

## Catholic Elementary Schools are on the rise:

# The Morning Star Initiative

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Catholic education on Long Island is here to stay because its mission in forming disciples for future generations is simply too critical. Catholic elementary schools in the Diocese of Rockville Centre have seen a spike in enrollment and a commitment from our communities to keep Christ at the center of children's lives while receiving an unrivaled academic education.

The Morning Star Initiative (MSI) works to revitalize diocesan Catholic elementary schools by nurturing faith through stronger schools making a lasting impact. Through its partnership with the Marianists (the Brothers of the Province of Meribah), MSI has already experienced great interest and increased enrollment in our elementary schools.

### MSI focuses on four pillars:

- Cultivating Catholic culture
- Providing a safe and supportive community grounded in the dignity of the human person
- Offering academic excellence which fosters individual development and growth
- Stating plainly that our Catholic schools are here to stay







Students in computer lab at Our Lady of the Hamptons School, Southampton.



Students throw the basketball around in the Our Lady of the Hamptons gymnasium with elevated track.



Sr. Kathryn Schlueter, CSJ, principal of Our Lady of the Hamptons since 1987.

The pillars of faith, fellowship, and academics along with the firm commitment to fight for our Catholic schools has already created opportunities for present and future success.

There are already early achievements in this great partnership. Re-engagement of parents and focus on data driven instruction are making a difference.

Brother Thomas Cleary, the president of Chaminade High School and the chief revitalization officer for MSI, attributed the early success to quick gathering and analysis of critical data to create a forward-thinking plan. Another key component is the hard work and diligence of principals in pivoting to remote learning within days of the pandemic striking.

Brother Tom also noted the increase in enrollment comes from parent and community engagement. "We have been very available and transparent with the parents of the students, hosting meet and greets, informational Zoom sessions, and personal phone calls," he said. "When we welcome a child to one of our Catholic elementary schools, we welcome the whole family!"

The effects within the diocese resulting from the relationship between MSI and Catholic schools are noticeable.

Mrs. Patricia Ayers, principal of Trinity Regional School in East Northport said, "The Morning Star Initiative has presented many ideas to move our schools into the future." Principal Ayers highlighted the implementation of the i-Ready program in all elementary schools across the diocese. The program "has helped us tremendously during this first full year back from remote instruction last fall."

The i-Ready program was created by Curriculum Associates to improve the classroom for students and teachers. Teachers gain insight regarding the strengths and weaknesses of their students and receive resources to reach all students, regardless of academic level.

Trinity Regional School serves six parishes covering a vast area on the north shore. Through the utilization of the "I Am New" page and the use of the Calendly App on its



*"Ever this day, be at my side ..."*

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**Abbey Swiatkowski, principal, St. John Paul II Regional School**



**St. John Paul II school**

website, Trinity has scheduled many one-on-one in-person tours of campus that allow parents to see all the school has to offer. The marketing and branding of the school along with staff availability to meet with prospective families led to a sustainable district enrollment.

Abbey Swiatkowski, principal of St. John Paul II Regional School in Riverhead, said the school “operates on the beliefs and teachings of St. John Paul II: faith, reason and service.” Working from that framework Mrs. Swiatkowski believes the MSI Team “truly understands Catholic education and the vocation of the elementary school employees.”

Strong faith and excellent academics are only possible with devout and hard-working Catholic school teachers. “The Morning Star Team was able to provide St. John Paul II Regional the guidance, tools and resources to advance that goal even further,” Swiatkowski said.

Curriculum Lead program was also instituted by MSI. A project connecting teachers from across the diocese strengthens the mission of education and allows teachers to share classroom successes with each other. Enrollment doubled for the 2020-21 school year and is continuing to grow for the upcoming school year.

Principal Peg Augello of Our Lady of Victory School in Floral Park said, “The January 2020 announcement of the Morning Star Initiative was exciting in its conveyance of hope for, and commitment to, Catholic education on Long Island.”

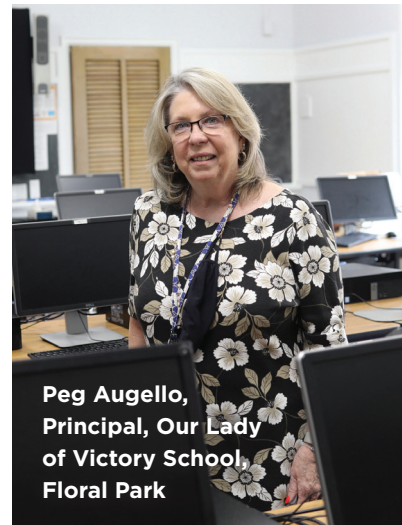
Working with MSI has brought much fruit to the school

community. The hard work, dedication and creativity is paying off. “We expect a twelve to fourteen percent increase in enrollment at Our Lady of Victory School for the 2021-2022 school year,” said Augello.

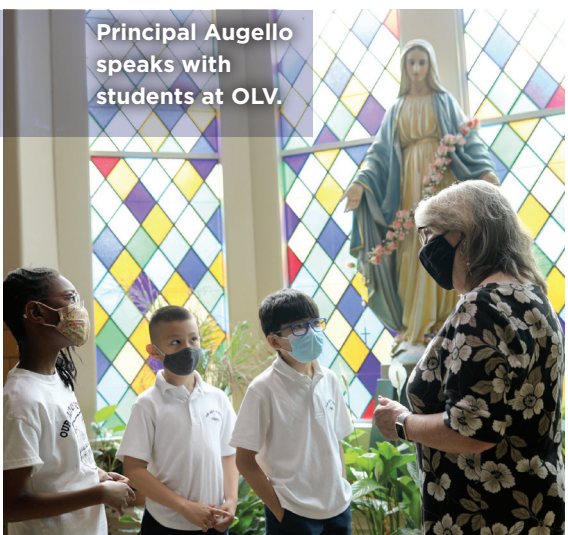
Sister Kathryn Schlueter is the principal of Our Lady of the Hamptons in Southampton. She noted the presence of a seasoned religious community in the MSI has had and will continue to have a positive influence on the growth and development of Long Island Catholic schools. Sister Kathryn believes this monumental task clearly aids the stability of Catholic education across the diocese.

Enrollment for Our Lady of the Hamptons reached maximum capacity with a waiting list for every grade. Parents are the bedrock and foundation for word and have spread the good news about Catholic education. Sister Kathryn sees the dedication of neighboring parishes to spread the word about OLH has increased interest in the school.

Achievements from the joint effort of MSI and Catholic elementary schools are found throughout the diocese. Providing every child with a vibrant experience of the Christian faith and a vigorous education is desired by Long Island parents and fulfilled by the dedication of administration and teachers inspired by MSI.



**Peg Augello, Principal, Our Lady of Victory School, Floral Park**



**Principal Augello speaks with students at OLV.**



**Our Lady of Victory School**