

June 2023



## SAINT CATHERINE CENTER FOR *Special Needs*

### *Saint Catherine Academy Receives an A+*

Saint Catherine Academy has been granted re-approval as a private special education program from the Connecticut State Department of Education. This status was granted for another 5 years, which is the maximum length allowable. Approval by the Department of Education is an important signal for students and families that a school offers a high-quality education and meets important benchmarks in areas including administration, climate and culture, and curriculum and instruction.

“The designation of approval by the Department of Education is important because it allows Saint Catherine Academy to partner with local school districts in receiving students who need more specialized instruction and small, nurturing environment,” said Helen Burland, Executive Director.

This is the culmination of a yearlong process that began with self-evaluation, review of records and documentation, and school-wide discussions around opportunities for improvement. An extensive application was submitted in March followed by a two-day site visit in May that included class observations, documentation review, and staff interviews. The site visit concluded with a presentation of findings by the visiting team. A highlight of these comments concluded that Saint Catherine Academy is a safe, student-centered school with a strong sense of commitment and pride in the community. They also recognized the warm, welcoming, supportive environment with staff highly committed to the well-being of each student. “We saw evidence of a collaborative, supportive environment with staff consistently committed to the well-being of students,” reported Dori Papa, Education Consultant, Connecticut State Department of Education Bureau of Special Education.

This is a significant achievement and we are proud to have met the rigorous standards. Our mission is to provide high quality education to support all our students, and this accreditation further validates our commitment to excellence. “The successful completion of the recent approval process is truly a testament to the whole Saint Catherine Academy team and the quality of our programs. We are blessed with a thoughtful, caring staff who always puts students first,” says Eric Spencer, Principal of Saint Catherine Academy.

“The process of re-approval strengthens our programs and holds the organization to rigorous standards that we are excited to maintain. As we move forward, we continue to focus on providing the best possible education to support our students. We recognize every child is unique and has their own set of strengths and challenges, and we are committed to helping each student reach their full potential,” said Helen Burland.



### *The Peace Squad: Celebrating a Culture of Peace*

In a world that often seems filled with chaos and turmoil, the need for peace and thoughtfulness has never been more important. A remarkable new club has emerged at Saint Catherine Center, aiming to make a difference in the Center

as well as the wider community. Andrea Lawson, Adult Program Staff Member, recognized the need for worldwide peace and created the "Peace Squad" as a way to recognize each participant's acts of kindness and good work.

The peace squad is based on the belief that peace begins within individuals and radiates outwardly, positively impacting the lives of others. This club provides a platform for Adult Participants to be recognized for actively engaging in promoting peace and kindness. By working together, they strive to create an inclusive and harmonious environment where everyone is valued and supported.

One of the distinctive features of the Peace Squad is the badge its members can proudly wear. After being recognized for a kind deed, Adult Participants are given a badge to wear. This badge displays the words "Peace Squad" with their name and picture, along with the uplifting phrase "Peace be with you." This badge serves as a visual reminder of squad's mission and celebrates the commitment each member has made to promote empathy, thoughtfulness, and hope.

Nicky, is always taking initiative to get tasks done and is consistently looking for ways to help without being asked. He often gathers and passes out all his friend's shoes after bowling to assist in preparing to leave. He also acknowledges every team member and staff each morning upon arrival by greeting everyone in a polite, soft tone "good morning."

Patrick N is also dedicated to spreading peace and joy in all he does. He is an incredible example of kindness when he visits his colleagues in each team room and greets them with a smile and encourages them to have an amazing day. "Patrick N is a positive light who welcomes all with a warm smile and he loves to share his ideas on how to have a fun day," says Team 4 Leader, Sonia Vielot.

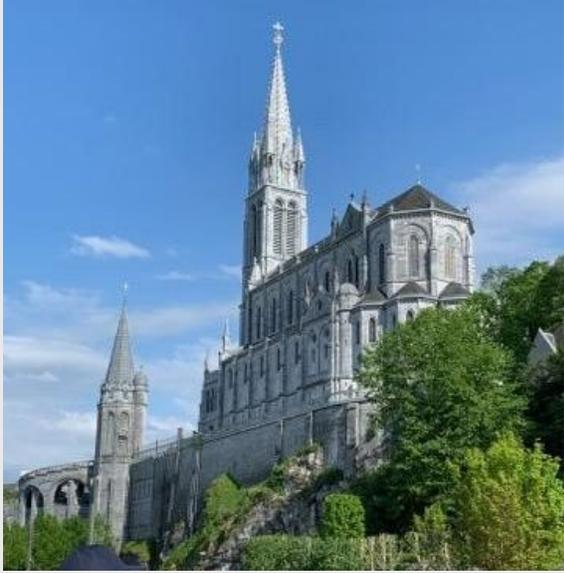
Our participants are encouraged to be friendly and concerned about their friends. It has become a common practice for participants to be mindful to hold doors open for others and work together to clean up after themselves.

By actively participating in helping others, and engaging in peaceful dialogue, the members of the peace squad foster acceptance, inclusion, and mutual respect. Their commitment creates ripples of positivity that resonate with everyone they encounter. As we witness the impact of the Peace Squad, we are reminded that peace is not merely the absence of conflict and hate; it is a proactive choice that requires continuous effort.



## *A Deeply Spiritual Experience*

Two Saint Catherine Academy students, Anna and Luke, were invited to accompany the Order of Malta on their annual trip to Lourdes, France. The Order of Malta is a Catholic lay organization that provides humanitarian aid and medical assistance to those in need, and their annual pilgrimage to Lourdes is one of their most significant events. Lourdes is a major pilgrimage center where Bernadette, a 14-year-old girl had numerous visions of Mary and its underground spring is believed to have miraculous qualities. Our student involvement was initiated by several Saint Catherine volunteers and Board members.



Anna and Luke spent a week in the beautiful French town of Lourdes, where they participated in a range of activities. The students experienced the love and compassion of the Malta volunteers, who provided them with support and assistance to ensure they could participate in all the aspects of the trip. The volunteers helped them with transportation, meals, and accommodations, as well as accompanying them on visits to holy sites.

A memorable part of the trip was visiting the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes. The students were accompanied as they visited the grotto. They participated in the daily processions, which included candlelit vigils, daily mass, the sacrament of reconciliation, stations of the cross and the recitation of the rosary.

A highlight of the trip for Anna and Luke was the opportunity to participate in the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick. Volunteers and pilgrims with disabilities are blessed with holy oil by priests in a deeply spiritual moment that brings a sense of peace and comfort. Anna then shared this experience with the school by bringing back holy water for each classroom.

The students also had the opportunity to explore the beautiful town in France. They visited the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception, the Rosary Basilica, and the Grotto of Massabielle, where the Virgin Mary appeared to Saint Bernadette in 1858. "My favorite part of the trip was to go to the grotto to see where the Blessed Virgin Mary came to Saint Bernadette. It was really beautiful and peaceful," explains Anna.



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