

New year begins for Catholic schools

HAZLETON – As the new school begins, there are many new faces filling the halls of Catholic schools across the Diocese of Scranton.

Overall, enrollment in Diocesan schools is currently up nearly nine percent over last year. Approximately 4,400 students have enrolled in the diocese’s 19 schools to date.

“We have once again prepared diligently this summer to open our schools in the safest way for the new year,” Kristen Donohue, Superintendent of Catholic Schools said. “We are excited to open our doors as we did last year to provide an excellent Catholic education in-person, while continuing to share good health. It is humbling to know the result of the efforts of everyone involved in our school communities is that more students will come to experience the transformative nature of a Catholic school.”

At Holy Family Academy in Hazleton, enrollment is up 17-percent this year.

Principal Jason Tribbet believes that is because many people in the community have seen how the Diocese of Scranton Catholic Schools safely managed in-person learning during the COVID-19 pandemic last year. He also credits school families for sharing the benefits of Catholic education.

“Word of mouth is huge. Our existing families are so supportive of our school and getting the word out to members of their church community, their little league teams and different things that take place in the area and spreading the word about Holy Family in a positive way,” he said.

At Notre Dame Elementary School in East Stroudsburg, enrollment is up 18-percent this year.

Interim principal Sister Dorothy Kibler, I.H.M. says several grades have waiting lists.

“We are getting students who are not of our Catholic faith and we always welcome them,” she said. “We have gotten some new students from as far away as Blakeslee.”

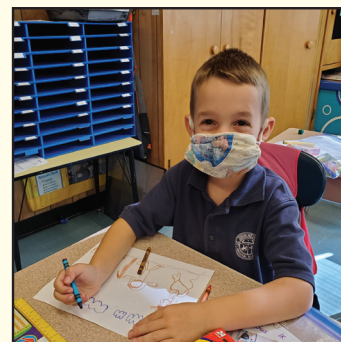
This year, Notre Dame is also pleased to welcome two international students from China. The family recently relocated to the United States because of employment.

“They have blended in very well. We have been so happy to welcome them,” Sister Dorothy added.

This is now the third year that schools have had to face challenges because of the pandemic in some form. Both principals say as the new school year begins, they will not become complacent about health and safety initiatives.

Percentage of Enrollment Increase for 2021-2022 Academic Year

All Saints Academy - 16%
 Good Shepherd Academy - 4%
 Holy Cross High School - 10%
 Holy Family Academy - 17%
 Holy Rosary School - 4%
 La Salle Academy - 13%
 Notre Dame Elementary School - 18%
 Our Lady of Peace School - 8%
 St. Clare/St. Paul School - 28%
 St. John Neumann Elementary School - 15%
 St. John Neumann Jr./Sr. High School - 4%
 St. Jude School - 26%
 St. Mary of Mount Carmel School - 23%
 St. Nicholas/St. Mary School - 12%
 Wyoming Area Catholic School - 10%



Statistics as of Sept. 10, 2021

“I sent out a reminder to our staff this week to continue to follow our safety protocols,” Tribbet said. “The COVID numbers continue to keep increasing in our communities so we have to do our part.”

“Our faculty has been very vigilant about the protocols and making sure that the students are socially distant and wearing their masks. We reinforce the fact that it is to keep ourselves healthy and to keep our friends healthy,” Sister Dorothy added.

While very conscious of the virus,

the new school year continues to allow for greater flexibility as some things begin to return to normal.

All students of Notre Dame Elementary gathered last week to celebrate Mass together in-person in the high school theater. Last year, because of COVID protocols, only a few grades came together at a time and everyone else watched via livestream.

“That was very positive,” Sister Dorothy said. “Everyone participated and you could hear it in them!”

During the 2020-2021 school year, numerous families joined the Diocese of Scranton Catholic School System wanting in-person education. As the Diocese of Scranton begins this new school year, several families reflect on their experiences - and why they have now chosen to stay in our Catholic School System.

Todd and Katharine Spanish

Three Children, Daniel, T.J. and Amelia, attend Our Lady of Peace School, Clarks Green

CLARKS GREEN – Katharine and Todd Spanish of Clarks Green have quickly become invested in the Diocese of Scranton’s Catholic School System. During the 2020-2021 academic year, they decided to enroll all three of their children in Our Lady of Peace School.

Daniel, 9, has just entered fourth grade, T.J., 7, has just entered second grade and Amelia, 6, has just entered first grade. When COVID-19 struck, the family sought out in-person instruction and education when their local school district planned to hold virtual classes.

“We felt it was important, at that young critical age, that in-person education was the best for our family,” Todd explained.

The family carefully reviewed the Diocese of Scranton’s “Sharing Good Health” policies and appreciated the increased sanitization efforts, temperature checks at the door and co-horting of classes.

As this new academic year approached, the Spanish family said it was the Catholic values at Our Lady of Peace School that

made them stay in the diocesan school system.

“2020 was a hard year. 2021 was a hard year for everybody and to have the reinforcement of faith, family, community and service in a year that was so tough for so many, it was a no-brainer to continue to educate our children with those values,” Katharine said.

Katharine Spanish also pointed to the benefits of the diocese’s new NWEA Assessments, which help to chart the academic growth of her children over the course of the year.

“It was so interesting for me to watch my child’s growth over the course of the year with that in-person education and seeing them meet or exceed each of those expectations,” she explained.

Daniel Spanish was thankful for being able to attend classes in person.

“I liked social studies,” he said. “We got to do a lot of projects and that was fun. Since I like animals, we also learned a lot about animals.”

His brother, T.J., enjoys reading, math



and art. He also began learning the basics of computer coding through the school’s new BeeBOT technology.

“Those were a favorite of mine,” the

seven year old said. “It looks like a bee and it’s a robot and there are buttons on top where you can program it where to go!”

Jayne and Desiree Galdieri *Daughter Gianna, 7, attends Wyoming Area Catholic School, Exeter*

EXETER – Having both been brought up in Catholic Schools themselves, Jayme and Desiree Galdieri from West Pittston were already familiar with the excellent academic environment that the Diocese of Scranton Catholic School System provides.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, they decided to enroll their daughter, Gianna, in first grade at Wyoming Area Catholic School in Exeter for the 2020-2021 academic year.

Knowing that Gianna is a very social child, the Galdieri family hoped she would benefit from the continued social interaction that in-person education provides when many other school districts were still holding virtual classes. The family wanted to make sure their daughter could remain in school five days a week.

“We were just thrilled with the fact that they didn’t miss a beat,” Desiree Galdieri said.

Gianna, 7, quickly fit into the school environment at Wyoming Area Catholic School.

“All the teachers knew me by the third day,” Gianna explained.

Gianna quickly made friends and fell in love with learning.

“I loved math and spelling,” she said.

Desiree admits she was surprised to learn some of what first graders learn.

“She got an ‘O’ for outstanding in computers on her report card. I asked her what she was doing and she looked at me without skipping a beat and said ‘coding.’ I was like, ‘What? You’re doing what in computers in

first grade?’ She said, ‘coding, 0’s and 1’s.’ She is smarter than I am in computers,” Desiree said with a chuckle.

Both Desiree and Jayme Galdieri work in the healthcare field. They said there was not a single moment during the pandemic where they felt the school environment was unsafe. They praise the teachers and administrators for focusing on every little safety detail to make sure kids remained healthy.

“When they’re greeted in the morning, someone opens the door for them and the classroom doors are opened by teachers. Those are the little things that they have thought enough into to minimize (virus) exposure, to make the kids safer, without the kids every realizing that things were different. It’s astounding,” Desiree said.



Tony and Kate Shattuck *Two children, Monica and John, attend Saint Agnes School, Towanda*

Tony quickly learned the many difficulties of having to balance their professional careers with the challenges of online learning for their kids.

Wanting both of their children to be in a brick-and-mortar school, the Shattuck family relocated to Wysox so that the children could attend Saint Agnes School in Towanda. Knowing that the Diocese of Scranton Catholic School System was committed to full-time, in-person education was exactly what the family needed.

“Saint Agnes had very small classrooms that we thought might work out well,” Kate Shattuck said. “We didn’t even understand how much it was just going to be a magical place.”

Kate Shattuck points to her daughter’s end-of-the-year reflection from fourth grade

as the reason why Saint Agnes School is such a special place.

Quoting from her daughter’s document, Kate read, “What are three words that describe yourself before you started this year: unconfident, scared, and nervous. List three words to describe yourself now: ready for the next school year, confident, determined. That is magical. That is magical for any parent!”

Tony appreciated not only the challenging academic environment of Saint Agnes School, but also the school’s focus on service, community and self-awareness.

“It’s the development of the whole child,” he said. “Of giving them confidence and understanding if I apply myself, if I work hard, I can get somewhere. Those are lessons that are not in books but the teachers

here provide.”

The Shattuck family says Monica and John are not just a “number” at Saint Agnes School.

“We know that there are other children that go here, but you really feel like it is your kids that are the only kids here,” Kate said.

Asked why people should support the Diocesan Annual Appeal – which supports Catholic education – the Shattuck family summed it up easily.

“Isn’t it the best investment that you can make? Our children? It is the best investment! We’re not growing children. We’re growing adults. At Saint Agnes, they’re growing adults here who are real members of the community. They care about each other. They care about their friendships,” Kate said.



TOWANDA – At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Tony & Kate Shattuck and their two children, Monica and John, were living in Arlington, Va. When their schools abruptly closed, Kate &

Chris and Melissa Heim *Daughter Dakotah, 8, attends Saint John Neumann Elementary, Williamsport*

WILLIAMSPORT – At a time when many of her peers were isolated at home and learning virtually, Dakotah Younkin, 8, was making new friends at Saint John Neumann Elementary School.

“My teacher was named Mrs. Kemser and she was really nice and all the kids were nice and I liked first grade a lot,” Dakotah said.

During the 2020-2021 academic year, the young girl transferred into the Diocese of Scranton’s Catholic School System because her family desired in-person education.

“I like to go to church. I like to learn about God and I like it because all the teachers are nice,” she added.

Dakotah’s mother, Melissa Heim, says

the environment at Saint John Neumann was very family-oriented.

“From day one, we never felt like outsiders. They were welcoming with open arms,” Melissa said. “I remember her first day. She was so incredibly nervous and just clung to me. Mrs. McNamee (principal of Saint John Neumann) came out and she grabbed her by the hand and walked her directly to her room and Dakotah was fine ever since.”

Because Melissa and her husband, Chris Heim, both work full-time jobs, virtual learning was not an option for the family. More than just wanting her to attend school in-person, both Melissa and Chris say Dakotah responds best to learning in a classroom setting.

“Her character has really developed here. She is being taught things about love and respect and being a real, Christian girl,” Chris said.

Because of their experience over the past year, the Heim family has gained a greater appreciation for the importance of the Diocesan Annual Appeal in relation to Catholic education.

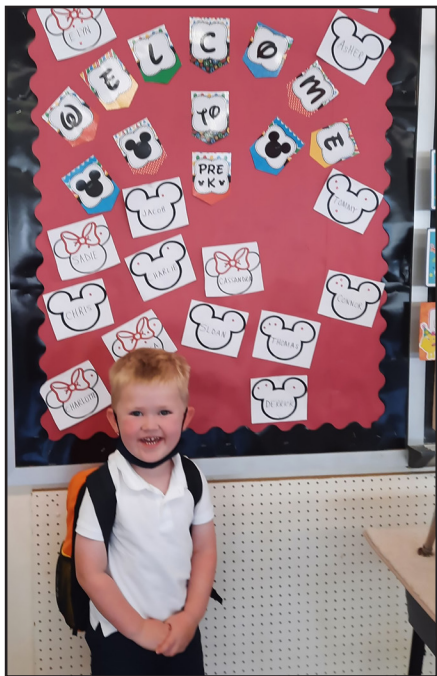
“The technology is so much more advanced than the public school system. The teachers here are just phenomenal,” Melissa said.

Chris Heim says Appeal funding helped their family with tuition assistance.

“We wouldn’t have been able to do it without the diocese’s help. We’re so grateful and blessed,” he said.



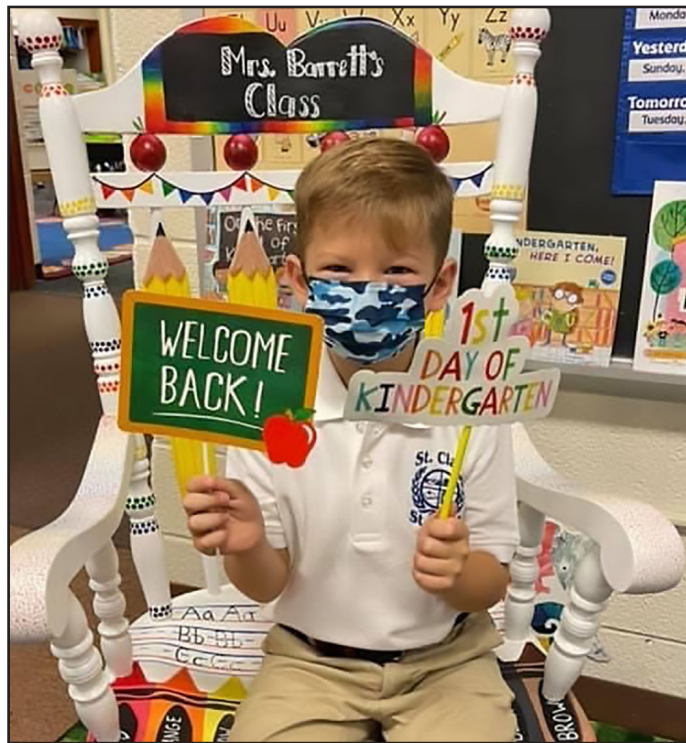
FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL



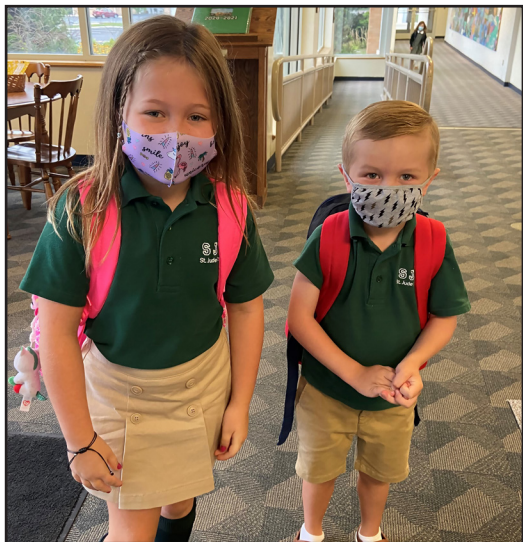
All Saints Academy in Scranton



Wyoming Area Catholic School in Exeter



Saint Clare/Saint Paul School in Scranton



Saint Jude School in Mountain Top



Saint Mary of Mount Carmel School in Dunmore



Holy Rosary School in Duryea



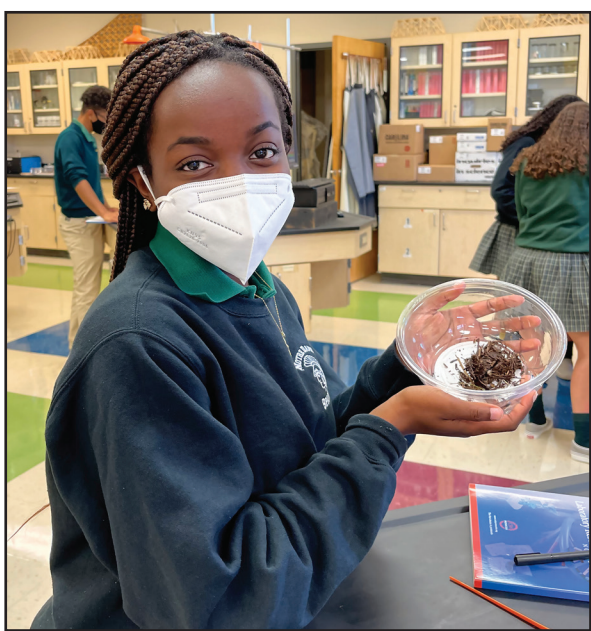
La Salle Academy in Jessup



Saint Nicholas/St. Mary School in Wilkes-Barre



Saint John Neumann Elementary School in Williamsport



Notre Dame Jr./Sr. High School
in East Stroudsburg



Holy Family Academy in Hazleton



Holy Cross High School in Dunmore



Notre Dame Elementary
in East Stroudsburg



Our Lady of Peace School
in Clarks Green



Epiphany School in Sayre



Good Shepherd Academy
in Kingston



Saint John Neumann Jr./Sr. High School in Williamsport



Saint Agnes School in Towanda



Holy Redeemer High School in Wilkes-Barre