

BOOST PROGRAM

State helps some students pay tuition

by JEREMY BAUER-WOLF
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At least seven Frederick County students were recipients of state money earmarked to help low-income families pay tuition at nonpublic schools.

The Maryland General Assembly established the Broadening Options and Opportunities for Students Today, or BOOST, program in March. Approximately \$5 million was handed out to families across the state.

The seven students attend Catholic schools. Six recipients attend St. John Regional Catholic school, and the seventh goes to St. John's Catholic Prep.

Other recipients attend other Frederick County nonpublic schools, but that information has not yet been released by the Maryland State Department of Education, spokesman Bill Reinhard said.

At St. John Regional, the scholarships range between \$2,500 and \$4,500, spokeswoman Sheila Evers said. That helps covers the school's annual tuition of \$6,800. The students are a mix of first-time attendees and students continuing at the school, which goes up to eighth grade.

"It's a benefit for us. We're always looking for ways making

(See BOOST B2)



Staff photo by Bill Green

Students leave St. John Regional Catholic School after their first day of classes on Aug. 29.

Boost

(Continued from B1)

Catholic education affordable," Evers said. "Another way is the annual fund. We help raise money from parents and the community."

The student at St. John's Catholic Prep received \$1,400, Principal Marc Minsker said. Annual tuition at the school is \$15,785.

About half of the \$5 million went to students currently in public schools who will attend nonpublic schools.

The state education department received more than 4,500 applications. Students needed to meet the same federal requirements — a certain income level — to qualify for free and reduced-price meals.

Within the Archdiocese of Baltimore, 628 students received about \$1.5 million in BOOST scholarships.

Follow Jeremy Bauer-Wolf on Twitter: @jbeowulf.

https://www.fredericknewspost.com/news/lifestyle/religion/traveling-statue-teaches-local-students-parishioners-about-compassion/article_e2c8d573-3afe-547e-9be5-071395be3d40.html

Traveling statue teaches local students, parishioners about compassion

By Nancy Lavin nlavin@newspost.com May 12, 2017



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Staff photo by Graham Cullen

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At first glance, the sculpture of a blanket-covered figure lying on a park bench appears

to depict a homeless person.

Step closer and you realize it's not just any homeless person; it's Jesus, his identity revealed by the telltale nail wounds in the dirty, weathered feet that peek out from underneath the blanket.

The original bronze "Homeless Jesus" sculpture, the work of Canadian artist Timothy Schmalz, was installed in Toronto in 2013. Replicas of the thought-provoking art piece now appear in more than 60 cities worldwide, from Singapore to St. Peter's Square in Vatican City, *The Baltimore Sun* reported.

The Archdiocese of Baltimore in February unveiled its own wood-and-resin version of the sculpture, the *Sun* reported. The lighter, portable replica journeyed throughout the archdiocese to churches, schools and other organizations.

The 8-foot-3-inch statue recently made its way to Frederick. It stopped first for a week at St. John Regional Catholic School in north Frederick, then for a visit to St. Peter the Apostle church in Union Bridge, where it remained until Friday.

The piece's message about the plight of those in need — and in turn, the presence of Jesus even in the most downtrodden — was one both the school and church highlighted as relevant to their communities.

"It just makes people stop and think," said Jerry Jennings, a deacon at St. Peter's. "We have people in our society who need help all the time. Caring for them, showing them mercy, is what Christ called us to do."

In what Jennings described as an example of divine intervention, the statue's visit

coincides with the similarly themed parish mission, Consoling the Heart of Jesus Through Works of Mercy, a several-day retreat that began May 7, was scheduled before the church learned when the statue would arrive, Jennings said.

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The statue's presence underscores the message of the mission: to encourage works of mercy.

The piece similarly reinforced the yearlong theme at St. John of "mercy in motion," said Sheila Evers, the school's marketing and development director. As part of the school's theme, students earlier in the year made bags of food and essential supplies to give out to homeless people they might encounter, she said.

The statue was incorporated into the curriculum, from art classes about sculpting to religion and history lessons.

On May 4, a group of two dozen fourth-grade students sat crosslegged on the asphalt pavement beside the statue. With wooden beads in hand, they prayed a decade of the rosary, wishing for safe travels before embarking on a field trip to Hagerstown.

Many of the students were initially surprised by the statue, which was a markedly different portrayal of Jesus than they were used to seeing.

"The last time I saw Jesus, he was with his family, looking happy," said Laurie O'Neil, age 10.

"I never thought of a homeless person as Jesus lying on a bench," agreed Adrian Nayli, also 10. "I thought of a [homeless person] as like, someone who doesn't get good grades, like they didn't do anything."

Kathy Shields, their religion teacher, reminded her pupils that the field trip might give them a chance to put into action the statue's teachings about mercy and compassion.

"We might see some homeless people when we are there," she told them of their visit to downtown Hagerstown. "It's our chance to live out what we talked about in our lesson."

The traveling Homeless Jesus has now moved to St. Michael Catholic Church in Mount Airy, according to Jennings. The statue will continue to make its way through the archdiocese before it is returned to Schmalz, the *Sun* reported. A permanent, bronze model will then be installed for display at St. Vincent de Paul Catholic Church in Baltimore.

St. John Regional Catholic School

Instilling morality, character and compassion

BY JIM MAHAFFIE

Serving pre-K through eighth-grade students, St. John is a coeducational school for students from Maryland, Virginia and West Virginia. Adding to a long list of honors and awards over many years, the school was voted a winner in the Best Private Elementary and Middle School category in *The Frederick News-Post's* Best of the Best readers' choice awards.

"This is a wonderful tribute," said school Principal Karen Smith. "Many *News-Post* readers are parents and students here, and it's nice that everyone who voted for us has this faith in our school."

St. John has much to brag about. Its teachers are highly effective educators. Music teacher Peggy Frazier was recently recognized as the Catholic school teacher of the year by the Knights of Columbus and was also recognized as a Teacher of Excellence by the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

St. John is a wonderful example of what a truly modern Catholic school looks like, seamlessly integrating a 21st-century education with the values and traditions of the Catholic faith. "We all know your child's name, their learning style, strengths and limitations, and we engage them daily," said Smith. "We work hard to ensure children graduate from St. John with morality, character and compassion."

Designated a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) school, St. John's innovative programs include school-wide Wi-Fi, Chromebooks and iPads for instruction, science and computer labs, 3-D printers accessible to students and a Maker Space Laboratory for creative 'inventioning.' There is a wide range of language arts and leadership opportunities, too.

"I love the community of St. John Regional Catholic School because it provides my children with a solid education in a safe and caring environment," said Carmela Stadter, an SJRCS parent. "We couldn't ask for better teachers that are developing a strong faith and academic foundation that my children will rely on throughout their lives."



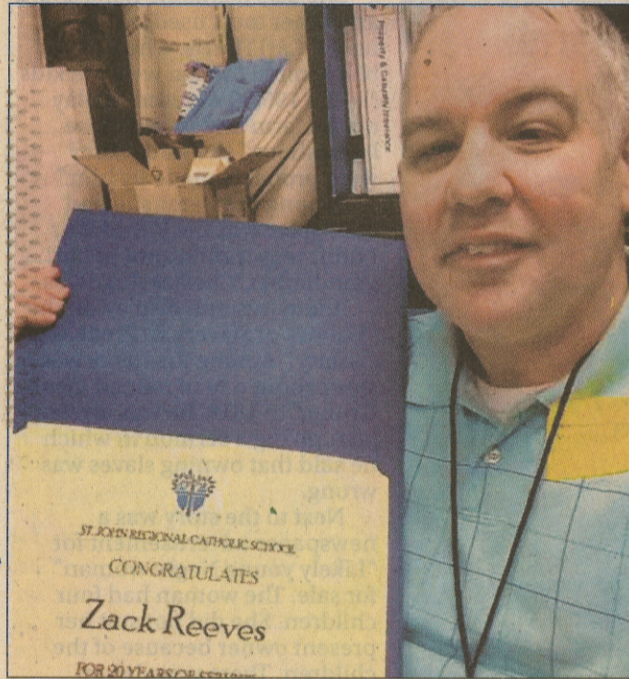
Students are proud, as well. Brooke Hill is a seventh-grader at St. John. "I think my school deserved to win the Best of the Best because I have fun while I learn, my teachers really care about me and are really nice," she said. "If I'm feeling down or having a hard time with my studies, I can go to anyone at school, friends or teachers, and they will help me through whatever I need. I love my school and I am happy to be a student here."

St. John has been shaping young hearts and minds since 1829, when the school began as St. John's Literary Institution on East Second Street in Frederick. St. John was named a National Blue Ribbon School in 2009, meaning student achievement in English and math was among the top 15 percent of students across the country. Private schools can receive the Blue Ribbon award once every five years, and St. John was one of only 50 private schools to receive this prestigious honor. Other honors include being named a STEM school by the Archdiocese of Baltimore, as well as a Maryland Green School; receiving a PRIDE designation—Pupils Receiving Inclusive Diversified Education; winning a Best Workplace award from *The Washington Post*; and winning in *Frederick Magazine's* Best of Frederick competition.



Best Private Elementary

Honored for service



Courtesy photo

Zack Reeves, of Frederick, received a certificate from the Archdiocese of Baltimore for 20 years of service at St. John Regional Catholic Church (SJRCs). Reeves helps with facility maintenance and physical education classes. He is a league bowler at Terrace Lanes and a longtime Special Olympics athlete in skiing, softball and golf.

Readers say thanks



Staff photo by Dan Gross

LaMarvon "Showtime" Jackson, of the Harlem Wizards, dunks a basketball for students at St. John Regional Catholic School in Frederick during a kickoff event Monday for Mercy in Motion.

A Wizard on the court

By JEREMY BAUER-WOLF

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Students at St. John Regional Catholic School shrieked with joy as LaMarvon Jackson — known as "Showtime" with the Harlem Wizards basketball team — spun a ball on his long finger.

After a couple of slam-dunks and some prizes were handed out, students quickly calmed down as they headed off to help pack backpacks with supplies for people in need.

Monday's display from the Wizards — a performing team that does fundraising events around the world, similar to the Harlem Globetrotters — kicked off the school's celebration of National Catholic Schools Week.

Sunday was the start of the designated week, in which Catholic schools across the country plan events to celebrate their faith

and preserving their way of education.

At St. John Regional, the week is a big deal, said Sheila Evers, a spokeswoman.

This year, each student is filling a draw-string bag with food, bottled water, a first-aid kit and hygienic products. That's a total of 550 bags, said Mary Haley, a parent volunteer.

Instead of donating bags to a local charity, the school will send them home with the children. The families then give them out when they find someone in need in their community.

"Every student is going to take one home for their parents to keep in their family car," Haley said. "Whenever they come across someone in need, when the opportunity arises, they can give it to someone."

Haley said that a key aspect of Catholic

(See **WIZARDS B2**)

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a lot of its students, Evers said.

"It's very tight-knit," Evers said. "It's a big thing that makes our school unique ... that we're a big family here and we're constantly doing service projects."

As the students packed the bags, Devon Curry, another member of the Harlem Wizards, looked on. He's known as "Livewire."

Curry said he played for the Globetrotters for a few years, and this type of job for him "was the most fun." He travels across the globe for charity events. He recently went to China.

"Seeing the smiles on the kids and the families, there's no better job than that," Curry said.



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VFW presents Patriot Pins



Courtesy photo

Joe Allen, far right, commander of VFW Post 3285, Frederick, presents Patriot Pins to, from left to right, Megan Cunningham, St. John's School, first place and winner of \$200; Ariana Isaylw, St. John's, second place and winner of \$100; Calista Sybrant, Windsor Knolls Middle School and third-place winner of \$50.



Staff photo by Bill Green

St. John Regional Catholic School teacher Julie Pessagno, who won a Knights of Columbus statewide Catholic School Teacher of the Year award, is shown working with fifth- and sixth-grade religion and history students.

HEAD *of the* CLASS

Catholic School Teacher of Year finds life's purpose

By **RYAN MARSHALL**
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Julie Pessagno took a while to begin her teaching career, but she believes she's found her purpose in life.

Pessagno, a teacher at St. John Regional Catholic School in Frederick, wanted to share her own love of learning with the students who fill her classroom.

"School was always fun for me, and I wanted to bring that to other people," she said.

Pessagno recently received a statewide Catholic School Teacher of the Year award from the Knights of Columbus, a Catholic fraternal charitable organization.

Pessagno, 48, graduated from college with a degree in education. After graduation, she spent about 10 years in real estate before the first of her two teenage daughters was born.

She stayed home with her daughters for several years, then worked as a substitute teacher for a few years before going into the profession full time. While subbing, she said, she thought that she could do a better job than some of the teachers for whom she was filling in.

She's been at St. John for six years, teaching social studies to fifth-graders and social

studies and religion to sixth-graders.

Pessagno, a lifelong Catholic, admits she was anxious about trying to answer questions about religion from inquisitive sixth-graders. But she said the key is to try to give the best answer you can, and not be afraid to say that you don't know something.

"I just think it's a privilege to bring your faith to kids," she said.

She enjoys teaching the "twists and turns" of history.

Pessagno said she always thought fifth- and sixth-graders were the best age to work with, and felt lucky when she got an interview to work with them.

At that age they're still kids, she said, but can do a lot on their own and can think deeply about issues.

She also loves the community at the school on Opossumtown Pike of about 500 students in prekindergarten through eighth grade.

The administration is supportive, and the staff works together to find solutions for students who might be having problems, Pessagno said.

Pessagno's award was well-deserved, St. John's Assistant Principal William Knotek wrote in an email.

“The kids make it fun. They keep you young.”

JULIE PESSAGNO,
Teacher

(Continued from B1)

"One of the most noteworthy characteristics about Julie is that she comes to school every day determined to be a better teacher for her students," Knotek wrote. "She truly is a blessing to this school community."

Pessagno said the most important part of teaching is to let students know you care about them.

"Every day is a good day," she said. "The kids make it fun. They keep you young."

Follow Ryan Marshall on Twitter:
@RMarshallFNP.

(See CLASS B2)

A photograph of three students in a science classroom. Two girls in the foreground are looking through microscopes, while a boy in the background is also using a microscope. They are all wearing white lab coats. The image is part of a larger layout with a purple banner at the top and a white box containing text on the left.

CIVIC PRIDE SCHOOL LISTINGS

EDUCATION A PRIORITY FOR FREDERICK COMMUNITY

Education in Frederick County is fostered by many hands, whether it's the Maryland Ensemble Theatre directing elementary students in a play, parents volunteering in school libraries shelving books or helping students who are having trouble with reading.

Opportunities are available for those seeking to learn English as a second language or adults who are unable to read.

Options to continue an education after high school is also available here with three colleges and universities within our boundaries and satellite campuses from outside institutions.

St. John Regional Catholic School

FREDERICK COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

191 S. East St., Frederick
Dr. Theresa R. Alban, superintendent
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Courtesy photo

Rosanna Rensberger, a language arts and foreign language teacher at St. John Regional Catholic School, recently attended a conference in China to discuss science, technology, math, engineering and literacy.

Teacher visits China to discuss literacy through the disciplines

By JEREMY BAUER-WOLF
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Many can recall their first attempts at public speaking — the hand-sweating, nerve-racking presentations. Now, imagine you're Rosanna Rensberger, who had to do the same thing in front of educational leaders from across the globe, in a country completely foreign to her.

The St. John Regional Catholic School language arts and foreign language teacher attended a conference this month in the Hebei province of China, a few hours south of Beijing, to talk science, technology, mathematics and engineering and literacy.

The conference, sponsored by a foreign-language school called the Shijiazhuang Foreign Language Education School, brings together teaching representatives from around the world for five days to discuss how advances in education

After Chung was invited to the conference, she was asked to bring along more American contacts.

She picked Rensberger.

In a whirlwind of packing and seeking approval of an expedited visa, Rensberger prepped for her more-than-15-hour flight. The conference organizers paid for nearly all her expenses.

Slice of Life

The focus of Rensberger's presentation was literacy instruction and how the inclusion of other disciplines — mathematics and sciences — can enhance a student's understanding of reading and writing. This ability to mesh

research and help more.

The students studied hurricanes and how they are formed, and scoured the news for details on the damage from Hurricane Sandy and its impact, she said. A parent who worked for the Federal Emergency Management Agency came in to speak about his job, evacuation routes and where rescue efforts needed to be concentrated.

The second-grade language arts class watched a speech by President Barack Obama about service members, and made a list of everyone who might have helped during the clean-up.

This research eventually became an informative picture book, Rensberger said, which was submitted to a national contest sponsored by the Scholastic Corporation — the book won an honorable mention.

"That's interdisciplinary work in action," she said.

Not only did Rensberger present, but she also sat in on other