



# St. Michael School Sets Out to Prepare Future-Ready Students with TinkRworks

St. Michael School believes education is a never-ending process of growth and challenge. The Catholic elementary school, which is part of the Archdiocese of Chicago Catholic Schools, provides a comprehensive range of programs and services to successfully prepare students for their lifelong educational journey.

When Principal Paul Smith decided to launch a STEM program at the preK-8 school, he spent more than a year visiting and speaking with educators from dozens of schools across the country.

**“We did an extensive search to find the right solution, and it just so happened that TinkRworks was in our own backyard,” he said.**

TinkRworks is a supplemental K-8 STEAM solution that supports Project-based Learning and transforms learners into innovators. It includes a standards-rich supplemental curriculum, hands-on STEAM project kits, a user-friendly coding environment, and professional development and support.

## Building teachers' confidence and skills in STEM

St. Michael School began using TinkRworks in the fall of 2024. “STEM was new to our school — and it's



## St. Michael School

### St. Michael School – Archdiocese of Chicago Catholic Schools

- Located in Orland Park, Illinois
- Grades preK-8
- 433 students

### Key Takeaways

- At St. Michael School, even teachers with limited experience in STEM are leading project-based STEM learning with confidence.
- Teachers and students are making strong cross-curricular connections.
- Students are engaged and developing essential interpersonal skills, along with grit and resilience.

a new part of the curriculum in many schools across the nation,” said Smith. “Not many universities are producing STEM teachers, so while many teachers are very interested in STEM, they don’t necessarily have a formal background in it.”

To empower teachers to lead STEM Project-based Learning, St. Michael School partnered with TinkRworks to provide personalized professional development.

**“Our teachers left the session saying, ‘This is awesome! I’m really excited! I can’t wait to do this!’ That was definitely a good sign. When teachers are excited and want to do something, that changes everything,” said Smith.**

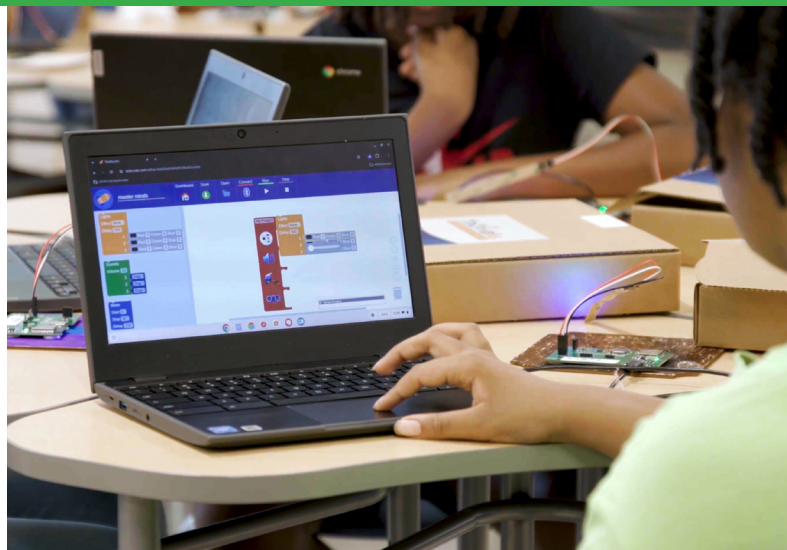
### **Making Cross-curricular Connections**

St. Michael School's dedicated STEM teacher now utilizes TinkRworks to teach students in grades K-8. Classroom teachers use it, too.

“TinkRworks is extremely robust, and it’s flexible too, which made the integration into our curriculum very seamless,” said Smith. “People often like to say that programs are cross-curricular, but TinkRworks truly is. Multiple teachers in different subjects — from science and math to art and music — can be involved in each project,” said Smith.

### **Building Students’ Interpersonal Skills, Grit, and a Sense of Accomplishment**

Using the TinkRworks hands-on project kits, teachers are engaging students in unprecedented ways and preparing career-ready innovators. “The TinkRworks projects provide a great balance, offering simplicity to our teachers and a sense of accomplishment to our students,” said Smith.



In addition to teaching essential STEM concepts, the skills-rich projects are helping students develop important social and emotional competencies.

“TinkRworks engages students in problem-solving, communication, and collaboration, so they’re building life skills as well,” he said.

**“When they’re working on a project, they see that they may not always be successful, so they say, ‘How do we bounce back? How can we think in a different way to solve this problem? Let’s keep going!’ The conversations and camaraderie we’re seeing are so valuable to students’ learning.”**

### **Supporting Socialization**

The projects are promoting positive social interactions in other ways too, according to Smith.

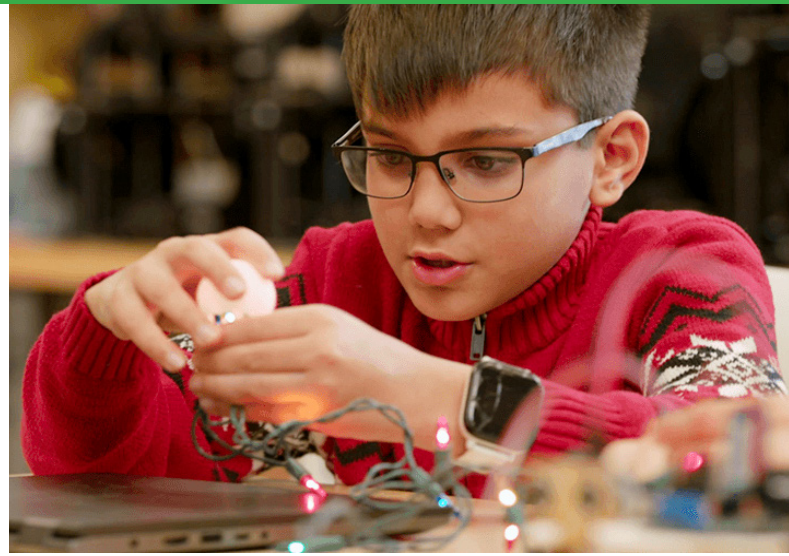
“We’ve seen that, after Covid, students’ socialization changed. It’s more limited now,” he said. “The TinkRworks projects not only give students opportunities to engage in conversations, but they help them learn how to provide constructive criticism to each other. Being able to give and receive feedback is

a really important skill. If students can learn this earlier rather than later, we see that as a big benefit.”

## Preparing Students for Success in High School and Beyond

Looking ahead, Smith sees STEM as a key part of preparing and advancing students for the future.

“When personal computers were first coming out in the eighties and nineties, we knew that was where the world was headed and how important it was to provide computer technology instruction to students — and kids have become so well-versed in it,” he said. “Now we’re seeing this again with STEM. STEM is going to be a pivotal part of students’ development going forward. Our school ends in the eighth grade, but students are going to need these skills to succeed in high school, college, and beyond because that’s where we’re going as a society.”



At St. Michael School, which marked its 75th anniversary in 2024, leaders and teachers see students’ educational journeys filled with hope and promise. “We’re excited,” said Smith.