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FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

Dioceses use data to assess the future of schools

By Vernell Bowen
Superintendent of Schools

Over the past three years of attending the Catholic conference for superintendents, there seems to have been more emphasis in presentations on assessing the viability of Catholic schools.



Vernell Bowen

Dioceses seemed to be moving toward more data-driven information and developing matrices to determine the ingredients for viability.

Capturing data in the following eight key areas seems to help decision making about strategic planning for schools: enrollment trends, administrative costs, revenue versus expenditure, affordability, tuition, instructional cost, facility costs and liquidity.

The Office of Catholic Schools in our diocese has been collecting most of this data for the past 10 years. This data has helped my office determine which schools might be moving into the crisis mode for continued operation. When a snapshot of all the data is evaluated, then my office is able to provide some suggestions on interventions the school might be able to address before the school has reached a point of no return and closure.

One of the new terms I learned this year from a presentation on ingredients for financially successful systems is "liquidity." Liquidity measures sustainability of the parish/school relationship at the current financial position. It takes into account the parish indebtedness, subsidy and the cost of operation of the school. The boards and committees of

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Tech at work in Catholic classrooms

More schools bringing in iPads, other tablets to enhance learning

By Dwain Hebda
Associate Editor

CONWAY — Having been brought in from recess early just so a visitor can take some photos of the new classroom iPads, St. Joseph School first-grader Vincent Pham feels entitled to an explanation.

"I'm writing a story for the newspaper," the visitor said. Vincent furrowed his brow.

"What's a newspaper?" the Conway student asked.

The march of technology into diocesan classrooms is definitely well under way. Computer labs are a fixture in Catholic schools, and some have been able to transition to laptops for teachers. Now, a growing number of schools are going even further by introducing wireless computing for teachers and students. It's not yet paperless, but it is changing the way classrooms operate.

"Students are still using textbooks but instead of always using paper and pencil on projects, now they're able to create things on the Internet or on the computer and share it with their teachers," said Lindsey Thompson, fifth-grade teacher and a member of the



First-graders Avery Neal (left) and Cherokee Jones work on iPads during reading class under the watchful eye of their teacher, Courtney Pope. The children are students at St. Joseph School in Conway.

school's technology steering committee. "They can even go home and show their parents."

According to an informal survey of the diocese's 28 schools, nine reported they were now using iPads or tablets with their students.

St. Joseph School in Conway rolled out arguably the most ambi-

itious program in the diocese this year. The school invested in three "carts" or sets of wireless hardware, shared among several classrooms. Elementary students use 28 iPads, while middle schoolers and high school students use 68 Chromebooks, a laptop device that saves work to the cloud instead of a hard drive. Each teacher was also given

their choice of either device.

In addition to the hardware, St. Joseph invested in upping its wireless digital capacity last spring to handle the extra traffic. And, it implemented a bring-your-own-device (BYOD) policy allowing students the option to work off their

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Schools update religion curriculum, teacher prep

The religion curriculum for the Diocese of Little Rock's Catholic elementary schools was updated this fall.

A 15-person committee of principals and teachers met with associate superintendent Theresa Hall this spring to review the curriculum and prayers taught in pre-kindergarten to eighth grade. It was the first time since 1996 that the curriculum has been revised.

"They are just guidelines," Hall said.

Hall said the curriculum only needed to be updated slightly, changing the wording in some places and reviewing in what grades certain prayers are taught.

"There were some things that were repeated," she said.

The diocese also offers a list of textbooks, approved by the U.S.

"Anybody who teaches in a Catholic school is a religion teacher. They might not be teaching the subject matter, but they are teaching the Catholic faith."

Theresa Hall, associate superintendent of Catholic schools

Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Because high school religion curriculum is overseen by the USCCB, the diocesan curriculum only extends through eighth grade.

The diocese has already revised its language arts and math curriculums and will be updating its science curriculum in 2014.

Along with updating the religion curriculum, the committee looked at faith formation continuing education for all classroom teachers, but especially for those who

teach religion. In some elementary schools the classroom teacher teaches about the faith, while in other schools a religion teacher leads the lessons, Hall said.

A list of websites, webinars and classes was compiled and given to the principals in August. The principals are required to ensure that those teaching religion participate in faith formation throughout the year and provide a written reflection on what they learned. Some of the locally recommended resources include the Little Rock

Theology Institute, Bible Institute and RCIA sessions in their parish.

"You want to make sure they are getting what the Church teachings are," Hall said of the students.

Teachers are encouraged to participate in a variety of educational opportunities where they learn about all areas of the faith, such as morality, liturgy, history and Scripture.

All teachers must achieve a basic certification within two years and continue to attend classes in successive years to maintain their certification.

Hall said faith formation is important for all teachers.

"Anybody who teaches in a Catholic school is a religion teacher," she said. "They might not be teaching the subject matter, but they are teaching the Catholic faith."

Viability

Continued from page 7

the parishes and schools need to realize that these two entities do not stand alone. Therefore, data assessment and planning should occur together.

Part of the equation for financially successful schools is to have annual, consistent feedback to keep the school finance discussion alive in the parish and school. The data needs to be used for confirmation of the need for specific intervention areas as well as highlighting future needs based on trends.

In order to have any successful organization, one must know its strengths and weaknesses. These are things that you need to know and your funders will also want to know.

How are you doing operationally? Is your building full? Are your revenues sustainable for the future? Is your cost structure efficient? Is your administrative and instructional staff "sized right"? Is your physical plant efficient?

School boards, pastors, administrators and parish finance councils should use data to assist them with assessing viability and developing strategic plans for their school. The Office of Catholic Schools will continue to collect data in the annual reports that assist in future planning.

Technology

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own tablet, laptop or smartphone.

"That's the beautiful thing about Google and the whole Google Drive concept," said Matt Tucker, elementary principal. "You don't have to have a Chromebook to access your account. You can have any desktop, any laptop, as long as you have your account. So, if a kid said they forgot their project, the teacher can pull it up on their laptop and print it."

A number of other Catholic schools are taking similar steps. In Hot Springs, St. John School's teachers received iPad Minis in May, which sync with 40 iPads the school bought for student use, as well as other classroom technology such as projectors.

Immaculate Conception School in North Little Rock bought 40 iPads for faculty and has an ambitious long-range goal of providing individual devices for every student, a goal shared by Christ the King School in Fort Smith. There, the administration is raising money now to buy 40 iPads for sixth-graders this December.

St. Boniface School in Fort Smith recently added 17 tablets for use by kindergarten through second grade and doubled the number for the upper grades to 16. Nearby Trinity Junior High School's teachers use laptops, ac-



Dwain Hebda

Fifth-graders at St. Joseph School take in a geography lesson using their new Google Chromebooks. This is the first year for an ambitious new K-12 technology rollout at the Conway parochial school.

centuated by a new BYOD policy, which allows students to use their own devices in the classroom.

At Subiaco Academy eighth-graders in August were given iPad Minis loaded with four of their textbooks as part of its pilot project. A school-wide plan is expected for 2014.

Sacred Heart School in Morrilton now has 24 Microsoft Surface tablets. Technically, these devices are for kindergarten through sixth grade but are available to the whole school to check out and use. Even tiny St. Mary School in Paragould has gotten in on the act, with 10 iPads and a printer for

fifth- and sixth-graders.

The challenges of stepping into this technology begin with funding — schools have invested from \$5,500 in Paragould to around \$60,000 at Conway. Technology budgets generally don't extend that far, so private donations and school fundraisers for new computers are the norm.

"Technology is not cheap," said Kathleen Benites, media specialist at Immaculate Conception in North Little Rock. "These aren't toys; they have to be viewed as augmenting the educational process."

Benites said other details from who will configure and maintain

the devices to staff training also cannot be overlooked. As the one tasked with maintaining the equipment and updating apps, she's attended workshops in her area of specialty to stay current. Several other schools have either hosted staff technology training or sent their teachers to conferences to learn how to maximize the devices.

This learning is reinforced through such things as Trinity Junior High's "Technology Thursday," which sets aside time for teachers to develop their digital lesson plans. St. Joseph School in Conway gives teachers the opportunity to attend in-house technology meetings to share best practices and collectively problem-solve.

While this all helps, teachers and administrators universally agree that the most help in mastering the devices or discovering new ways to use content comes from the students themselves.

"The kids are very good about saying, 'Oh, you can do this and you can do this,'" said Teresa McKay, Paragould teacher. "They're very comfortable with the technology while this is my first time dealing with it. It's a great to see that level of engagement and for them to teach each other and me. But I still have to tell them to keep it simple; they're supposed to keep up with me not the other way around."

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Male teachers more rare in Catholic elementary classes

Less than 8 percent of teachers in pre-K to eighth grade are men, making the shortage more dire in Arkansas

By **Dwain Hebda**
Associate Editor

Elementary classrooms are lacking male teachers and nowhere is that more pronounced than in Arkansas' Catholic schools. Over the past decade, the percentage of lay male teachers in the diocese never exceeded 7.9 percent and hit a low of 6.4 percent.

The situation is the extreme example of what is a national shortage of male teachers, particularly among primary grades. According to National Education Association statistics, less than 25 percent of all elementary and middle school teachers in 2006 were men; by 2011, the number had dropped to 18.3 percent, according to U.S. Bureau of Labor.

The National Catholic Education Association reported in 2012 percentage of men in the classroom roughly 5 percent lower than the national average.

Pay and image barriers

Overall, Arkansas has ranked at or near the bottom with just over 16 percent male teachers in 2008 and Catholic schools are doing nothing to reverse that trend. With the 2013-2014 seeing a relatively high percentage of male teachers at 7.7 percent, roughly one-third of the diocese's 25 elementary and junior high schools don't have at least one male on faculty and only 10 schools had more than one.

While experts attribute the problem to low pay and lack of mentors, Marcia Brucks, principal at Immaculate Conception School

in North Little Rock, said image problems keep many male educators out of the primary school ranks.

"I think it's a societal thing," she said. "Teaching elementary school isn't considered a 'manly' profession. In high school, you can get into coaching. In fact if we paid coaches in middle school, we'd probably see more men teaching at that level. But as it is, it's not considered cool."

Teaching as a vocation

John Taylor, who's taught 18 years of fourth-, fifth and sixth-graders at Sacred Heart School in Morrilton, can relate. He started out to be a high school teacher, changing his major after a college counselor told him the job market would be better if he did. While it proved sage advice, economic factors haven't made it easy to be in this field.

"When it comes to men and their careers, money and economics is a big factor," he said. "It's a sacrifice to be an educator, even in the public school system. Me, I consider myself a missionary. I really look at myself as spreading the faith and delivering a good Catholic education, meaning incorporating the faith into everything I do. But we've still had to make sacrifices for me to do what I love to do."

Brucks, whose four male staffers place her school in the upper echelon of gender diversity in the diocese, said she didn't actively recruit men when female teachers left. It was more a matter of right place-right time, she said.

Proportions low but steady

Over the past 10 years the proportion of male elementary and middle school teachers in Catholic schools in Arkansas has hovered in the range of 6.4 percent to 7.9 percent, far below the Arkansas and national averages. According to the National Catholic Education Association, nationally Catholic elementary schools employed 12 percent male teachers in 2012-2013.

2004: 35 men, 6.4 percent	2009: 38 men, 7.7 percent
2005: 42 men, 7.9 percent	2010: 39 men, 7.4 percent
2006: 36 men, 7.5 percent	2011: 41 men, 7.8 percent
2007: 34 men, 6.9 percent	2012: 37 men, 7.5 percent
2008: 35 men, 7.1 percent	2013: 38 men, 7.7 percent

Environment a plus

Zach Edwards of Trinity Junior High School in Fort Smith is quick to point out that like many of his male peers at the University of Arkansas, he didn't plan on teaching at the elementary level, but the Trinity job was the only position available.

"In my profession, men are actually in the majority, except at the elementary level," said Edwards, 29, in his fifth year.

However, once men dip their toe into a parochial system, the environment, the relative lack of disciplinary problems and the ability to spread one's faith are appealing. They also find reaching kids at an age when they are still excited about learning is rewarding.

"Elementary music is primarily geared toward vocal range, so when you start talking about instrumental music you're usually

starting from scratch," he said. "I enjoy bringing out the creative side of seventh-graders and building them through ninth grade. It's rewarding to see them develop over several years."

Patton breaks the mold

Perhaps no male teacher in the state experiences the joy of discovery more fully than Travis Patton, now in his third year in charge of Our Lady of Fatima Church's preschool in Benton. As less than 2 percent of preschool and kindergarten educators are men, Patton is the rarest of the rare.

"There was an adjustment period at first," he said of parents' reaction. "I'm in the minority in this job for sure. But it didn't take long."

Most parents now say they feel safer knowing there's a male in the building. Disciplinary issues are few and his previous role in the

parish's youth ministry makes him an evangelizer of sorts for Catholic education.

Moreover, he experiences what educational experts cite as the biggest reason for men in the classroom, even at his students' tender ages of 12 months to 4 years.

"The students who respond to me best are the ones who don't have a male role model at home," he said.

Role models valuable

On that point, studies are mixed as to the educational payoff of boys learning from male teachers. However, the social aspect of having a consistent, positive male role model is something most agree is a valuable asset in developing boys' self-confidence, ability to accept responsibility and overall emotional and social development. What's more, this isn't a new concept — researchers have reached this conclusion in studies dating back at least to the early 1970s.

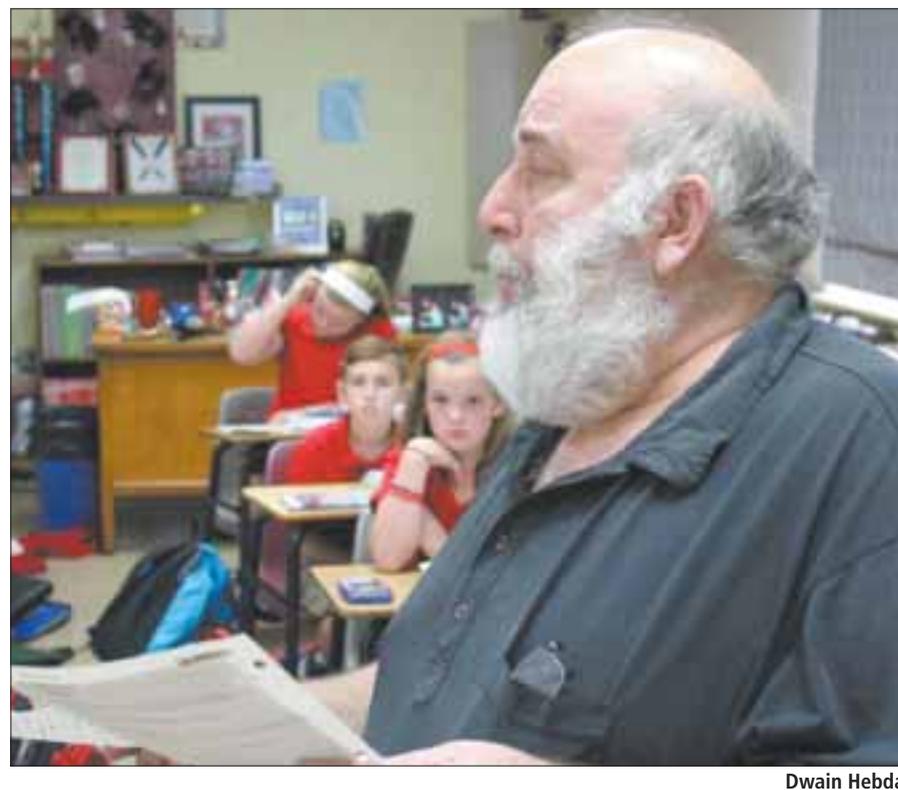
"There are benefits in middle school especially, in being able to have those conversations with boys," said Mark Wilhelm, assistant principal and former fifth-sixth- and seventh-grade reading teacher at St. Joseph School in Fayetteville. "I've had two conversations just recently about what it means to be a man because, due to their situations at home, they don't hear that."

"It's not the norm, but there are students who have very different ideas of what manhood means and they need someone to demonstrate how to treat females, how to carry yourself, what's appropriate and what's not. At this age, they try to be so macho. It's often the biggest show-off who needs to hear it."



Dwain Hebda

Travis Patton reads to a classroom of 3-year-olds at Our Lady of Fatima Church's preschool in Benton. Less than 2 percent of preschool and kindergarten teachers nationwide are men, making Patton a rarity.



Dwain Hebda

John Taylor, an 18-year veteran of the elementary classroom, hands out math quizzes to his fifth-grade students at Sacred Heart School in Morrilton. Less than 8 percent of diocesan elementary teachers are men.

Davidson chalks up 42 years of ABCs, 123s at St. Theresa

By Dwain Hebda
Associate Editor

Not too many things predate Judy Davidson at St. Theresa School in Little Rock. When you've spent the entirety of your 42 years in teaching at a school founded just 54 years ago, there's not much you haven't seen firsthand.

"When I first started teaching kindergarten, we just taught the letters and the sounds," she said. "Now, I'm teaching reading and addition and subtraction. It's almost like kindergarten has come down to being first grade."

"When I first started teaching, of course, there was paddling. We don't paddle anymore, so I guess that's a big change, but I didn't like paddling anyway, so that was good."

Davidson, 63, has watched the times, faces and trends change in ways both satisfying and challenging. She has seen four additions to the school and the construction of the parish center. She even pre-dates the current church building by a few months. Through it all, she finds a refreshing constant in her students.

"I just enjoy them," she said of the kindergartners, the class with which she has spent the bulk of her career. "They're sweet; they just



Dwain Hebda

Judy Davidson greets kindergartners at St. Theresa School in Little Rock. She has been on staff here for all of her 42 years in teaching.

want to learn so much and when they learn something new they get really excited about it."

Davidson grew up in St. Edward Parish in Little Rock. The second of four kids, she was volunteering at Catholic day cares during the summer by the time she was in middle school. She also candy-stripped at UAMS' nursery while a student at

"The one thing that has not changed in the Catholic schools is just how wonderful the kids are."

Judy Davidson

Mount St. Mary Academy; babysitting was her pocket money.

She graduated from the University of Central Arkansas in 1971 and welcomed her first class of St. Theresa sixth-graders that fall. One student from those first three years was Joyce Gangluff (now Joyce Hood), a student who would later figure into a landmark in Davidson's career.

Three years in, Davidson switched to second grade and for the next decade led legions of young Catholics through their academic steps as well as the sacraments of reconciliation and first Communion. St. Theresa was not only a workplace but her new home parish along with her husband Leonard, now a retired state auditor, and their two children, both of whom spent second grade in mom's classroom.

Davidson helped get the school's kindergarten program started and found teaching the littlest of the school's students agreed with her, so after one year teaching pre-K she settled in as kindergarten teacher and never looked back. Among her students during this

period was Joyce Hood's daughter, Kristy (now Kristy Dunn), notable as one of many second-generation students to pass through Davidson's classroom.

"This was the first year out of the house and away from my mother," Dunn said. "I was very nervous. One of my clearest memories was when (Davidson) dismissed us for recess, I wasn't sure it was OK to go out and play and I followed her all the way to the school office."

Davidson would relinquish her kindergarten classroom only once, a three-year stint as interim principal. She said it was a matter of doing what needed to be done, not something to which she had previously — nor since — aspired.

"It was all right being an administrator, but my love was the kids," she said. "I missed the kids, Teaching is a job and being up there as an administrator is a whole completely different job."

But it was during this time that she became re-acquainted with Kristy Dunn, interviewing and ultimately hiring her following Dunn's graduation from Lyon College in 2004.

"That felt really odd, because Father John Connell was also in that interview," recalls Dunn, who teaches seventh grade. "Here I was interviewing with the two people who had played such a role in my life as a child."

In the years since, Davidson returned to kindergarten where she continues to be inspired by the eagerness of the young minds and challenged by the changing times.

"I think that the big challenge is our Hispanic families. It's hard sometimes to communicate because many don't speak English," she said. "But the kids do well, they learn it fast and they pick it up. My other Hispanic kids help out a whole lot; one of my little boys translates for me."

Dunn, once a student and now a peer, said her career has been made easier for having Davidson to consult. In return, Dunn solidified a place of distinction a couple of years ago when she walked her daughter Andi into kindergarten, making her Davidson's first third-generation student. Not that there's anything in the immediate future to suggest she will be the last.

"The future holds that eventually I will retire," Davidson said, playing coy as to when. "The one thing that has not changed in the Catholic schools is just how wonderful the kids are."

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Juniors and seniors at St. Joseph High School in Conway consider their college options during a college fair Oct. 17.

After high school

Representatives from 11 area colleges and the U.S. Army made presentations Oct. 17 for 11th and 12th grade students who are considering their college options at St. Joseph School in Conway. Susan Dewey, the admissions supervisor for the University of Arkansas Community College at Morrilton, gave tips on how to successfully apply for college admission and scholarships. Students and parents were able to visit with college representatives afterward.

Rivalry

The first Sacred Heart vs. St. Joseph alumni fundraiser basketball game will be held at St. Joseph School in Conway at 1 p.m., Sunday, Nov. 17. Next year's games will be played at Sacred Heart School in Morrilton. All gate and T-shirt proceeds will be split equally between the two schools. The fundraiser will include four games: women 35 and under, women over 35, men 35 and under, and men over 35. Each game will consist of two 15-minute halves with a running clock. The women over 35 will play 6 on 6 or half court rules. Admission will be \$3 for adults and \$2 for children.

United with the rosary

Students from Christ the King School, Immaculate Conception, St. Boniface and Trinity Junior High in Fort Smith and the Subiaco Jazz Ensemble displayed their dedication to the rosary at the Fort Smith Convention Center Friday, Oct. 18 by praying for unity and peace. Students joined children all over the world in the One Million Children Praying the Rosary Program. The elementary choirs showed their unity by performing the song "I Want to See Jesus" as one children's choir.

The rosary was prayed in Eng-



Rachel Rodemann, Times Record
Isabelle Low, Tylin Nguyen, Alexas Gonzales and Leah Nguyen of Christ the King School's choir sing "I Want to See Jesus" Oct. 18 in Fort Smith.

lish and Spanish and they also prayed a special prayer as the Year of Faith is coming to a close. Once the rosary service concluded the students were treated to a performance by the Subiaco Jazz Ensemble, directed by Deacon Roy Goetz. Each year the program begins in a quiet and meditative atmosphere and ends with the children laughing, singing and dancing together as one unified Catholic family.

Grandparents visit

The 19th annual Grandparents' Day was celebrated at Subiaco Academy Sept. 16 with 180 grandparents coming from Alabama, Arkansas, Kansas, Louisiana, Michigan, Missouri, Oklahoma, Tennessee and Texas. Grandparents posed for photos with their grandsons before joining students and faculty for the 10:30 a.m. Mass. Celebrant Father Elijah Owens, OSB, reminded students to express their love for grandparents in person and in writing. Upperclassmen lunched with grandparents in the guest dining room while younger students ate in the student dining room. Campus tours and visits with teachers followed lunch; then all enjoyed a 1 p.m. performance by the music department.

Alumnus award

Nominations are now being accepted for this year's Alumnus and Honorary Alumnus of the Year awards at Sacred Heart School in Morrilton. Recipients for both awards will be recognized during the homecoming celebration Jan. 18. All alumni are invited to attend the homecoming ceremony and will receive a special gift, recognition during the event and a complimentary concession item.

Nominees for Alumnus of the Year must be a Sacred Heart graduate. The person will be recognized for their contributions to the school, their community, state or society or outstanding achievement in their personal and/or professional endeavors.

Nominees for Honorary Alumnus of the Year may include anyone who has giving significantly to the school over the years and clearly exemplify a commitment to Catholic education at Sacred Heart. Nominations must be received by Dec. 31. Send nominations to to akoonce@sacred



Grandsons attending Subiaco Academy have lunch with their grandparents Sept. 16 for Grandparents' Day.

GROSS!



Teacher Gayle McLemore captures the curiosity of her St. Michael School science class in West Memphis by growing bacteria in petri dishes. The students are waiting to see what grows from the swabs taken from their fingers, noses, toes and arm pits.

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Essay winner

Sierra Voglewede, a sixth-grader at St. John School in Hot Springs, recently won a statewide essay contest sponsored by the Catholic Daughters of the Americas. Voglewede, a student in Donna Kent's reading and writing class, won at the local level and advanced to the state competition, where she captured first place with her essay "How My Life is a Reflection of Good." Students were required to write about themselves using a maximum of 400 words in the essay, which was graded for content and grammar. She received a plaque and check from the CDA.

Life science

St. Joseph Middle School in Conway has acquired 14 new handheld microscopes for use in science classes. The microscopes



Sierra Voglewede stands with her teacher Donna Kent (left) and Stephanie Nehus (right) of the Catholic Daughters of the Americas.

in North Little Rock celebrated the monarch butterfly migration to Mexico Oct. 11. Students donned decorative wings and antennae and "migrated to Mexico" where a celebratory fiesta of homemade Mexican chocolate and pastries awaited. Spanish classes are taught by Diana Hurtado.

Fundraiser

Kim Wine's third-grade class at Immaculate Conception School in North Little Rock had a howling good time when Santo Coyote supplied lunch for being the class to raise the most money for Arkansas Children's Hospital. The third-graders raised \$243.22.

Honoring veterans

Second-graders at Immaculate Conception School in Fort Smith will host their 14th Annual Veterans Day Program on Monday, Nov. 11. The program will consist of prayers, songs and a guest speaker sharing the meaning of Veterans Day. Each second grader interviewed a family member or family friend who is a veteran and will share a little information about that person.

At Immaculate Conception School in North Little Rock the Veterans Day Celebration will be held at 1:30 p.m., Monday, Nov. 11. Students will present song, dance and spoken word in an uplifting celebration of local military veterans. There will be a guest speaker and all military branches will be represented.

Abbey history

According to Subiaco Academy dean of men and Pig Roast chairman Greg Timmerman, the ninth annual Pig Roast Oct. 19 was a big success. Numerous parents provided food and joined the entire student body for the event. The event began with Mass under the tent; Father Hugh Assenmacher, OSB, noted in his homily aspects of the history of the abbey and the annual Pig Roast is again taking place on the original site of Subiaco Abbey. Mass was followed by various competitions: pie eating, egg toss and drunk bat spin.

were obtained through a St. Joseph School Endowment Paul and Mary Ann Tipton K-6 Classroom Grant.

"They're much more powerful than the old ones we had," teacher Melanie Kordsmeier said. "Those only magnified 30 times, but these go up to 100 times magnification."

The microscopes will primarily be used outside when the children are studying trees, plants, grass or insects.

"The kids think they're the coolest things," Kordsmeier said.

Butterfly migration

The second-grade Spanish class at Immaculate Conception School



Fourth-grade students at St. Joseph Middle School in Conway use new handheld microscopes to study tree bark. A St. Joseph School Endowment Paul and Mary Ann Tipton K-6 Classroom Grant was used to buy the microscopes.