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Maintaining Momentum

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COURTESY NAZARETH SCHOOL

RUNNING THE RACE: Students at Nazareth School participate in their 2022 Turkey Trot on Nov. 19. A recent national report on education showed that, while test scores declined amidst the COVID pandemic, Catholic school students outperformed their peers at public and charter schools. Local Catholic educators are committed to building upon their schools' pandemic era successes.



Not Here

Barrio Logan parish against proposed cement warehouse. **Page 2**



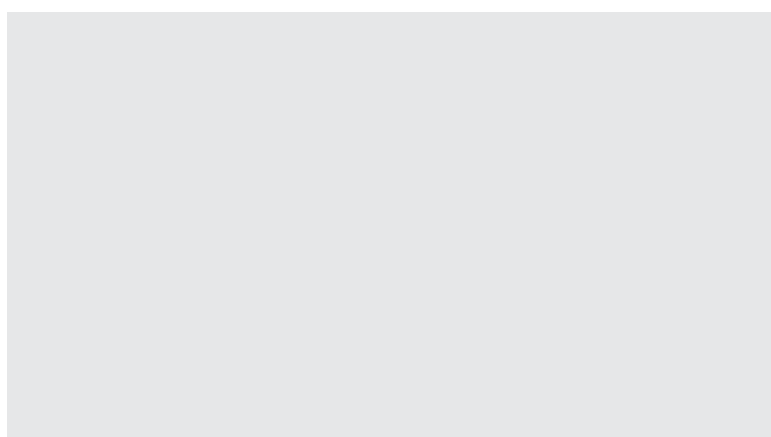
Ready to Serve

Four seminarians ordained to diaconate on path to priesthood. **Page 4**



Faith Traditions

Filipino Catholics prepare for Christmas with Simbang Gabi celebration. **Page 17**



'Changing Hearts, Saving Lives'

Jan. 14, 2023

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U.S. Report Reveals Strength of Catholic Schools

The Southern Cross



The results of a recent national report on education were great news for Catholic schools.

The U.S. Department of Education's biennial report on test scores showed that fourth- and eighth-grade students at Catholic schools outperformed their peers at public and charter schools nationwide.

The report, which reviewed national test scores before and after the COVID pandemic, showed an overall decline in test scores in math and reading, but found that Catholic school students showed higher achievement in those subjects compared to public and charter schools across the country.

In fact, the report showed Catholic school students beat the average scores of public and charter school students in all 50 states.

Kathleen Porter-Magee, an adjunct fellow at the Manhattan Institute, tweeted, "If Catholic schools were a state, they would be the highest performing in the nation on all four (National Assessment of Educational Progress) tests."

"I was elated! I'm very proud of the work we've been doing in Catholic schools to support our students throughout the pandemic," said Leticia Oseguera, superintendent of Catholic schools for the Diocese of San Diego. "This validates the hard work, the dedication, the flexibility and resiliency that our Catholic school teachers and principals displayed through a very difficult time."

Oseguera pointed to the fact that Catholic schools in the diocese had been prepared and were able to shift over to distance-learning in just a few days when the pandemic began, and then were able to open for in-person



FOCUSED: The 7th- and 8th-grade students at St. James Academy worked in groups in December to build and program a robot in their robotic class.

instruction a full year before most public schools were able to do so.

"The effort that our families, teachers, staff and administrators put into reopening our schools was heroic," she said. "They poured everything they could into creating a safe environment where students could learn and be socially supported — and it paid off."

Nationally, Catholic schools and Catholic school students weren't immune to the effects of the pandemic. Eighth-grade math and fourth-grade reading scores dropped slightly from 2019 to 2022, but they dropped less than public and charter schools. Conversely, fourth-grade math scores were unchanged from 2019 to 2022, but eighth-grade reading scores showed a small improvement.

In all cases, however, Catholic school students showed higher scores across the board.

Local Catholic schools aren't content to rest on their laurels, but rather are committed to keeping the momentum going.

Through the experience of the pandemic, Oseguera said, local Catholic

schools "learned to be flexible, to be adaptable, and to be collaborative." She said they "leaned into each other for support, knowing that we are stronger together." That, along with a greater use of technology in the educational process, "will continue to serve schools well beyond the pandemic."

"It is gratifying for Catholic schools to be recognized nationally for their hard work and dedication," said Analisa Burgos, principal of Sacred Heart School in Brawley.

"Our teachers are motivated to continue to provide a high-quality education," she said.

"We have school-wide goals, discuss best practices, and work together to support the high achievement of all students," she added. "We participate in as many professional learning opportunities as possible and work collaboratively with the Diocese of San Diego to ensure we are moving forward and on track."

Kelly Bonde, principal of St. Katharine Drexel Academy said the recent results "bring me a lot of pride."

"Schools planned, pivoted and exe-

cuted miraculous things to allow our students to return to school safely in the fall of 2020, and clearly our hard work paid off," she said. "Not only is it gratifying to see our students perform well nationwide, but knowing that we created a safe place and continue to foster their social, emotional and spiritual development."

Bonde said the biggest lesson her staff learned during the pandemic was the importance of being flexible — "not just with planning, but with ourselves, our students and each other."

Building on what they've achieved, she said, "We have tried to continue the momentum that COVID-19 brought us through our teaching strategies. COVID-19 reminded us of the inequity present in education and forced us to break down barriers so that all students were successful.

"Our school's policies have continued to strengthen in this area so that every single student has as much equitable access as possible to technology, curriculum and resources."



TEAMWORK: Kindergarten students at Our Lady of Grace School study wind speed and temperature Oct. 26 while learning about the weather.

Open Houses on Tap

The Southern Cross

The annual weeklong celebration of Catholic education in the United States will be observed from Sunday, Jan. 29, through Saturday, Feb. 4, 2023.

The current National Catholic Schools Week theme is "Catholic Schools: Faith. Excellence. Service."

The week helps to showcase what makes Catholic schools the right choice for parents, including families exploring this education for their children.

"The purpose (of National Catholic Schools Week) is to celebrate and honor all the wonderful contributions our Catholic schools make to their communities, the larger community and the world," explained Leticia Oseguera, superintendent of Catholic Schools for the Diocese of San Diego. "We want to recognize the different members of the Catholic school community that make this possible and

celebrate the wonderful work taking place at each school."

Schools typically observe the week with Masses, open houses, assemblies and other activities for students, families, parishioners and community members. Schools often also invite special guests, go out into the community to serve, and find ways to express gratitude to their families for their commitment to Catholic education.

Those interested in finding out more about a particular campus' activities may phone the school or visit its website.

Applications for Catholic school are accepted year-round and financial aid is available for qualifying families. More information is available from the Office for Schools at sdcatholic schools.org. The office also will be sharing images from Catholic Schools Week activities on its social media.