Archdiocesan schools. This unique model, created by our JP II teachers, was formed and implemented in less than 3 months.



Tricia Menzhuber, Principal

ASCENSION

With the caring and patient guidance of our staff, Ascension scholars are continuing to adjust to a "normal" school routine following the challenges of the past 16 months. It is a tricky balance: showing compassion while continuing to hold scholars and parents accountable for attendance and school work. Our staff is doing a great job in this delicate situation.

Teachers are polishing these skills through Academy-wide professional development, which has focused all year on racial equity. This is part of the Academy's commitment to encouraging voice, choice and agency among our scholars and families.

In academics, we are grateful for our rigorous new English Language Arts curriculum. We are examining our math curriculum to decide if we want to change it and considering options.



Benito Matias, Principal

YENIKA FONDUNGALLAH

Yenika Fondungallah, a 2021 graduate of St. Thomas Academy, learned much more than academics during 8 years he spent at St. Peter Claver Catholic School.

“What you do when no one’s watching shows your true character,” Yenika said. SPC teachers “changed my life and perspective ... and really shaped me into the person I am today.”

Yenika is heading to Benedictine College in Kansas this fall. He hopes to build a career in creative arts, specifically fashion and design.

His parents, who came to the United States from Cameroon, recognized St. Peter Claver as the strong Black community they were seeking for their four children.

“My parents created greatness out of nothing, all in hopes of making sure my brothers and I could be the free Black men we are today,” Yenika says in his St. Thomas Academy Senior Speech.



He understood at an early age that many of his classmates lived in poverty. “It taught me to be mentally strong and mentally open to see all perspectives,” he said.

The care and closeness that St. Peter Claver extends to its scholars is unmatched, Yenika said. The whole community benefits from that.



Scan to watch Yenika's Senior Speech at St. Thomas Academy.

ALEX ALVARADO

St. John Paul II Catholic School taught Alex Alvarado two important lessons vital to his adult life: Be yourself and help others.

Alex is attending Dunwoody College of Technology, studying to be an electrician. His goal is to become a master electrician.

At JP II, Alex said, “I learned how to socialize with others around me without trying to be someone I’m not.” Many of his good friends are those he met at JP II.

The school is a close-knit community where everyone knows and supports one another. “The younger kids all knew me and looked up to me,” Alex said. “I had two younger cousins who attended JP II at the same time I did, and that was a neat experience.”

Alex is going back to JP II as a volunteer tutor, helping scholars



with math. “In my job, I use a lot of the math skills I learned at JP II on a daily basis,” Alex said.

The scholar he has been tutoring doesn’t speak much English. “I really like knowing that I am able to help this boy who has had a hard time and doesn’t know English,” Alex said. “My dad didn’t speak any English when he came to this country at age 14. It’s great to help someone like him.”

THE JOYS OF TEACHING KINDERGARTEN

GRACE DONOVAN, SPC



Most memorable part of this year?

The gift of this spring! It has been a true joy being able to do all of the fun, silly end of the school year activities with my sweet kindergarten friends. (Especially since we missed out on this last year because of the pandemic!)

SCARLETT WAND, JP II



What is the best part of your job?

I love seeing the scholars’ growth from the beginning of the year to the end. It is AMAZING how much growth they have (physically, emotionally, and academically).

MICHELLE KLEIN, ASCENSION



Favorite subject to teach?

I enjoy religion the most because I get to share the love of God with my students. We read the whole Children’s Bible in a school year.

JAMIE MICHEL, ASCENSION



What is the most challenging part of your job?

Kindergarteners come into kindergarten with such different abilities and skills. For example, some come in already reading and others come in knowing maybe a handful of letters and sounds. Helping all of them succeed and learn can be challenging.

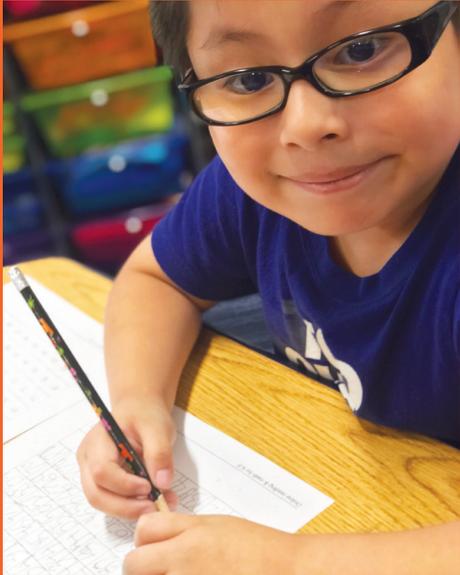


Scan to read more from the Academy Kindergarten teachers.



ASCENSION
CATHOLIC ACADEMY

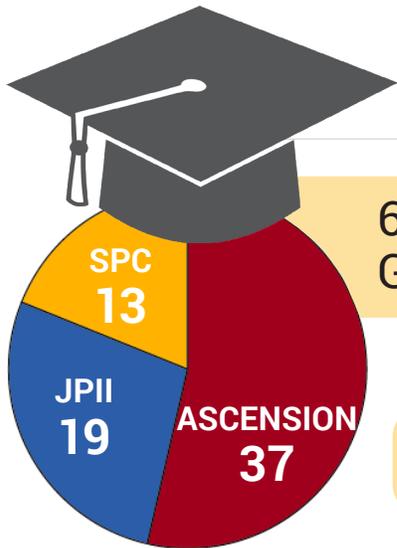
1723 Bryant Ave. N
Minneapolis, MN
55411



COMING UP:

- **SLAM** summer program begins June 21.

Preferred Addressee
Preferred Address Line 1
Preferred Address Line 2
Preferred City, St Preferred ZIP



ASCENSION CATHOLIC ACADEMY CLASS OF 2021

69 TOTAL ACA GRADUATES

HIGH SCHOOLS THEY WILL ATTEND

- DeLaSalle 18
- Cristo Rey 7
- Cretin-Derham Hall..... 2
- Benilde-St. Margaret's 3
- Public schools..... 24
- Undecided..... 15

CAREERS THEY HOPE TO PURSUE

Historian, engineer, doctor, software developer, firefighter, lawyer, nurse, stock broker, graphic artist, writer.

WHAT THEY SAY THEY LEARNED IN OUR SCHOOLS

You can get through/learn ANYTHING if you just throw yourself into it, even if you're uncomfortable inside. Let that nervousness turn into adrenaline.

– **David at St. John Paul II**

I have learned to always pay attention in class and be respectful to people, and always stand up for what you believe in.

– **Brooklyn at Ascension**

I have learned to be independent.

– **Regina at St. Peter Claver**

The importance of God in my life.

– **Marius at JP II**

Taking notes will help you remember things you need to remember.

– **Jamison at Ascension**