

Blessings and Challenges For Academies and Schools

▲ by Brother Ralph J. Darmento, F.S.C.

In a couple of weeks, the most wonderful time of the year commences, to quote a recent Staples commercial heralding the start of the academic year. What better time to assess the accomplishments of the previous academic year and consider the challenges of the future?

Catholic academies and schools in the diocese graduated a total of 2,332 students this year. These young people are headed to secondary schools across the metropolitan area this fall; 69 percent enrolling in Catholic secondary schools within the diocese, and the remainder to Catholic and private schools throughout the city as well as specialized, magnet, charter and public schools.

The Class of 2018 earned more than



Brother Ralph

\$4.3 million in scholarships and their education has prepared them to enroll in rigorous honors programs, advanced placement courses and the International Baccalaureate program to name just a few. Students who sat for the Regents examination in algebra and/or living environment and earned the required grade now move onto other courses.

Graduates have received recognition and commendation from numerous agencies, schools and sponsors of academic competitions: the NYC STEM Expo, Art and Poetry Contest of the NYC Environmental Protection Agency (Water Resources), Athletics, Pax Christi, Propagation of the Faith, the Senator Martin Golden Essay Contest. All of these experiences testify to the accomplishments of the students.

During the past year, academy/school students experienced education outside the classroom walls as they journeyed to Broadway, local cinemas, the NYPD and FDNY sites, Shakespeare festival, MOMA,

the National Museum of Mathematics, NY Hall of Science, the United Nations and St. Patrick's Cathedral to name a few.

Of course, to nurture students' faith formation, academies/schools collaborate with their aligned parishes for weekly liturgies, prayer services, sacramental preparation programs and an education in the Catholic faith. Putting faith into action means providing service and care for the elderly, poor and those most in need.

Similarly, the Catholic secondary schools are proud of the accomplishments of their students. Graduates in the Class of 2018, who numbered 2,812, will be attending colleges and universities across the country. There are graduates moving onto US military academies, each of the Ivy League colleges, most of the "Seven Sister Colleges," and the top tier colleges as named by the major ranking organizations. The class has earned a total of over \$560 million in scholarships. Truly the future belongs to these students!

The secondary schools, with their array of coveted partnerships with colleges and universities, have provided an education for these students in the competencies and skills found necessary for success: adaptive thinking, critical thinking and problem solving competencies, communication and collaboration skills, inquiry and technology skills. Of course, and most importantly, students learn moral and eth-

ical decision-making and are grounded in the Catholic faith teaching and practice.

As we look back on the year, we can say it has been good, thanks be to God.

Declining Population

Yet there are challenges that our Catholic academies/schools, on both levels, must face. A recent study by Richard Murnane of Harvard University and Sean Reardon of Stanford University reveals that the market share of students has declined in Catholic schools. Citing demographic shifts, the decline of Catholics living in the northeast, the cost of an education, and the priorities of families facing financial constraints, the researchers present an opportunity to reflect on and address moving forward.

The Diocese of Brooklyn commissioned a comprehensive study of the academies/schools, called Generation in 2016. This study revealed that current parents rate "structure/discipline/respect for others as the most important consideration in school selection;" prospective parents emphasize an "affordable, high quality education." Further conclusions found that "state of the art facilities/equipment/technology and curricular innovation were least likely to be identified with all Catholic academies/schools. Note the dis-

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St. Francis of Assisi Academy

Nurturing Peaceful Leaders for Over 100 Years

St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Academy is located in the Prospect/Lefferts Gardens area of Flatbush. St. Francis has educated children for more than 100 years in the Catholic tradition of excellence. The faith formation program enables students to develop a deeper understanding of the teachings of Jesus. The academy believes that the intellectual, affective, social and physical spheres are woven together in the fabric of the whole person.

The school follows the N.Y.S. curriculum for core subjects (math, ELA, science and social studies) and is committed to including physical education, art and music to enhance the educational program.

The academy participates in the Performing Arts School Residency Program, which teaches film making to fourth graders, play writing and producing to sixth graders, and Shakespeare study and performance to eighth graders. Students' also display their talents at the annual Christmas and Spring shows. Faculty and staff organize and run various afterschool clubs, including dance, basketball, baking, martial arts, and arts and crafts.

Technology is provided and updated to enhance the learning experience. Weekly technology classes are held in a computer room equipped with PCs, and classrooms have interactive whiteboards. Grades four through eight are equipped with one-to-one Chromebooks used in class. Google Education is used on a daily basis.

Students graduate St. Francis equipped with strong study skills, time-management and note-taking techniques that prepare them for high school, college and careers. Graduates who move on to Catholic high schools often receive scholarships.

The school's staff consists of dedicated educators and is blessed with the continual presence of the Sisters of St. Joseph since the school opened in 1909. Dedicated to our patron, St. Francis of Assisi, peace education is integral to the program. Students are instructed to act as peer mediators, classes include a focus on conflict resolution and non-violent behavior.

Tuition assistance is available through programs sponsored by the Diocese of Brooklyn and the St. Francis of Assisi Alumni Scholarship Program.



**St. Francis of Assisi
Catholic Academy**

**400 Lincoln Road
Brooklyn, NY 11225**



**FREE Pre-K for ALL
Kindergarten through Grade 8
For Excellence in Education
For a Faith Based Education
For Creative Arts, Music and Drama
For 21st Century Technology Education**

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