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Local

Students welcomed to first 2010 Initiative school

By Christine Williams
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BROCKTON -- The first day of school at a renovated facility and new faces in the classroom are exciting enough without Cardinal Seán P. O'Malley, followed by a media entourage, touring the halls. But students at the new Trinity Catholic Academy experienced all these thrills and more on Sept. 10.

When the cardinal entered a classroom, students chimed in unison, "Good morning, Cardinal Seán."

One girl in an art class with a new pencil box containing markers, crayons and pencils in an assortment of colors, said of the cardinal's arrival, "I think this is so cool."

The archdiocese combined three schools in Brockton -- St. Casimir, St. Edward and Sacred Heart -- as the first project of the 2010 Initiative, a plan to revitalize Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Boston. The three Brockton schools were located within a mile of each other.

The new school, Trinity Catholic, consists of an upper and lower campus. The former St. Edward's building now welcomes students from pre-kindergarteners to third graders, and fourth through eighth grades are taught at the former St. Colman's, which had previously been leased to two different educational groups.

Both buildings have been completely refurbished, featuring new classrooms, science labs, computers, gymnasiums, cafeterias and kitchens. There are new windows, ceilings, lights and roofs. The school also offers more activities, including pre-kindergarten classes and full-time art, music and language programs. A courtyard was added at the lower campus and a playground at the upper campus.

In addition, the academy has been realigned under a regional board and director, which the archdiocese hopes will provide greater resources to the school system, ensuring long-term viability.

The plan to create Trinity Catholic was announced a mere seven months ago. Suffolk Construction employees began their work four months ago and have worked hard to make the project come together, Cardinal O'Malley said.

President and CEO of Suffolk Construction, John Fish, said that working on the project has been a wonderful opportunity.

"We've taken the bones of the existing building and kept them intact, and then built a brand new school around it," he said. "What we have now is a brand new building that will stand the test of time for the next 30 to 40 to 50 years."

Father David O'Donnell, pastor at Christ the King Parish in Brockton, said that both the Catholic school community and wider Brockton area will benefit from the new facilities. After school hours, the buildings serve as community centers with youth events and Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, he said.

“It’s an upgraded facility, not just for Catholic education but really for the community,” he added. “It’s a real exciting time.”

Brockton Mayor James E. Harrington said that the community is amazed at how quickly the project came together.

“We are extremely proud that the archdiocese picked Brockton, and we’re just amazed at all the construction the crew did here,” he said. “It just proves that when people have the right mission, the job can be done.”

Cardinal O’Malley said that it has been a joy to watch the former schools transformed into state-of-the-art facilities. Catholic schools are a very important part of passing on the faith and helping young people discover their vocation in life, he said.

As he toured both schools, the cardinal stopped into various classrooms, asking the children about their studies. In one math class he solved a word problem with a student and said to the class, “Well, you’re all wonderful mathematicians here. I can see that.”

A third grade student asked him, “Is it hard to become a cardinal?”

He answered, “The Holy Father names you, and it just happens.”

After another classroom visit, he told the students, “A lot of excitement on the first day -- it will quiet down.”

The parents are excited about the new year at a new school as well. Pam Leary, whose children have been in the Brockton school system for three years, said that she too hopes things quiet down as students adjust to the changes.

“It’s very new right now,” she said. “I said to my son, ‘Give it a month. You’ve got to give it a try here.’”

Leary said that she welcomes the art classes and technology at Trinity Catholic. Those changes are positive for the children, and the children enjoy them, she said.

Cardinal O’Malley said the next step for the 2010 Initiative, announced in August 2005, has not yet been decided.

“The school system was in trouble, and we needed to come up with some creative and radical changes in order to shore up, strengthen and launch Catholic education in a new phase,” he said. “Right now there are conversations going on in a couple of different regions.”