

# Catch-Up with the Council

A publication of the Chester County Advisory Council for Elementary Education

February 2024 edition

## Celebrating Catholic Schools Week January 28 – February 3, 2024



Assumption BVM School holds a *Saints Wax Museum*



Stocking their local food pantries are important service activities for Holy Family, Saints Peter and Paul, and St. Patrick Schools.



"Celebrating Our Community" day at Saints Simon and Jude School had firefighters, EMTs, and police officers attending Morning Assembly for a special blessing.



Catholic Schools  
United in Faith and Community



To create their Luminary Prayer Walk, students at Pope John Paul II filled over 300 bags with thank you notes, rosaries and goodies for nursing homes and EMS/Police stations.



St. Agnes 4th grade students practice public-speaking at their opening Mass



Peacemakers at St. Elizabeth School receive their awards at a Catholic Schools Week closing Mass.



Young and older students connect with their community by sending Valentines.

Assumption Academy sends to local assisted-living centers; St. Agnes to nursing homes and Camilla Hall ; St. Elizabeth to the Sisters of St. Joseph, Flourtown.



Finalists from Saints Peter and Paul's *Religion Bee* are shown here with their Pastor, Principal and teachers.

## Saints Philip and James named Blue Ribbon School



Congratulations to Saints Philip and James School (SSPJ) for being named a National Blue Ribbon School in 2023. The National Blue Ribbon Schools (NBRS) Program is one of the U.S. Department of Education's longest-running recognition programs. NBRS recognizes outstanding public and non-public elementary, middle, and high schools based on their overall high academic achievement or success in closing the achievement gap among diverse groups of students. Since its inception in 1982, the goals of the program are



to shine a spotlight on the best schools in the United States and to share best practices of outstanding schools across the country. SSPJ first received the Blue Ribbon Award in 1989 and again this school year 2023. In addition, the Office of Catholic Education has recognized SSPJ as a School of "Distinguished Instruction" in 2019, 2021, and 2022 based on their Terra Nova test scores. This acknowledgement has promoted high achievement among the students and challenges teachers to maintain high standards of instruction within their classrooms. The Preschool program has been voted the Best Preschool in Chester County by the readers of the Daily Local for three consecutive years. These awards have attracted new families to enroll their children.



The Blue Ribbon Schools designation was followed by another award, this time for *Principal Sister Teresa Ballisty, IHM*, who received the Terrel H. Bell Award. The U.S. Department of Education presents the Bell Award to the principals of National Blue Ribbon Schools for their outstanding work and the vital role they play in guiding their students and schools to excellence, frequently under challenging circumstances.

Sister Teresa Ballisty arrived at Saints Philip and James School in 2017, at a time when the school needed supportive leadership to address a variety of challenges. Enrollment had declined, school facilities needed upgrades, and the school's sense of culture and community needed a boost. Sister Teresa initiated a Board of Limited Jurisdiction with the support of the pastor and the Office of Catholic Education. Taking a collaborative approach, Principal Ballisty quickly involved the newly formed Board with teachers, parents, and other partners in developing a Strategic Five-Year Plan to improve multiple aspects of the school, including facilities, finances, and academic support.



The outcomes of her leadership included retention growth from 70% to 90%, and overall enrollment increasing by 20% during her tenure as principal. Her leadership has been instrumental in reshaping SSPJ into an institution that excels academically, nurtures a positive community, and actively involves its members.

## Saints Philip and James School Principal Wins National Award !

## Council Member Spotlight

The Council has been well served by the guidance and educational experience and perspective of member **Dr. Laura Erhard Fiorenza**.

Dr. Fiorenza is an Associate Professor in the Early and Middle Grades Education Department at West Chester University. She has served on the Chester County Advisory Council for Catholic Elementary Education for six years. Her strong commitment to education, particularly Catholic Education, has been evident through her early years of teaching at Mother of Divine Providence School and her service through the Chester County Intermediate Unit as a guidance counselor for the former Coatesville Area Catholic Elementary School for 5th-8th grades.



Dr. Fiorenza is actively engaged in the field of education as she prepares future educators to skillfully facilitate the academic growth and development of the next generation. Each semester she supervises students in the field as they hone their pre-service teaching skills. She is the chapter advisor for the international education honor society Kappa Delta Pi, and she coordinates an annual professional development conference each spring for pre-service and in-service educators.

Additionally, Dr. Fiorenza acts as the coordinator of the Post Baccalaureate Early and Middle Grades Teaching Certification Programs at the university. Her academic research interests include school and classroom climates, social-emotional learning, school bullying, and finding ways of engaging students to increase student motivation and academic commitment.

She is a published author who has presented her research regionally and nationally. Dr. Fiorenza believes in the potential of all students to be successful and in the importance of building relationships with students to ensure a caring, supportive, and nurturing environment.

Thank you, Laura, for your thoughtful counsel during your tenure with the Advisory Council.

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Dr. Angela Rufo

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### Third Annual Golf Outing

Tuesday, May 14, 2024

The Union League, Liberty Hill Golf Club

800 Ridge Pike Lafayette Hill, PA

More information to come!  
Questions? Contact the Foundation



Have ideas for our next newsletter?

Contact

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The Council's mission is the promotion of Catholic Education in Chester County by recommending policies, procedures, and plans to foster a close collaboration between parishes and schools.