Preparing for the 2015-2016 School Year
The purpose of Catholic schools

Over the years in four different dioceses, I have observed the “back to school” phenomenon – first as a student for 20 years, from kindergarten through eighth grade (in two different schools), then a seminarian at St. Joseph’s Seminary for high school and junior college, then Notre Dame Seminary for philosophy, then Catholic University for theology and counseling studies. The “going back to school” experience brings about anxiety, wonderment and excitement. What’s it going to be like? How will our teachers be? What changes has the school made in facility, schedule or policies?

Clearly, the struggles and complexities of operating Catholic schools have grown through the years. When there was a plethora of religious sisters, brothers and priests, schools were operated “on a dime.” How well I remember the tattered maps we had in the classroom for geography, desks that had stood the test of time, textbooks that were passed down from year to year and classrooms without any fans, much less air conditioning!

Why does the church in the United States continue to operate Catholic schools? The reason is not just to provide an alternative to public, government-administered schools for which we all pay taxes. Nor is it just to offer an alternative to Catholic schools in the United States exist to continue the mission begun in times of previous heavy immigration.

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Curriculum, promoting faith development through liturgy, prayer and service.

We are a Christ centered, family-oriented community with a history and tradition of excellence. Gospel values are integrated with academics within a progressive curriculum, promoting faith development through liturgy, prayer and service. Nationally accredited by AdvanceEd (SACS).
Championship roots are planted in summer training

By Rachele Smith
The Catholic Commentator

Summer time and the living is easy, right? For most students, that statement is probably accurate. But if you’re a high school athlete, summer is more than just sleeping in, playing video games and hanging out with friends.

It’s a chance to run faster, get stronger and jump higher; in short, it’s a chance to expect the very best of yourself. Why? So you can be better on the field or on the court next year.

It’s the stuff of championships.

“If we did not have (athletic) training over the summer, we would be 10 times less competitive,” said Paul Varnado, head football coach at St. Michael the Archangel High School.

Varnado noted that the mandatory summer workouts are rigorous. Training, which is directed at only the school’s athletes, targets several body components, including strength, agility, speed and even nutrition and hydration. It’s a formula that pushes each athlete and appears to want perfection, but don’t get confused. At its core, training is also vital for safety.

“Without summer training, the number of injuries we would have grown exponentially. Strength and conditioning is critical. (For example,) when playing football especially, you have a lot of collisions and a lot of (body) stress. The more you train your body to take that stress, the stronger it will be, and the less injuries you will see,” he explained.

Liz Fontenot, the conditioning coach at St. Joseph’s Academy, approaches strength and conditioning during the summer months with the same mindset.

“Summer training is vital to the development of our athletes as well as their success during their season,” she said.

Fontenot explains that for 10 weeks during the summer, SJA athletes are trained to develop both physically and mentally.

“With so many athletes becoming faster, stronger and quicker, if you don’t train in the summer, whether your season is in fall, winter or spring, you will be behind,” she said.

During the summer, Fontenot trains all athletes together. They represent every sport offered at the school as well as students not involved in a sport but wanting to workout for overall physical wellness. They participate in a cross training/cross fit manner training the entire body and not sport specific.

“This way, certain muscles will not be over trained,” she emphasized.

Having all of the girls together and not focusing on certain teams at certain times also serves another purpose.

“When different teams train together, the athletes get a greater sense of what each is going through, and in turn, they are more supportive of each other during their respective seasons,” Fontenot said.

Megan Welsh, a rising junior at SJA who plays volleyball, agreed, “It’s a great way to meet other people doing other sports. Sometimes I’ll see the soccer players running laps, and they’re fast, and they motivate me to keep up and get better.”

Welsh, who also plays club volleyball outside of SJA’s season, noted that while individual team coaches have a specific workout for members, every girl attending the summer workout classes also complete strength and conditioning training as directed by Fontenot.

“Coach Fontenot is such a great motivator. We start each class with a prayer, and she always has a quote for us,” said Welsh, who took to heart one quote about the definition of character.

SEE TRAINING PAGE 18B

Wrestling team members from St. Michael the Archangel High School gather for a photo after attending a wrestling camp in Missouri this summer. During the week-long camp, nationally renowned All-American Wrestling Coach Nick Purler taught them primary offense, secondary offense and counter-attack offense.

Many high school players attend various sports camps throughout the summer to improve their skills. St. Michael wrestling team members pictured are, from left, Jacob Martin, Bradley Brignac, Anthony Washington, Colin Mix, Nathan Zeringue, Alex Baltas, Ethan Allen, Kevin Heltz, Dana Harter and Alec Brawley. Photo provided by St. Michael High School
Erin Candilora a natural fit at St. Aloysius School

By Rachele Smith

The Catholic Commentator

“Coming full circle.”

That’s how Erin Candilora describes her recent appointment as principal at St. Aloysius School.

Candilora, who most recently served as one of the school’s assistant principals, replaces longtime St. Aloysius principal John Bennett, who retired at the end of the past school year.

Candilora is excited to begin her tenure in the school’s top spot, but more importantly, she feels blessed to have this opportunity to lead in the church parish she and her husband adopted as their “home away from home” more than two decades ago.

“It was one of those things where we went to church for the first time (at St. Aloysius), and within 15 minutes my husband and I looked at each other. When our eyes met, we both knew this was the place for us,” said Candilora. From that point on, St. Aloysius would be a part of their family. It would be a place where they would give both time and talent, volunteering in many ministries, from working at the church fair to vacation Bible school to retreats.

“My kids have been here since the Child Care Center (established for pre-school children in 1986). They have been on campus: Kyle since he was three, and Jordan started when he was three, too,” she said.

Originally from New Orleans, Candilora received her bachelor’s degree in secondary English education (with a minor in history) from the University of New Orleans. Once married, she and her husband moved from the Crescent City. They soon found themselves in Arkansas and then Missouri before making Baton Rouge their permanent home.

In the Capitol City, Candilora accepted a job teaching high school English and coaching basketball at Redemptorist High School. As she settled into her new teaching assignment, she became active with many school organizations and activities, including assisting and leading youth retreats and working with the school’s dance team.

“At a small school, you kind of do a little of everything,” noted Candilora, who also found time while teaching to complete a master’s degree in administration and supervision from LSU. She was soon tapped to move into a leadership role.

“After eight years (of teaching), I became an assistant principal at Redemptorist,” said Candilora.

“But I also taught one class. I just couldn’t give up my English IV Honors AP class, which I loved. I took them to England, where we went to London. We went to Stonehenge, saw Shakespeare’s birthplace and all of that,” said Candilora as she recalled some special memories.

Yet, after 15 years of working in education at Redemptorist, Candilora was beginning to wonder if God was leading her somewhere else. She thought she might want to go to law school. However, since she and her family were so involved with St. Aloysius, she said it just seemed fitting that she reach out to people at the school to see if anyone could help her find the right answer. She found herself talking with then-principal Bennett and later accepting a newly created position in administration.

“From the time I stepped on campus (as an assistant principal), everything has come full-circle. For the first time, everyone seemed ready,” said Candilora.

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By Rachelle Smith  
The Catholic Commentator

Will the 21st century see young women excel beyond expectations? Do women biologically have the work place skills the 21st century needs?

Dr. Michelle Lambert, the new principal at St. Joseph’s Academy, can ardently answer, “Yes” to these questions. The career educator and recent resident of Tampa, Florida, isn’t just responding based on feelings.

Rather Lambert, who replaced Linda Fryoux Harvison following Harvison’s retirement at the end of the past academic year, has scientific proof that for young women the 21st century is “their century,” and the opportunity to help them reach this pinnacle is just one of the many reasons why she is excited to lead the diocese’s only all-girls Catholic high school.

“My passion is brain research and how it affects learning,” explained Lambert, who is also the founder of Spot2Succeed, an education firm specializing in identifying student learning styles in order to optimize teaching in the classroom.

Lambert explained that when looking at CT scans of both an adolescent girl and an adolescent boy’s brain at rest, more areas of a girl’s brain is in use, allowing some interesting conclusions.

“A girl’s corpus callosum (that broad band of nerve fibers joining the two hemispheres of the brain) is larger in girls than in boys, which allows the two hemispheres of the brain to talk. Girls have better memory storage and better listening skills,” noted Lambert, who also added that language arts (which includes reading and English) is typically a strong skill for girls.

This brain research offers reasons why young women may be scientifically wired for success in the 21st century job market. Skills needed in today’s business arena include creativity and innovation (“Again the two hemispheres talk here,” said Lambert). Other skills, according to Lambert, include problem solving, critical thinking and collaboration.

“Collaboration is what most jobs are looking for, and girls use more words,” said Lambert, who explained that research shows girls use 21,000 words a day as compared to boys with 7,000.

“In terms of evolutionary science, this makes sense,” Lambert explained. “Men had to be single-minded because they were the hunters and were in charge of that. Women, on the other hand, were home and doing all sorts of things.”

But Lambert cautions that this science doesn’t mean that women are smarter. Instead, it helps explain the way women can multi-task, and knowing that allows educators to specifically enhance learning opportunities for young women in the classroom, she said.

Lambert is excited about sharing this brain science with St. Joseph Academy’s faculty and staff as they prepare for the new school year. She hopes that by focusing on strengths and differences, they can encourage the young women in their care to harness their gifts and prepare for the future.

In addition to her study in how we learn, Lambert is looking forward to implementing other research, including what she describes as replenishment rooms. Noting that research shows adolescent clocks are set later, she said most teenagers work in sleep deprivation almost daily. Since the overworked neurons in the brain have trouble functioning in that state, she is hoping to provide areas where the girls can rest or take a nap during the day to help them achieve their best in the classroom.

On the academic scheduling side, Lambert noted that there is a plan to add a significant number of AP courses during the next years as well as the possibility of virtual courses.

“Many high schools in other parts of the country require that students take an online course for graduation simply because many colleges are requiring this,” she said.

Lambert, who received her advanced degrees from the University of South Florida and the University of Toledo, respectively, also wrote a virtual learning curriculum for a John Hopkins University.
Landry returning to her educational roots at St. Elizabeth

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

When the students’ groans of protest signal the debut of a new school year, Mollie Landry will begin her own personal journey through history.

As the incoming principal of St. Elizabeth Interparochial School in Paincourtville, Landry is putting the exclamation point on a career that will likely begin where it started. She attended kindergarten at St. Elizabeth before following her older siblings to Ascension Catholic, where she attended elementary and high school.

Her husband, Chris Landry, attended St. Elizabeth through eighth grade, and her mother-in-law, Gerri Landry, is a former principal.

“It’s rewarding to be here,” Landry said. “It was not my plan. It was never in my plan. But God’s plan was better.”

Filling the seat of a principal’s chair, especially one previously occupied by her mother-in-law, was certainly never a position Landry sought, especially three years ago when she initially retired from a nearly three-decade career as an educator. A 1987 graduate of LSU, Landry spent much of her career as a mentor teacher and later as a master teacher in the Ascension Parish School System.

She retired to accept a part-time position as coordinator of evangelization and formation for St. Elizabeth Church, a job she called the best of her life.

“I thought I was finished with education,” said Landry, who after retirement also spent one day a week mentoring St. Elizabeth teachers.

Her life, however, would soon change in a direction she never imagined. Earlier this year, St. Elizabeth principal Paula Simonneaux announced she was vacating her position to become director of administration at the school. Shortly after that announcement, pastor Father Andrew Merrick approached Landry about becoming principal.

Her first thought? “Anything but that,” she said with a smile.

“But my heart slowly changed,” Landry, a mother of three, including a son who has aspirations of becoming a canon lawyer, added. “I prayed when Father and I talked about it. I clearly felt God called me so I do have a peace about it. It’s too perfect a fit not to take.”

Landry said she will incorporate an expanded spiritual dimension to parallel the academic tract. Her plans include forming small faith groups among teachers that will study Scripture. Benediction and Eucharistic adoration on the first Friday of each month will continue as a strong fit for her as she is driven to embrace the community globally.

“When the teachers are fed and hear it again and start to recognize the living word of God through the Scripture and reflect on it, they will be able to give more of what they have now,” she said. “I also know it’s not just taking children to the sacraments and expecting some magical thing to happen because they too have to understand and believe what they receive.

“You can’t be before the son and not get a little suntan.”

Landry said she will stress to her staff that each child is known, loved and accepted as a child of God. She said getting to know each child is essential to learning.

“I want to know about the children but it’s about how I impact them through the adults that truly impact them,” she said.

“Teachers are truly the ones that are entrusted to do this.”
Walnette plans to be visible in her role as principal at Holy Ghost

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

“I’m very excited to come full circle and to come back to the Catholic education setting I grew up in,” said Donna Wallette, incoming principal of Holy Ghost School in Hammond.

Walnette grew up in New Orleans and attended Catholic schools throughout her elementary and high school years. She graduated from Southeastern Louisiana University, where she met her husband, Dennis.

She has worked in the public school systems for 31 years, the past 14 years as principal at Magnolia Woods Elementary School.

A woman of deep faith, Walnette said she was fortunate to be able to infuse the importance of faith and values in some of the students. “There are multiple types of faith and beliefs (present in the public school system and society). Most people have some type of faith, even if they come from terrible home lives,” said Walnette.

“At least in Louisiana I have been able to input some of those Christian values into the students. And receptive parents like you doing that, even in a public school setting,” she said.

She only discussed it individually with children whom she knew had receptive parents and in a way that was comfortable to the students. “It’s very important for those children to have that belief, that faith, so they know that someone other than the principal is watching over them as well,” Walnette said.

Returning to the Catholic school setting, however, gives Walnette the chance to help students experience the richness of the Catholic faith and academic excellence. “You know how important that faith-based education and values are in a Catholic school setting,” said Wallette.

She plans to do daily “walk arounds” at the school. “I want the children to see me every day around the campus so they can develop a relationship with me,” Wallette said.

The students will also know that Walnette has academic, behavior and faith expectations of them. Walnette also has expectations of the teachers to recognize the needs of the children individually, particularly their learning styles, such as audio, visual and kinesthetics and not to do a blanket teaching of the whole group. “You have to teach using all the different learning styles,” said Wallette.

She also has expectations of parents. “The job of the teachers is to teach the children and the job of the parents is to get the children to school ready to learn,” Wallette said.

“The academic expectations, behavior expectations and faith expectations all begin at home,” she said. “The transformation that occurs when all are working for the best of the students. “It is an extremely rewarding career. I’ve enjoyed watching children that have made a ton of errors in behavior or academics being transformed into very successful students. In some cases we see that as they become an adult. They will come back and tell us about their successes,” Wallette said.

However, the highest expectations Walnette has is from herself. “My job is to help the teachers be the best teachers they can be so the students can be the best students they can be,” Wallette said.

But for the whole educational process to work, it takes contributions from everyone, Walnette acknowledged. “It has to be a team effort … you’ve heard it takes a village to raise a child … or it’s not going to be as productive or as successful as it could be,” Wallette said.

And Wallette has seen the transformation that occurs when all are working for the best of the students. “It is an extremely rewarding career. I’ve enjoyed watching children that have made a ton of errors in behavior or academics being transformed into very successful students. In some cases we see that as they become an adult. They will come back and tell us about their successes,” Wallette said.
Emphasis on math adds up for St. George students

One of the hallmarks of a school of excellence is continuous improvement. Each year St. George strives to improve and improvement is measured by students’ academic achievement, both in the classroom and by gains noted in Terra Nova standardized test scores.

Two years ago, after examining Terra Nova scores, it was determined math should be an area of growth for St. George. With this goal in mind, the administration, along with the school math teachers, began to strategically plan for improvement and adopted a multi-layer approach to improving student math performance by focusing on rigor, relevance and student engagement.

The first step taken was to look at the school’s math curriculum. Was student math instruction meeting the curriculum standards by grade level? Using an online curriculum mapping program called Rubicon Atlas, grade levels began to “map” their curriculum by grade level. Grade level maps along with lesson plans were examined for gaps in instruction and/or overlaps in instruction.

Next, math resource teachers were hired to work in first through fifth grades. By adding a resource teacher in these primary and intermediate grades, teachers were allowed to monitor student progress more closely, differentiate instruction, provide small group activities and work one-on-one with those in need.

Another approach used to foster growth in the area of math was the school-wide adoption of IXL Math. IXL Math is an online leveled math program that allows for students to practice math fluency and computation. All students were required to complete 30 minutes of First In Math each week as part of their homework. Teachers were able to monitor weekly progress. Jack Nelson, the school principal, acted as program monitor and was able to update the student body on their progress as a whole.

As of April, St. George students had completed 2,600,000 problems. IXL Math also recognized students in second, third, fourth and fifth grades for completing more than a combined 100,000 problems during the academic year.

School leaders also recognized the need to develop common math language among teachers and grade levels. Using math vocabulary and math strategies, anchor charts were created and placed in classrooms to help facilitate this strategy.

Lastly, teachers made a concerted effort to incorporate new technologies into their math instruction. The use of document cameras and SmartBoards facilitated a visual component to math instruction that had been missing in the past. Through a generous donation from a stakeholder, Apple televisions were purchased for all classrooms allowing for teachers to circulate and instruct via the SmartBoard rather than remain stationary at the front of the
St. Michael’s Student Advisory Program plans for continued success

St. Michael the Archangel High School implemented a Student Advisory Program during the 2014-15 school year that is strengthening the connections among faculty and students.

Advisory programs provide a structure and a set of practices for monitoring and supporting students’ academic progress. They promote healthy student development and life skills and establish a forum for college and career planning throughout the students’ high school careers. The program at St. Michael was developed under the leadership of Julie Lechich, assistant principal of academics, and Dr. Anna Bourgeois, science department chair, as a response to a challenge identified in student and parent surveys.

St. Michael assigns faculty advisors to small groups of 12 to 14 students from the same grade level. The advisors teach lessons on the designated topics for each session and advocate for the students in their group. They help students set goals, acknowledge students’ accomplishments, monitor grades and support students in their extracurricular activities. The program has been designed for students to remain in their same advisory group with the same advisor throughout all four years of high school, strengthening the connection of students to the school community.

St. Michael students Lauryn Goff, left, and Julian Guillory tie red ribbons on their fingers to remind them not to text and drive during an advisory group session about smart decision making. Photo provided by St. Michael High School

St. George students enjoy some of the innovative ways teachers have employed in teaching math. Above, students learn about units of measure. Photo provided by St. George

MATH ▼

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classroom. St. George purchased Ipad carts in the summer of 2014 and many teachers have used Ipad apps to enhance instruction or act as the vehicle through which learning has taken place.

Within two academic school years, St. George has made monumental strides in math.

Currently the Terra Nova math scores place students in the top 15 percent, nationally.
Summer's silence paves the way for fall's melody of youthful voices

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

An almost eerie silence permeated the halls of Catholic Elementary School of Pointe Coupée in New Roads on a sultry summer afternoon.

Rather than the pitter-patter of tiny feet and the symphony of high-pitched voices surround- ing the hallways, there was only silence and doors stacked nearly floor to ceiling, creating an academic quietness of sorts.

Inside her office, principal Melissa Cline relished the stillness of the afternoon, when her office was a rare haven of peace.

“I love the quiet,” Cline sheepishly admitted. “The halls are very seldom quiet.”

Summer is a time when a school building has the oppor- tunity to take a deep breath, undergo cosmetic touches or even a dramatic makeover. Whatever the case, Cline said the building’s renovation is vitally important to laying the groundwork for a successful school year that is only weeks away.

“This is the only time we have enough time to do things and to do them well,” said Cline. “We do a do a deep-cleaning, refurbishing, replacing. Also it gives us time to take a breath. Even with all of this going on, it’s a different pure, a different kind of work.”

Although her office was quiet, at least for the moment, activity buzzed elsewhere throughout the school, which butchered-Catholic- High School of Pointe Coupée. Maintenance worker Calvin Roberts was busy stripping and waxing the cafeteria floors, while maintenance supervisor Jimmy Andrus, who is in his 30th year at the school, put the finishing touches on the classrooms, making notes of what still needed to be done.

Cline said her husband and son are com- pletely happy with things being done, as they help to prepare the school for fall.

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“The classrooms were receiving a much- needed facelift, the original brick walls being painted a sparkling white, creating an instant transformation from dull to bright and cheery. Along with the stripping of the floors and repainting fresh makeup to the classrooms, also planned for the summer is the installation of a new fence surrounding the school. She admitted the work is “quite an undertaking but it will be very well worth the effort.”

“We’re doing it right now,” Cline said. “The painting of the classrooms will ab- solutely help the students,” Cline said. “First of all, the teachers morale is boosted because the rooms are extra spatially planned and freshened and bright. And when the teach- ers’ morale is up, automatically the students’ morale is up, the parents’ morale is up, and that’s what keeps us going. The teachers are very proficient, and it starts with us.”

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“IT’s about the kids.” And as mid-July ap- proaches and the teachers trickle in to begin setting up their classrooms, Cline said the ono-welcome silence al- most brings them pleasure. She admits by then she begins missing the kids, being in the middle of what she af- fectionately calls the “incredible and brutal.” For now, though, she has to endure a few panic attacks, as she glances down the hall- ways and sees desks and other furniture lined up against the walls.

“T’m very much an organized person and I like his things just so,” Cline said. “Mon- othly, I get a little panic attack when I see the halls. But I can see the end in sight.”
St. Alphonsus Beta Club rocks a great year

St. Alphonsus Liguori School is proud of its outstanding Beta Club students. Every year the students work diligently to prepare for the state Beta convention. This past year’s hard work and dedication paid off in a huge way.

The club members won first place in the Group Talent Competition at the State Junior Beta Convention held at the Cajun Dome in Lafayette. The 25 members performed an original routine to their version of a circus. They entertained the audience with jugglers, acrobats, magicians, lions and tigers, clowns, and a ringmaster. The performance was titled “Betas, Rockin’ the Big Top.” The club received a bid to compete in the National Convention in Nashville, Tennessee. Competing in academic categories were Conner DeLaune, Nhi Tran, Camille Robertson, Blaine Baker, Tori Termini. Competing in art, crafts, and photography were Maddie Toler, Conner Blanchard, Nhi Tran, Jolan Taylor and Conner DeLaune.

Also competing on the state level were Jolan Taylor in speech and Nicholas Breaux for a sculpture of a 3D origami dragon. Breaux placed third and qualified to compete in nationals.

To qualify to be a member of the SAS Beta Club, seventh- and eighth-grade students must maintain a 3.2 GPA and complete a minimum of 20 service hours. The club accomplished a total of 755 hours for the 2014-2015 school year.

The students give generously of their time and talents to work at various events in and around the community. The school year’s events included the Amite River Cleanup, Operation Christmas Child, The Buddy Walk, Central Community Alliance Valentine’s Dinner, the parish fair, and many more worthwhile activities. The students can also be seen sporting their yellow Beta shirts and assisting with school events such as Meet the Teacher Night and the annual Open House in January. The Beta students also assist with getting students to their homerooms the first week of school.

Members of the 2014-2015 St. Alphonsus Beta Club included Taylor, Lauren Leep, Riley McLin, Lindyn Landry, Claire Tate, Megan Davis, Termini, Tran, Robertson, Toler, Elizabeth Pennington, Julia Charleville, Trystan Tate, Alyana Tate, Chloe Hixson, Grant Norwood, DeLaune, Baker, Hayden Cowart, Blanchard, Carson Moran, Evans, Nick Brister, Breaux and Natalie Lazaroe.

If you would like more information on the St. Alphonsus Beta Club or any other inquiries about St. Alphonsus, please call the school.

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YOUNG POLITICIANS – St. Francis Xavier students Keith Singleton, Tayshaun Williams and Diamonte Rogers participated in the Youth Legislature this past school year. Singleton was elected governor, Williams was selected clerk of the House of Representatives and Rogers was voted president pro tempore of the Senate. Singleton and Rogers are rising freshmen at Catholic High School and Williams is a rising eighth-grader at St. Francis. Photo provided by Paula Fabre | St. Francis Xavier School
Former concession stand now selling education at Our Lady of Mercy

When students return to Our Lady of Mercy School, some will be learning math, science and English language arts in quite an unusual place ... the gym concession stand. The school’s enrollment has grown so quickly that every available space on campus is being converted into classroom space. According to Mercy principal Brian Moscona, this change is a good thing.

“It’s a great problem to have,” he said. “We’re bursting at the seams, and that’s a tremendous blessing.”

With an enrollment increase of more than 100 students in the past few years and waiting lists in several grades, Our Lady of Mercy is in an exciting time of growth.

Mercy’s maintenance team has been at work preparing the spaces ready for students. The former concession stand will be the home of the school’s resource program and accelerated/gifted program. The storage room behind the stage has been converted into the new choir room. Spanish and religion teachers will use rolling carts, as they will not have permanent classrooms this school year. Mercy is also making room to serve as a site for the Baton Rouge Diocesan Special Education Program.

These tight conditions, however, are temporary. Our Lady of Mercy parish has been in the midst of a nine-month, parish-wide campus master plan for the church and school called “Traditions for Tomorrow.” The final plan, which will be unveiled publicly on Aug. 19, will include additional facilities to accommodate the school’s enrollment.

Our Lady of Mercy partnered with the Center for Planning Excellence (CPEX) in the master planning process. CPEX spent significant time conducting research, facilitating stakeholder focus groups, and interviewing numerous members, school and church staff members, school parents and parishioners. CPEX even involved Mercy students: Student Council members brainstormed, sketched and presented their own creative plans to improve campus playgrounds. The process also included a three-day public charrette in which all members of the Our Lady of Mercy community were invited to offer input in an open-door design studio. The finished product is a plan that will meet the needs of the parish, and the first phase of the master plan will address the growing school population and the urgent need for classroom space.

“It is an exciting time to be part of the Our Lady of Mercy community,” said resource director Kristy Monsour. “As a parishioner, parent and teacher, I see our community flourishing in so many ways. We are happy to be flexible with the space, knowing that so many students will be able to attend a great school like Mercy.”

No matter if their classes are held in a former concession stand, a converted storage space, or from a rolling cart, students and teachers alike appear to be excited to grow together during another school year at Our Lady of Mercy.

CANDILORA

From page 48

one was in one place. My kids were here; my ministry (volunteer work) was here. It just all overlapped, and it was just a natural fit,” said Candidora.

“The faculty, staff and administration welcomed me in and made me feel a part of it right away,” said Candidora.

For the next seven years, Candidora continued to work as one of the school’s assistant principals, helping with all aspects of curriculum and instruction, including evaluating new technology and spearheading the school’s last two accreditation teams. From completing the job responsibilities she enjoyed the most, like observing the teachers as they brought creative lessons to life in the classrooms, to doing the necessary, statistical overview and recordkeeping, Candidora has kept pace with close to 1,200 students and more than 100 faculty and staff attending St. Aloysius.

During that time, Candidora was also in a unique position working along the school’s administration team to learn about the job she would fulfill. As she transitions to the school’s helm, her old job as an assistant principal will remain open, at least for now, and the reason is simple.

“(Bennett) created this position to prepare me (for the position of principal),” said Candidora, who added that as the year progresses, and they evaluate the school’s strengths, “We will decide later if that (assistant principal) position will be filled.”

As she takes the next step, Candidora is open to new and creative advances in education (changes have already begun rolling out with new clubs and new course offerings in electives, such as a photography class for eighth graders). She is also interested in more effective ways to use technology, including finding better ways to reach out and remind parents about upcoming activities. However, she stands committed on the core values of St. Aloysius.

“Because I have been a part of the team for several years, there have been several things I wanted to implement (such as a writing program), and (Bennett) has already allowed me to do those things (as assistant principal), so I don’t think people will see a change in our program academically or spiritually,” noted Candidora.

Another area that Candidora is committed to is the school’s faculty and staff.

“I never really set out to be a principal. That wasn’t my ultimate goal, but because the faculty and staff are so loving and so welcoming and so amazing to these children, it is just a humbling experience to lead them,” she said, then quickly added, “They’re the real leaders, They’re the rock stars making it happen. My job is to just support them.”

Our Lady of Mercy Student Council members participated in a kids charrette where they created plans to improve the campus playgrounds. Photo provided by Our Lady of Mercy School

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BEING OF SERVICE TO OTHERS – As part of our Catholic faith, students at St. John Primary and St. Theresa Middle promote service to others throughout the school year. All grade levels adopt a service project with an added awareness during Lent of the need to help others. Seventh grade went on a retreat to St. Joseph Church in French Settlement where students weeded flower beds, cleaned the church, and raked leaves. Photo provided by St. John Primary/St. Theresa Middle Schools

STUDENT ▼
From page 9B
the group. St. Michael students have been receptive to the program and said they enjoy their advisory group discussions. “I was excited to be a part of this program during my senior year,” former student council president Caroline Campagna said. “The underclassmen are going to have some great opportunities to build a closer relationship with St. Michael faculty and receive more academic support and guidance.”

Eleven advisory sessions were held in the 2014-15 school year. Groups met one to two times a month for 50 minutes during the school day. Topics included academic and personal goal setting, learning style and career clusters, stress management, etiquette, smart decision making, and financial literacy.

Dr. Anna Bourgeois, who serves as co-chair of the Advisory Planning Committee, said the program is an “integral part of our efforts to educate students for life beyond the classroom.” We visited great topics this year ranging from dining etiquette to student loan debt. Our hope is this program will continue to grow and enrich the lives of the students.”

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Watch The Catholic Commentator for the 2015-16 school news.

Discover...
DUKE SCHOLARS – This past school year 32 St. Thomas More seventh graders who scored in the top five percent on the Terra Nova test were invited to participate in the Duke University Talent Identification Program. Sixty-two percent of STM students who took the ACT as a part of this program qualified for state recognition in one or more subjects. Catherin Etheridge, Nicholas Khemmanyvong and Thomas Smith earned national recognition with high ACT scores in the reading and science subtests. The STM Duke Scholars are: Michael Alley, Christopher Angel, William Curry, Austin Johnson, Molly Kaiser, Vincent Nguyen, Bryce Olivier, Emma Perrault, Kylie Rangeley, Ethan Smith, Michelle Vu, Jay Wardlaw, Michael Rusk, Everett Vercher, Bradford Nguyen, Abby Bordelon, Aaron Borne, Olivia Dimattia, Josh Hollier, Camille Hosea, Marcella Taranto, Andrew Calendar, Michael Day, Chandler Gibson, Khemmanyvong, Luke Bella, Sean Brooks, Joseph Alexander, Etheridge, Madison Roy, Smith and Susan Tran. Photo provided by Tootie Lee | St. Thomas More School

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SJA to open school year with STEM lab

St. Joseph’s Academy will begin the 2015-2016 academic year with new leadership and an expanded emphasis on its curriculum in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

Dr. Michele Lambert has worked throughout the summer in preparation for her first year as principal. She succeeded Linda Fryoux Harvison, who retired June 1 after 11 years as principal of the all-girls’ school. Additionally, Dr. Jason Hanks is preparing to start the year in his new role as dean of academics.

Both leaders are enthusiastically anticipating student reaction to the school’s first STEM lab, which was dedicated during an afternoon ceremony June 16. The Andrea Clesi McMakin ’74 STEM Lab will provide cross-curricular, hands-on learning opportunities in a laboratory setting.

“What the lab brings to the students at SJA is the opportunity to incorporate 21st century technology in all areas of curriculum,” Lambert said. “In addition to science, engineering and math, the lab can be used for further exploration into the humanities, theology and the arts.”

“I am elated for the opportunity the STEM lab will afford the students of St. Joseph’s to be on the cutting edge of technology,” Hanks said. “I’m equally thrilled about the skills these students will bring to our community and future. Because of the gift of the STEM lab, our students will continue to develop critical-thinking and leadership skills. It is an exciting time to be part of this community.”

Claire Luikart will serve as director of the STEM lab. She will also teach SJA’s new engineering course. She said the lab will serve as a springboard to expand the scope of the work students are currently doing in 3D scanning, 3D modeling, 3D printing, electronics, design, robotics and programming.

“We’ve always strived to incorporate high-tech, cutting-edge technology and design concepts with our technology students, but this lab is a real boon as it will give us a better and more formalized space to do this and allow us to reach more students,” Luikart said. “The STEM lab will serve a myriad of purposes: It will enhance some of our traditional technology courses and house the new pre-engineering class to introduce students to the basic ideas behind engineering and design. In addition, the STEM lab will serve as a creative space for students to work on projects for other classes, learn how to work with awesome, high-tech tools and explore their creativity. We also look forward to offering out-of-class learning opportunities to both students and faculty to facilitate more STEM-centric classroom activity.”

Rising senior Ava Landry said she looks forward to exploring the many opportunities the STEM lab will offer.

“The space has quickly become my favorite spot on campus,” she said. “It’s a space dedicated to letting SJA students make, quite literally, whatever they think of. It will be so great having an area dedicated to creativity and technology. I’m most looking forward to continuing to make it a place that everyone utilizes to explore STEM projects.”

The lab was made possible by a gift from Wally McMakin in honor of his wife, a trailblazer in the local broadcast journalism market. Andrea Clesi McMakin broke into the field at a time when it was dominated by men.

SEE SJA PAGE 19B

Sacred Heart School appoints new assistant principal

Sacred Heart of Jesus School principal Joan Hutson has appointed veteran junior high science teacher Cecilia Methvin as the assistant principal. Methvin joined the Sacred Heart faculty in 1998 after teaching two years at Catholic High School of Pointe Coupee. She earned her bachelor’s and master’s degrees from Mississippi State University and currently serves as one of the school’s coordinators for the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Accreditation (SACS) self-study.

“Mrs. Methvin brings to her new position a dedication to our rich school traditions, an under-
St. Peter Chanel teachers creative in making science fun for students

St. Peter Chanel School students enjoy learning about science in all grade levels. The PK3 class begins the year with discovering all there is to know about pumpkins. Students learn about the life cycle of pumpkins and identify the parts of the pumpkin plants in their garden. The students guess whether a small or large pumpkin would have the most seeds, then check to see if their hypothesis was correct. The students learned that both pumpkins had more than 500 seeds, but their guess was right. The large pumpkin did have more seeds than the small pumpkin even if was only nine more. The students were excited to realize the size of the seeds were different also. The large pumpkin had large seeds and the small pumpkin had small seeds. The students also enjoyed tasting pumpkin seeds and making pumpkin shakes to finish up their lesson.

Students in fifth grade enjoyment learning about chemical reactions. First, students work through the scientific method to determine the outcome of the experiment. Next, the students experimented to determine if baking soda and vinegar would inflate a balloon and if they combine white glue with borax, along with water, the result is a new product called slime. Students also enjoyed sharing what they learned in science with other grade levels. Sixth graders, Madison Beier and TaLaija Allen, helped kindergartener Jaci Anslum, launch a rocket. Students in fourth through eighth grade made rockets as part of a 4-H National Science Week project, “Rockets to the Rescue.” Older students launched for their buddies, then launched their own rockets.
OMAHA, Neb. (CNS) It’s just four words, designed to carry a powerful message: “Catholic School, Awaken Greatness.”

Combined with the image of a schoolhouse with windows lit to form a cross and topped by an American flag, the words are part of a $2 million marketing effort designed to draw parents and students to Catholic schools.

Launched at a news conference with Archbishop George J. Lucas of Omaha at All Saints School in Omaha, the marketing includes newspaper and television advertisements across the archdiocese and a voiceover carrying the same message in radio ads in English and Spanish. Social media including Facebook also is being used.

Catholic schools offer a faith-based education that leads students into a relationship with Jesus and teaches morals, discipline, confidence and values, Archbishop Lucas said.

Those schools partner with parents and they want to work with still more parents who are not sending their children to Catholic schools, the archbishop said.

And Catholics across the archdiocese are playing a role in the marketing campaign, because funding for the effort comes out of a two-year, $40 million Ignite the Faith capital campaign in a third wave of parish fund raising, said Shannan Brommer, director of the Office Stewardship and Development.

“This wouldn’t be happening without the generosity of the people who supported the Ignite the Faith campaign,” she said. “They’re helping us tell the story with their gifts.”

In scale and scope, integration of message and mediums used, it is the biggest marketing campaign for schools in the 127-year history of the archdiocese, said Deacon Tim McNeill, chancellor.

“I think we took it for granted people know how effective our schools are,” Deacon McNeill said.

“But you just can’t assume.”

The ads include iconic images of textbooks, chemistry beakers, pencils and rulers emblazoned with words such as “confidence,” “discipline” and “faith,” designed to raise awareness about the way Catholic schools instills values in a unique way, striving for the education and growth of the whole person, said Patrick Slattery, superintendent of schools.

Students in Catholic schools have high test scores and graduation rates, but their education goes beyond academics, he said.

“It is more than an academic institution,” Slattery said. “We’re putting our attention to the heart of the child.”

The ads are designed to resonate with parents and their families, and this year as part of this expansion, we have updated the program design to better reflect the sophisticated tastes of today’s students.

For your students, we offer a variety of meal choices with one goal in mind: To provide outstanding service and high quality “child-friendly” meals that meet or exceed the latest federal and state requirements. Our School menus are designed to ensure that students receive a balanced meal, consisting of foods from all major food groups in the right proportions to meet calorie and other nutrient needs. The products and the cooking methods we use conserve food quality and nutrients, while limiting the addition of fats. So although you may see popular items like pizza and chicken nuggets on our menus, be assured that your child’s school meal selections contain healthy grains and are lower in fat and salt than what you find in grocery stores or restaurants. We will also be offering some different foods that your child may not have tried before: Lasagna, Roasted Chicken, Southwestern Baked Potato, just to name a few; so please encourage your child to taste these items. They just might become a new favorite! Also, we invite you to have lunch with your child so you can try these tasty new menu items too.

- All of the bread and grain products served for breakfast and lunch will now be whole grain-rich, ensuring plenty of fiber and other essential nutrients.
- Added trans fats have been eliminated from all foods; and menus are planned to limit sodium to meet the new standards set by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) for school meals.

For your students, we offer the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) will continue to have age-appropriate calorie limits; offer more servings of fruits and plenty of vegetables, with a focus on nutrient-dense dark green, red/orange and legume vegetable selections; and offer a wide variety of grain and protein items.

- The National School Breakfast Program (NSBP) will also have age-appropriate calorie limits for 3 grade groups (K-5, 6-8, and 9-12). Schools must now offer even more fruit and/or vegetables every day, and students will have to take at least ½ cup of fruit with each breakfast meal.

In addition, we are involved in a Farm to School Program, with locally grown foods. We are reaching out to local growers to use Louisiana fruits and vegetables.

We are proud to serve your child and encourage you to support our ongoing efforts to improve student health and well-being by participating in our Child Nutrition Program. For more information about our menus and programs, please visit www.cnbr.org and to learn more about healthy school meals visit www.fns.usda.gov or www.myhealthierlife.com.

We hope that you and your child have a great year! Please feel free to call us at 225-387-6421 with any questions or comments.

Sincerely,

Ms. Lynda Carville
CNP Director

Her evidence? Here’s just one: a machine called the “VertiMax.”

“We use it to help with vertical jumps. That’s something you need when playing volleyball,” Meaux explained, adding that when she first started using this machine, she was only seeing a small vertical lift off the ground.

However, she found that the more she worked with it, the better she got. Then last year, when she stepped onto the court, she could really feel the difference.

“You feel like you’re flying,” Meaux said, explaining that she just felt stronger.

At that point, something else happens.

“That’s when you know your whole summer was worth it,” she said.
From page 28

- Sustained by Gospel witness
- Shaped by communion and community
- Accessible to all students
- Established by express authority of the bishop

Catholic schools have also reflected on their effectiveness within 13 benchmarks in four main areas: mission and Catholic identity; governance and leadership; academic excellence and operational vitality. Surveys of board and community members, parents, faculty and staff members, and students shed light on perceptions in these areas. Additionally, statistical and descriptive data on religious education, governance, leadership, curriculum, instruction, finances and strategic planning were examined to complete the image of current reality in each school.

Seeing a reflection that is not perfect can be difficult, but school personnel courageously collaborated on identifying strengths and weaknesses as they produced an action plan for improvement, which addresses at least one goal for Catholic identity, academics and operational vitality to correspond with the district vision of Evangelizing Hearts, Educating Minds and Embracing the Future.

The story’s ending to the district reaccreditation self-study process is almost here for the schools in the Diocese of Baton Rouge. In January a team of educators from all over the country will come to read reports, visit schools and interview stakeholders. Their reflection on the work of our schools will provide professional collaboration needed for improvement.

The story of Catholic schools must include gratitude for the leadership of Bishop Robert W. Muench, who is a great champion for the work of the schools, and for pastors and priests in our diocese, who nurture the ministry of education within their parishes. May all schools in the Diocese of Baton Rouge live happily ever after as they begin the school year with a clearer focus from the knowledge learned during last year’s self-evaluation!

From page 168

Methvin

standing of the academic and behavioral expectations in the classroom, and most importantly, a commitment to the responsibility to pass on the light of faith,” said Hutson.

Methvin and her husband Jeff are the parents of two Sacred Heart of Jesus alumni. Their son Sean ’12, is a rising senior at Catholic High School. Daughter Aisie ’15 graduated from Sacred Heart in May and will begin her studies at St. Joseph’s Academy in August.

“One of the greatest blessings in my life was joining the Sacred Heart family 17 years ago,” said Methvin. “The faculty and staff who shaped me as an educator also helped Jeff and me raise our two children; to experience both of those things in the same school is rare and beautiful. Sacred Heart has been a beacon in Mid-City Baton Rouge for 85 years and I am excited for the opportunity to help (Hutson) lead it into the next 85.”

JUMP

From page 188

result emotionally with Catholics and non-Catholics alike, and they include references to a website built for the campaign love-my-school.com that has facts and figures about academic success, financial aid and other aspects of Catholic education, as well as contact information, costs and hyperlinks to all 70 Catholic elementary and high schools in northeast Nebraska, Slattery said.

Often discussed by people familiar with them as one of the “best kept secrets,” Catholic schools need to step up and be recognized, Slattery said. “Let’s not be a secret anymore.”

The website’s details help flesh out the message, he said.

“Once interest is piqued and people visit, if they want data it will be there,” Slattery said. “If they want to know about discipline it will be there. If they want to know about academics it will be there.”

Attracting people’s attention is important, and the Christmas season is a good time to launch the effort, said Annie Grace, a brand strategist heading the effort for the archdiocese.

From page 2B

METHVIN

From page 168

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Ascension Catholic

Melissa Cline
Catholic Elementary of Pointe Coupee

Lisa Harvey
Catholic High

Colleen Caillet
Catholic High of Pointe Coupee

Michael Comeau
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