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MEDIA RELEASE

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**CATHOLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHER COLLABORATION PROGRAM
FROM DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE’S MORNING STAR INITIATIVE YIELDS
ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE AND CONSISTENCY THROUGHOUT DIOCESE**

ROCKVILLE CENTRE, NY – February 15, 2023 – With the shift in early 2020 to remote



A presenter working with teachers at the Department of Education headquarters in Hicksville.

learning spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Diocese of Rockville Centre’s Morning Star Initiative launched its “Curriculum Lead” teacher collaboration program.

Initially, the program provided support for teachers throughout the pandemic. When schools reopened their doors in September 2020, the program shifted to supporting teachers as they transitioned back to teaching within the building under COVID restrictions. Today, Curriculum Lead supports teachers in their everyday professional practice.

The impact has been evident in the Catholic elementary schools across Long Island.

“Facilitating the Curriculum Lead Team for the past 18 months has been the most rewarding part of my role as assistant superintendent,” said Brian Colombari, assistant superintendent for data and instruction. “I leave each meeting with such a positive outlook on the future of education in our Diocese. I’m blessed to work with a group of such talented and dedicated teachers.”



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Currently, there are 31 teacher “Leads” from 18 schools representing each grade level from nursery through eighth grade, with teachers in grades five through eight meeting in their specific subject areas. These Curriculum Leads meet regularly with their grade-level and subject-area peers to promote rigorous academics and collaboration across the Catholic elementary schools in the Diocese of Rockville Centre. Additionally, the leads meet regularly as a team throughout the school year under the direction of Mr. Colomban.

“The Curriculum Lead program has been an invaluable tool to ensure academic excellence and consistency throughout the Diocese,” said Patricia Ayers, principal, Trinity Regional Catholic School, East Northport.

“The teachers can collaboratively plan and work together under the guidance of lead teachers. I am thankful for the opportunities this program has provided our teachers and in turn our students.”



Bethany Murano, 7th grade Math Curriculum Lead and Diocesan Math Coordinator working with principals.

Each Lead meets with their grade-level colleagues six hours each semester (eighteen hours per year). These meetings provide an opportunity for teachers to collaborate, share successes, and obtain support for the challenges they face. Teachers are also given professional development in topics of relevance to them. Each group has its own Google Classroom, where collaboration and sharing of resources continues beyond the live meetings.



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Curriculum Leads Megan Tennant and Ann Marie Donnelly with Brian Colomban, assistant superintendent for academics and data.

“It is through the Curriculum Lead program that middle science teachers have improved their science lessons,” said Anne Marie Donnelly, teacher and Eighth Grade Science Curriculum Lead at St. Mary’s Catholic Elementary School, Manhasset.

“Through shared lessons and bi-monthly meetings, science teachers collaborate on a whole new level. We follow the newest science standards and implement lab activities that bring science to life.”

Most schools have only one AIS teacher, so having this group means a great deal to us as we are able to collaborate with each

other,” said Regina Millman, Academic Intervention Services Lead and AIS teacher, St. Joseph Catholic School, Garden City.

“I like that we know the AIS teachers in other schools,” said Barbara Varous, teacher, St. Aidan Catholic School, Williston Park. “I like that people can share good and bad experiences. I think it's helpful when we talk about activities, websites, manipulatives that others have found helpful and fun for the students.”

“The Curriculum Lead program empowers and supports teachers in helping one another to integrate community, academics, and faith into their classrooms,” said Rich Capuano, teacher and Seventh Grade Science Lead, Our Lady of Peace Catholic School, Lynbrook.

“It not only elevates student achievement but also fosters a culture of collaboration, continuous improvement, and spiritual growth among educators,” said Concetta Veltri, Kindergarten Lead, Our Lady of Peace Catholic School, Lynbrook.

The regularly held curriculum meetings provide an added layer of support for new teachers in the parish and regional elementary schools. They serve as a place where these teachers can learn from their more-experienced peers. Another important role the Leads play is in sharing best practices for using i-Ready in the classroom, both as a diagnostic tool and for personalized instruction.



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“As a first-year teacher with the Diocese the "CLP" for science has been helpful and afforded me an opportunity to assist my students in their learning process by modeling an education plan designed by a very experienced and knowledgeable professional,” said Edward Scali, teacher at St. William the Abbot Catholic School, Seaford. “In addition, having immediate direct electronic access to the lead teacher has been valuable in the event any questions or concerns of mine arose.”



Hailey Wehr, 5th Grade Science Lead from St. John Paul II Regional School assists a student.

“I enjoy our meetings,” said George Dancause, teacher, Trinity Regional Catholic School, East Northport. “I get a chance to hear from everyone and it makes a difference when I'm creating lessons or unsure of topics. The room is very inviting, and everyone listens to each other and builds off each other. We share available websites, resources and how effective they are in the classroom. To me, our collaboration is important because it makes me better at my job.”

Curriculum Leads have worked on topics such as identifying priority standards (which will lead to Diocesan-wide curriculum mapping), classroom management, sharing unit plans and lessons, developing professional learning communities, data-driven instruction, and social-emotional

learning.

“The meetings are a great resource for staying up-to-date on standards and news and as a way to touch base with fellow teachers to commiserate, laugh, and sometimes cry,” said Lorraine Letteri, teacher at Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic School, Malverne.

“The technology curriculum meetings have allowed me to collaborate with colleagues who have enriched my teaching experiences with students, leading to more engaging and fruitful classroom experiences,” said Maria Conte, teacher at St. Rose of Lima Catholic School, Massapequa. “It gives educators a forum to ask questions and learn from each other without judgment. It creates a true community experience.”



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Valerie Schwamborn, Third Grade Lead at St. John Paul II Regional School assists her students.

“The program has proven very valuable to me as it has helped me gain new insights on the way to teach some of the topics that I have been teaching for decades,” said Lisa Hartel Goodman, teacher at St. Brigid/Our Lady of Hope Regional School, Westbury.

“But, most of all, it allows me to be able to talk to a group of peers and share successes and disappointments. That enables me to be more comfortable and more confident and realize we are all experiencing the same issues and joys and we learn from each other's experiences both professionally and personally.”

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About the Diocese of Rockville Centre

The Diocese of Rockville Centre (www.drvc.org) was formed in 1957 and covers 1,198 square miles in Nassau and Suffolk Counties. The diocese serves approximately 1.4 million baptized Catholics* (total population in both counties is approximately 2.9 million). There are 132 parishes plus one campus parish in 115 towns. The diocese is blessed with 336 total priests, 703 religious women, 61 Brothers and 275 permanent deacons. In 2020, 13,526 baptisms, 11,583 confirmations, 11,760 First Holy Communions and 2,169 Catholic marriages took place in the diocese. There are 11,077 students in Catholic elementary schools; 10,407 students in Catholic high schools and 3,409 students in higher institutions. There are 35 Catholic elementary schools (31 parish or regional and four private), 9 high schools (2 diocesan, 2 parish and 5 private) and one Catholic college (Molloy College, Rockville Centre) in the diocese. In 2020, there were 66,578 children in parish Faith Formation programs. In 2020, Catholic clergy and community provided consolation to families and loved ones of 9,439 deceased Catholics at 4 diocesan and 20 parish cemeteries. Catholic Health is an integrated system encompassing some of the region's finest health and human service agencies. The health system has 17,000 employees, six acute care hospitals, three nursing homes, a home health service, hospice and a network of physician practices. Catholic Charities of Long Island shares the love of Jesus by offering dignified and compassionate care to poor and over 1.3 million, face-to-face services to an average of 58,000 neighbors from 53 sites in Nassau and Suffolk Counties. The diocese maintains Facebook, Twitter and Instagram social media platforms. Catholic Faith Network, broadcasts 24/7/365 to millions of homes; the weekly DRVC E-newsletter is emailed to more than 10,000 recipients. The diocesan website drvc.org averages approximately 18,000 unique visitors each month.

*As of 2020