



Meet the Administration and Teaching Staff of BIA



Principal - Mr. Mark Schaezlein

Joining the BIA family in 2023, I have been blessed to work with the truly dedicated staff you see below. Throughout my first year, I have felt so connected to all of you as your Principal and look forward to a tremendous 2024-25 school year. We say often that Bethesda is “Transformational Learning, Anchored in Faith” and surrounded by God’s love. As a three decade educator in the public school system, I have gained a wealth of administrative leadership as a two decade Assistant Principal for Activities and Operations at Buffalo Grove High School in the Northwest Suburbs. I earned my Bachelor’s degree in the Teaching of Mathematics from the University of Illinois and my Master’s Degree from Aurora University in Educational Leadership. All of these experiences lead me now to answer God’s call as Bethesda’s Principal and I am honored and blessed to be able to apply my love of Christ to my daily work. As I enter year two, I hope that throughout the year, all students, staff and families will feel the Spirit move them in ways toward academic success and love. I can feel it and I hope all of our families do as well. I am a proud “girl dad” of two amazing daughters, Maddie (26) and Abby (23). As we start the school year, I want all to remember that today, like every day, is a great day to be a Bobcat! May God bless us all on this school year journey, as we grow our faith in God’s love.



Pre-K & Early Childhood Director - Mrs. Judith Acosta

I have been a part of the BIA family for 24 years. I have had the opportunity to be both a parent of BIA students AND have had the opportunity to serve as a teacher for the last 15 years within the Early Childhood program. I have seen firsthand the difference that a BIA education can have in the life of students and I want to be a part of continuing that legacy. Serving within a Christian school, I can freely share God’s love and see firsthand the impact it has on the lives of my students. Each day at BIA is a gift AND an opportunity to share God’s Word. If my students learn nothing else, I am sure they have heard that God loves them! It is my greatest hope that our students will have the following take-aways this year: Above all, I want our students to know God’s love AND develop a love for Him. I want our students to feel safe, secure, and loved by our community. Lastly, I want our students to fall in love with learning. Yes, there are standards that they need to meet, but they also need to grow to love learning...especially in our younger grades. If we can get them to love learning and be inquisitive at a young age, it will make their journey in education so much easier. Outside of teaching, I love camping and being in nature. The Tranquility and fresh air rejuvenate me, and I enjoy exploring the outdoors. I also have a deep passion for travel. Discovering new places, experiencing different cultures, and meeting new people enriches my life and inspires me. These activities keep me refreshed and energized, bringing new ideas into my teaching.



Pre-K 3 Ms. Andrea Oliva

My name is Andrea Oliva, and I'm thrilled for another school year at Bethesda! I have been in Early Childhood Education for over 14 years and began my journey at BIA in January 2023. My experience includes working as a lead teacher in a daycare and running my own home daycare. I chose Bethesda because of the close-knit, supportive environment and the sense of community. As a teacher at BIA, my goal is to help students overcome academic challenges in a safe, secure, and loved environment. In my free time, I love traveling, camping, going to the beach, and dancing. Looking ahead, I plan to continue my education and grow as a teacher, guided by my faith in God.



Kindergarten - Ms. Laurie Mauga

My name is Laurie Mauga and I have been in the education field for 44 years. I have worked in the daycare field where I was a teacher and director. For 19 years I was the director/teacher at a private church preschool. For the past 8 years, I was at Grace Lutheran where I taught multiple classes from Pre-K -4th grade. I have a deep desire to teach children about God and to help them grow in their faith. I love to see a child's growth from the beginning of the year to the end of the year. My goal is to have a happy and active classroom where children develop a great love for learning!!



1st Grade - Ms. Ronica Daize-Hicks

I am thrilled to join the BIA team as the 1st-grade teacher this school year. I have been in the education field for over 14 years and have spent the past four years as a certified Dyslexia practitioner and Literacy Intervention Specialist. I am a huge advocate for access to high-quality literacy in our school systems and for children with diverse learning needs. I love the way that fun and connective learning makes students light up, and I love to talk about our Lord. These two things are what drew me to Bethesda. I have encountered many families with terrific things to say about the staff and academic experiences, and I just knew this was the place to be. This year, I hope to join BIA in sharing the love of Christ with our students and to help them connect with and respond to His love in return. I also want to make learning meaningful and engaging this school year. When not teaching, I enjoy tending to my plants, singing, reading, creating art, cooking, and spending time with my friends and family.



2nd/3rd Grades - Ms. Melissa Hernandez

This will be my fifth year at BIA, my third teaching in the classroom! I've always loved the diversity that the school offers. BIA instills values of faith, respect, and responsibility while providing a strong academic foundation. I am looking forward to helping the students thrive in their education and become a better version of themselves. When I am not in school you will find me in my kitchen baking or cooking new foods. I also enjoy my quiet time reading a good book.



4th/5th/6th Grades - Ms. Delaney Bonacquisti

This is my third year teaching at BIA as our 4/5/6, ELA, and upper grades art teacher. I grew up in Rockford, IL, and I chose to stay in Chicago after graduating from college. One of the main reasons I did so is because I treasure Chicago's cultural diversity, just as I treasure BIA's. I am always delighted to hear from our students about their cultural backgrounds, family traditions, and insights on the world. Another important thing about me is that I follow Lord Jesus and embrace God's family values of love and care for his creation. At BIA, I am blessed with the opportunity to converse with our students about what the Way of Jesus means and how we can embody God's love. This year, I hope our students will keep growing as

readers, writers, and public speakers, use their imaginations as we study the past to better understand the present, relish appreciating various forms of art, and most of all, encourage each other to love our God and our neighbors.



7th/8th Grades - Mr. Joe Dembowski

I will be going into my 12th year teaching at Bethesda International Academy. In my time here at BIA, I have mostly taught at the upper grade levels, commonly in the areas of science and mathematics. Currently, I teach departmentalized science 3-8, upper grades math and social studies, take on some coaching, as well as assume in-house technology responsibilities. Although smaller in scale, Bethesda continues to serve such a diverse community of the West Ridge and Rogers Park communities. Our student body reflects the neighborhood which we serve, providing a unique perspective that promotes understanding each other's cultural and familial backgrounds. This is done in a way that honors and respects them.

Bethesda's staff makes every effort to value, care for, show compassion to, and be accepting of our Bethesda families. I could not appreciate them more for taking a chance on me all those years ago, being receptive to new ideas and challenges over the years, and just generally showing care, patience, and compassion towards me. That is who Bethesda is. I believe that exploring your own personal faith walk is incredibly important in all aspects of life. Setting the foundations of that at an early age, where kids come to know God and Jesus plays a vital role in a child's development. Having spent my grade school, high school, and graduate level years in Lutheran institutions, I have personally felt the guidance of God and the blessings He provides for me and my family. I have seen that work done as a student by all of the caring individuals who have guided me to where I am today. It is a tremendous reason for which I make all my efforts in servant leadership capacities. I want to give back. My hope for my students is to continue to pursue and strengthen their interests, realize and maximize their individual potential, and create a hunger and motivation for learning with a Christ-centered growth mindset. I want them to strengthen their independence in a way that prepares them well beyond their years at Bethesda. I have a whole host of hobbies, which includes athletic activities such as running and swimming, team sports (go Sox, Bulls, Bears), playing guitar, reading, fishing, boating, general travel, and of course all things Star Wars. I'm building up to run in this year's Chicago Marathon in October.



Office Administrator - Ms. Cali Noble

This is my 8th year as a parent at BIA, and the start of my 3rd year as the Office Administrator. I grew up in a Lutheran School, and wanted the same for my kids. I found BIA while looking for a new school for my oldest daughter when we moved to the neighborhood. The close knit and welcoming atmosphere make the school feel like a family. Whether I'm greeting students in the morning, or tending to them when they're not feeling well - I always look forward to seeing the kids everyday, and can't wait to see what the school year brings!



Title 1 Teacher - Mr. John Hayford

I am the Title 1 teacher at BIA and am excited about beginning my fourth year here at Bethesda and my tenth year overall in this role. I work for Catapult Learning, a CPS vendor for Title 1 services. As a result, I have been assigned to a variety of parochial schools over the years. I am blessed to have been at Lutheran schools for the past 7 years. In my role at the school, I get to work with students in small groups to help bridge any learning gaps they might have. Working with students ranging from kindergarten to eighth grade, my days are never boring and always joy-filled. My hope for my kiddos this year is that with my help and support they can increase their self-confidence, grow academically, and love coming to Title 1!

When I am not at school, I enjoy cooking, baking, and building Lego sets.



Title 1 Academy Coach - Dr. Elisha L. Neely

My name is Dr. Elisha L. Neely, LPC. I am a Licensed Child and Adolescent Therapist. I have been working with BIA for the last four years as the Title One Academy Coach. Originally, BIA was chosen for me, but I stayed because I enjoy the family environment and staff. I love the small class size and having the ability to connect with the majority of the students on a daily basis.

My hope for BIA this year is that the school continues to grow and develop and enrich the minds of each and every student. When I am not working, I love to read books, spend time with family and friends as well as alone time and watch tv. I also love going to the beach to sit near the water and just listening to the sound of the water.



CLEF Instructional Coach - Ms. Jennifer Heinze

BIA families may know me as the CLEF Coach - a position which supports the principal, teachers, and students. I am a retired principal with an educational background which includes degrees in Business, Education, and School Leadership. I'm starting my 6th year as coach at BIA, after 31 years of experience in Lutheran Schools – primarily at Saint Paul Mt Prospect. Before becoming principal, I taught math, music, literature, and history in junior high and high school. Perhaps more notable to BIA students is that I am the proud mom of two grown daughters – one (Rena) is a speech teacher, and the other (Elise) filled in as a teacher at BIA a couple years ago. My husband, Michael, has also been a teacher and principal in Lutheran Schools.



*Admissions & Marketing Coordinator - **Mr. Kaylan Acosta***

My name is Kaylan Acosta, and I'm thrilled to serve as the Admissions and Marketing Coordinator at Bethesda! This is my 7th year working with children, a journey that has taken me from being a Pastor, educator, and coach to now guiding families and students here at BIA. As a proud alum of Bethesda, Class of 2012, it's incredibly special for me to bring my passion for faith-based education back to the community that helped shape me. I love partnering with families to create a nurturing environment where students can thrive both academically and spiritually. Currently, I'm finishing my degree in Pediatric Psychology and Neurology at Loyola University, furthering my commitment to understanding and supporting the unique needs of every child. Being back at Bethesda feels like coming full circle, and I'm excited to see what this year holds!