



St. Michael

THE ARCHANGEL

Michael D'Angelo, known as Mike, is a favorite staff member among students at St. Michael the Archangel High School, which opened in Lee's Summit in 2017. Mike joined the team as the Director of Love and Hospitality; his salary comes in the form of treats, love, attention, and walks. Oh, and he's a puppy!

Mike is just one of the many elements that makes St. Michael a unique addition to Missouri's Catholic education landscape. Principal Jodie Maddox says every single aspect of the school was chosen with great intention—including Mike. "The architecture in this building is very intentional," she says. "It's a 21st century school, but our chapel, when you go inside, is very traditional and old world, because that's who we are. We

are a school that's rooted in the ancient but striving toward the future. We're a 21st century school rooted in God's grace and tradition." All students are equipped with laptops, have the opportunity to enroll a variety of educational programs including aviation, participate in varsity sports, and to attend Mass daily. New ideas intertwine with the tradition of Catholic theology, answering the greatest call to 'know truth, love God, and serve others,' the mission of St. Michael the Archangel. "We know that truth is in everything we do," Maddox says. "There is an ultimate truth, and that is true with everything including science, including math, and so we can talk about that truth in many ways, but to exclude Christ would not bring the actual truth to it. Knowing truth, teaching truth, teaching children that service is love, love is not anything other than an active piece of who you must be. You have to participate in order to love."

In the S.M.I.L.E. (St. Michael Inclusive Learning Enhancement) Zone, St. Michael's

special needs learning center, students learn to participate and to love. Here, Mike helps students learn valuable life skills. “They’re learning empathy, responsibility, all those great things, but really they’re learning what friendship looks and feels like...they’re learning how to care for him as well as their own needs at the same time.” These students also run the Guardian Grind, which is a coffee bar inside the school, as part of a business math class on Tuesdays and Thursdays. “They not only learn math skills but they learn marketing,” Maddox says. “They do all the shopping, they have a seasonal latte that they serve, black coffee and then a smoothie that they create. They create all the recipes, they do the trial and errors...it’s their business, they make money...it’s a full life-skills learning lab.” St. Michael’s employs another uplifting special education strategy. “These kids are not only serviced through the S.M.I.L.E. Zone, but they are also cared for and taught by our peer mentors,” Maddox says. “We don’t have paraprofessionals, we have juniors and seniors that elect to take this as a class. So they go to class with these kids, help them take notes, help them stay organized, email them, ask them to go to a basketball game, those kinds of things.”

St. Michael’s student body is organized into communities, a collection of students from all four grades, rather than being separated by their graduating class. “So if you can think about the Kansas City area, we have Blue Springs, Lee’s Summit, Independence,” Maddox says. “So we have St. Michael HS, but we also have the communities.” Each community is named after a 21st century saint—currently John Paul II, Maximilian Kolbe, and Padre Pio. This setup allows the students to be more unified, but no less competitive in their achievements. Throughout the year, the communities compete with each other in various charitable activities, such as food and toy drives, to rack up the most points to win the year-end competition. “Everything is attached to a point,” Maddox says. “At the end of the school year, we have what we call the ‘Battle of the Guardian Sword,’ it’s



Bottom left: Aprons worn by Guardian Grind baristas; bottom right: Maximilian Kolbe community lounge/language arts wing



like the Super Bowl. We have one whole day where we have minute to win it games; the community that wins that day has bragging rights for the whole next year.” Each day, students spend anywhere from 15-45 minutes in their “houses,” which are small groups within their communities. “You might just be eating Doritos in the commons, you might be praying the rosary, you might be taking a walk down by the lake,” she says. “It looks a lot like youth ministry, and it is.” This type of interaction helps students beyond the walls of the school building. “Part of the 21st century model is we know universities, we know industries, we know the world of work is craving authentic relationships,” Maddox says. “These kids know how to collaborate, know how to take feedback, know how to plan, know how to do all those soft skill things we used to take for granted.” It also ties back to the ultimate truth. “In the Catholic world we also crave an authentic relationship not with just one another, but with Christ. So we use that time in a very intentional way.” As part of their daily education, students have the opportunity to enroll in a learning academy. “Within those academies there are pathways for exploration,” Maddox says. Subject areas include engineering, aviation, healthcare, humanities, and more. “We really intentionally tried to create an environment of discernment and discovery,” she says. This encouraging environment helps students grow and succeed together in areas they might not otherwise have the opportunity to try. Across the nation, St. Michael is one of only three private high schools, and the only Catholic school, to offer an aviation program. The program is designed and piloted by Aircraft Owners and Pilot Association (AOPA) through a partnership of STEM educators, science individuals, and aviation experts. Students who choose to partake learn about engineering practices, problem solving, and the innovations and technological developments that have made today’s aviation and aerospace industries possible. Upon graduation, students who successfully complete the aviation pathway will earn a

drone pilot license and be prepared to enter flight school or go straight into an aviation-related career.

Many modern schools offer this type of 21st century learning. So what really makes a difference at St. Michael's? "In the Kansas City area, especially Lee's Summit, you can get a good, solid education for free," Maddox says. "But, are we feeding the soul of the child?" It's a question that eventually led Maddox to make the move from public to Catholic education. "When I was studying education in the 90s, we talked a lot about teaching the whole child. But never did anyone talk about the soul. So everything we do feeds mind, body, and soul." Incorporating Christ and Catholic teaching is a key component to this balanced formula. "We have very intentional things, like a service project, which is 25 hours of service per year, 100 hours before you graduate," she says. The project ends with a presentation in front of a panel that may include anyone from your teachers and coaches to the Bishop of the diocese, and ties together all the tools, skills, and knowledge students gain over those fast four years. "You begin to talk about the corporal acts of mercy, the four years of service you've had, what you've learned, how you've grown, and how you plan to continue that service moving forward."

ST. MICHAEL THE ARCHANGEL DEFEND US IN BATTLE

