

DIOCESE OF METUCHEN

PRESS RELEASE

Two Catholic high schools in Central Jersey receive \$700,000 donation to bolster STEM programs

CENTRAL JERSEY – February 3, 2017 – The Diocese of Metuchen announced today that it has received a \$700,000 private donation, which will be used to expand the existing STEM programs at Bishop George Ahr High School, Edison, and Immaculata High School, Somerville. It is one of the largest gifts from a single benefactor that any of the schools in the diocese have received.

STEM is the commonly known acronym used for a cross-curricular program focused on the areas of science, technology, engineering and mathematics. The goal of academic STEM programs is to better prepare current elementary and secondary school students so that, following high school graduation, they may confidently go on to pursue degrees in these fields.

“In the Diocese of Metuchen, we are committed to keeping our schools technologically relevant and well-maintained and, so, making a significant investment to upgrade our STEM curriculum serves as a visible example of our diocese’s commitment to academic excellence,” said Bishop James F. Checchio, who leads the Diocese of Metuchen.

“Our private benefactor knows that students who enroll in our Catholic schools are the future of our Church and, ultimately, the leaders of our country; this generous gift truly comes from the heart and with the knowledge that it will positively impact our students and graduates for years to come,” the bishop said.

The donation will be used to bolster the existing STEM curriculum in both diocesan high schools, allowing each to purchase equipment, expand their engineering and robotics programs, and provide ongoing professional development for teachers.

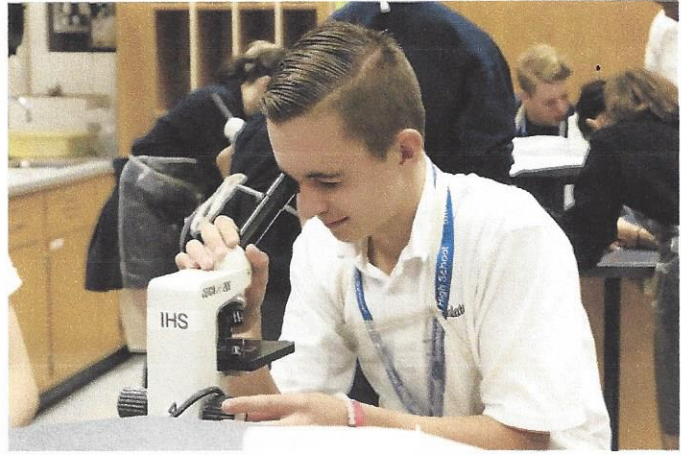
Upon learning the news, Bishop Ahr’s principal Felician Sister Donna Marie Trukowski said, “I am excited and grateful to receive this generous donation, which will allow us to focus on creating a robust environment for our STEM program. One of our first priorities will be to construct a ‘Makerspace,’ a community room that will provide students with high-tech resources to collaborate in areas such as robotics and engineering.”



The veteran principal noted that substantial improvements were made in the school over the summer – most notably, the installation of a new roof and central air conditioning system – and that this gift would assist the school’s efforts to further provide a 21st century learning environment for students. “Our capital improvements will be complemented by our ongoing efforts to enhance our STEM curriculum, with vibrant course additions that include engineering and computer programming, as well as a Robotics Club,” she said.

“Since an estimated 25 percent of our graduates pursue science-related studies in college, providing a challenging STEM curriculum offers exceptional opportunities for our students. In addition, an outstanding STEM program benefits all students by creating an environment of dynamic analytical thinking that will prove invaluable in college and the working world,” Trukowski said.

Immaculata High School principal Jean Kline said, “We are so very grateful for this extraordinary gift and for the opportunity it brings to expand our STEM program. It is very affirming to know that the benefactors believe so strongly in the value of Catholic education that they are willing to invest in our schools and in our students’ futures. We know that we must be good stewards of this great gift moving forward.”



Kline said the school began its Solar Suitcase project about three years ago, which combines STEM with outreach. Each year, she said, the school purchases kits, valued at \$1,700 each, for students to make portable solar energy suitcases, which provide electricity to those living in remote places in the Philippines that otherwise would not have electricity in their schools. So far they have made 12 and are looking to do more.

With this new funding, Immaculata also will be able to offer a more comprehensive curriculum and more hands-on experience for students in the areas of science, technology, engineering and mathematics. “We’ll purchase equipment, such as digital microscopes and graphic calculating software, and also make sure teachers receive increased professional development, so they can employ the latest methods of STEM education in the classrooms,” the principal said.

Looking at the past and the future, Kline said, “We have many success stories here at Immaculata. Our recent graduates have gone on to pursue fields in aerospace, electrical and environmental engineering, to name a few. We believe this donation will enable us to send forth more young men and women into STEM-based fields, opening the door to many wonderful educational and career opportunities in their future – and they are the leaders of tomorrow.”

The announcement comes during National Catholic Schools Week, celebrated annually. The 2017 observation falls on Jan. 29 – Feb. 4, and the theme this year is “Catholic Schools: Communities of Faith, Knowledge and Service.”

Catholic schools of the Diocese of Metuchen are nationally accredited and have a proven track record of providing academic excellence in a faith-based setting; and they are open to students of all faiths and backgrounds. There are 24 Catholic elementary schools and four Catholic high schools in the diocese located throughout Middlesex, Somerset, Hunterdon and Warren counties.

In 2016, Catholic high school graduates in the Diocese of Metuchen received \$89.5 million in scholarships and awards and completed thousands of hours of service to their respective school and communities over four years.

Our Catholic schools are now enrolling students for Fall 2017 and hosting Open House events and private tours. For more information on Catholic school education in the Diocese of Metuchen, or to find a Catholic school near you, please visit diometuchen.org/schools. Follow the Diocese of Metuchen on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).