

St. Jerome Regional School recognized by Catholic education association

JOHN E. USALIS / PUBLISHED: APRIL 7, 2020 REPUBLICAN HERALD



SUBMITTED PHOTO St. Jerome Regional School in Hometown has been recognized by the National Catholic Education Association for its success in maintaining and growing its student population during the past five years. The school is featured in the current print and online issue of "Momentum," the NCEA's magazine.

HOMETOWN — The success of St. Jerome Regional School in maintaining and increasing its student population year after year has been recognized by a national teachers organization.

The school, part of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Allentown education system, has seen a constant increase in the student population, and according to the trend in registration for the 2020-21 school year, it should exceed the current school year's record.

The national recognition came in an article entitled, "Keeping Our Promise — The Key to Excellence in Retention" in the spring 2020 issue of "Momentum," published by the National Catholic Education Association.

The article said the school was near closing five years ago with 110 students, but the number currently is closing in on 300 students. The track record earned the attention of the teachers union.

Principal Amy Hannis-Miskar is appreciative of the attention and she said there are various reasons of the school's success.

"I think it's a combination of things," Hannis-Miskar said. "Again, we kept with many of the Catholic school traditional aspects. We made sure we kept all of those things in the school while updating all the other things to make them modern as far as our STEM lab, our curriculum materials and the teachers using the Smartboards and all of those types of things, while still having our same family core religious values. There has been a real effort to combine the old with the new."

The school's motto is "Living Fearless Through Faith," which Hannis-Miskar and Advancement Director Manda Smarr Beers follow as part of their efforts in helping the students excel in their spiritual and educational lives.

Hannis-Miskar said those core values are having weekly Masses, which are still being celebrated in the school chapel by the Rev. Allen J. Hoffa, pastor representative, and livestreamed on Facebook.

Based in downtown Tamaqua for almost 100 years, the school moved in 2018 to its new building in Hometown. The new building was the former Rush Township Elementary School, which was part of the Tamaqua Area School District.

A major reason for the change was the former location, which was two buildings, became too small to handle the growing student body. It began as the parochial school of St. Jerome Roman Catholic Church, which is now closed.

The diocese purchased the 35,000-square-foot facility in Hometown in 2018 for \$1.2 million. In addition to being a more modern building, the Hometown building is one story as compared to the former four-story building in Tamaqua.

The 2017-18 school year, the last year at the Tamaqua school, had about 200 students. For the 2018-19 school year, the student count was 252 from pre-kindergarten to eighth-grade. The current school year began with 287 students, and currently has 279 students.

"Even though the building is closed, we are still accepting students for next year," Beers said.

The registration number as of last week for the next school year was 274 students, which also shows an increase since the current year will see 30 eighth-graders graduating.

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SUBMITTED PHOTO—St. Jerome Regional School sixth graders, from left, Breanna Hernandez, Andreas Chaikalis and Caroline Breslin look over information on tablets sitting in the school's STEM classroom. The STEM program is one reason the school continues to grow in students each year.