



ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTE FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS



SUMMER 2014

Project TIE: Training Innovative Educators

The School of Education has an extraordinary legacy of partnerships with elementary and secondary schools in the metropolitan area. Project TIE is a partnership established in 2002 by two professors who sought to provide professional development in our Catholic elementary schools, noting that "school/university partnerships offer a means of expanding professional development opportunities for teachers moving beyond the traditional models" (Sandholz, 2002, p. 828). Project TIE is a unique model of a schoolwide K–8 initiative to improve the integration of ELA and mathematics into the school curriculum through sustained professional development. This three-year program has become even more enriched by the inclusion of the Common Core State Standards and incorporates three phases.

During the first year, University instructors conduct a needs assessment with teachers and examine existing test scores to determine academic areas in need of improvement. Then a tailored plan of instruction is designed to facilitate the appropriate lessons. Instructors consult with individual teachers to plan demonstration lessons that will take place in their classrooms. The math team is coordinated by Judith McVarish, Ph.D., and the ELA team is coordinated by Fran Guastello, Ed.D.

Weekly visits to the schools include teacher focus groups to discuss how to incorporate Common Core standards and how to implement instructor demonstrations. Teachers are asked to keep a journal on their reactions to the lessons, including questions they have as they begin to modify and improve their techniques. The teachers are further supported at St. John's University by grade-level professional development sessions in ELA-Math. Melissa Parenti, Ed.D., conducts the teacher focus groups with time to demonstrate, answer more questions, and give the teachers the opportunity to provide feedback about the ELA strategies they are implementing in their classrooms. Dr. McVarish does the same for the math teachers. There are 12 sessions during the course of the academic year.

In the second year, while some demonstrations are held if there are new teachers in the school, the professional development focuses on a team-teaching approach. University instructors remain as mentors as teachers implement the new

educational strategies. In the second year, principals often ask the instructors to conduct workshops or presentations for parents. It is not uncommon for principals to invite the educators to give an all-day session on professional development.

During the third and last year of the program, the teachers take center stage. The instructor's role is to observe the teachers implementing the new strategies and then conference on their success and challenges. Over the three-year period, teachers have the opportunity to expand their repertoire of teaching skills.

The goal of Project TIE is ultimately to improve the teaching and learning process, build the confidence level of teachers as they attempt to implement innovative strategies, and enable students to achieve better grades and test scores because of more effective teaching. The results of research conducted will appear in our next issue.

From 2002 to 2010, Project TIE was funded through No Child Left Behind. Since 2010, the project has been exclusively funded by St. John's University's Institute for Catholic Schools by individuals who believe our schools are the best environment for developing and sustaining Catholic values and academic excellence. To date we have incorporated Project TIE into 34 schools in Archdiocese of New York and the Dioceses of Brooklyn and Rockville Centre. Through the continued generosity of our benefactors, we hope to sustain this valuable University partnership with our Catholic schools.

– Francine Guastello, Ed.D.



“Graduation” Time for CLT (Cohort III)

On Saturday, April 5, 127 teachers and principals from 28 schools in our three neighboring dioceses “graduated” from St. John’s Curriculum Leadership Team Program. This is our third such graduation, with applications for Cohort IV for the 2014–2015 academic year due next month. The best testimony for this program comes from our participants.

I am extremely grateful for the opportunity to be part of the CLT cohort III. What a blessing to collaborate with such an incredible group. I am truly inspired, uplifted, and excited to continue to do what I love, knowing that I have an incredible support system.

– **Mary-Claire Gill**, Teacher
St. Raymond School, Diocese of Rockville Centre

St. Thomas Aquinas School took part in this program during 2013–2014; it is wonderful! The alignment with the Common Core and the Curriculum Leadership teams in our schools is terrific. The sessions were so informative, providing both the information on how to turnkey our faculties and the know-how to do it! I certainly recommend the program to any school that has not yet participated; it is well worth the time!

– **Theresa Sopot**, Principal
St. Thomas Aquinas School, Bronx, NY

We were overwhelmed by the changes brought by the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). St. John’s threw us a life preserver. The CLT provided us with the tools necessary to understand the CCLS and the chance to change our teaching methods. The St. John’s team convinced and inspired us; the beneficiaries are our students.

– **Eileen Harnischfeger**, Principal
Immaculate Conception School, Astoria, NY

As educators at all stages in our careers, we have found ourselves as beginners again. The CLT has provided us the opportunity to collaborate, spark our creativity, and build our confidence in preparing and teaching curriculum that is both rigorous and meaningful.

– **Maria Cuomo**, Principal
Notre Dame Academy, Diocese of Brooklyn

CLT III inspired us to challenge ourselves as educators. Our mission to “unpack” the huge suitcase of Common Core standards was based on love for our students and our commitment to their future as the workforce and Church leadership of the next generation.

– **Michele Mulderrig**, Principal
– **Diane Sorensen**, Teacher-Leader
– **Katie Mitchell**, Teacher-Leader
Holy Angels Regional School, Rockville Centre

As part of this year’s cohort, our team gained a better grasp of the Common Core standards and learned ways to implement strategies that will improve and drive instruction within our entire school community.

– **St. Gregory the Great Team** - Archdiocese of NY

Thank you so very much for the amazing experience you afforded me and my teachers. We learned so much, made new friends, and gathered an amazing amount of information. Each Monday following a session, the buzz in my school was all about SJU! The pride I felt each day sitting with my own teachers was only surpassed by the humble feeling I had as I witnessed teachers and principals from all three dioceses collaborating, sharing stories, concerns, and best practices. The goal that I heard in every conversation was to improve teaching and learning for every student entrusted to our care. In 2014, more than ever, being a Catholic school educator may truly be more of a calling than a career choice! I thank you, your colleagues and the individual Diocesan office staff members for a terrific experience.

– **Maryalice Doherty**, Principal
Holy Family School, Diocese of Rockville Centre

PROGRAM UPDATES

2013–2014 is the first year that the St. Vincent de Paul Board Inservice curriculum has been aligned to the *National Standards for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools*. According to board mentor Karen Signoracci Suero, “We rely on the directors who are seated on the Academy Boards to ascertain that the academies are financially, academically, and strategically viable for the students and families. The knowledge, insights, and practical examples that the St. Vincent de Paul program provide further educate directors on the governance model we are introducing to these dedicated and committed volunteers. Knowing that our curriculum is closely aligned with national standards raises our work to yet another level.”

An ad hoc committee from the Think Tank for Deans of Schools of Education Catholic Colleges/Universities throughout the country has been formed. The members are James Carl, Ph.D., Sacred Heart University; Debra Ponec, Ed.D., Creighton University; Debra Colley, Ph.D., Niagara University; Paul Jojnts, Ph.D., DePaul University; and Jerrold Ross, Ph.D., Larry Boone, Ph.D., and Mary Jane Krebbs, Ph.D., St. John’s University.

On the Horizon

Registration forms for Cohort IV of the Curriculum Leadership Team Program have been disseminated to our three neighboring dioceses.

The St. Vincent de Paul program will deepen its partnership with the Office of Catholic School Support Services in the Diocese of Brooklyn by actively participating in the fall and spring convocations sponsored by the Diocese of Brooklyn.

Starting this September, we will have a new mandatory theology course for all undergraduates in The School of Education: The Spirituality of the Educator.