

Mount St. Mary Academy announces new academic vision

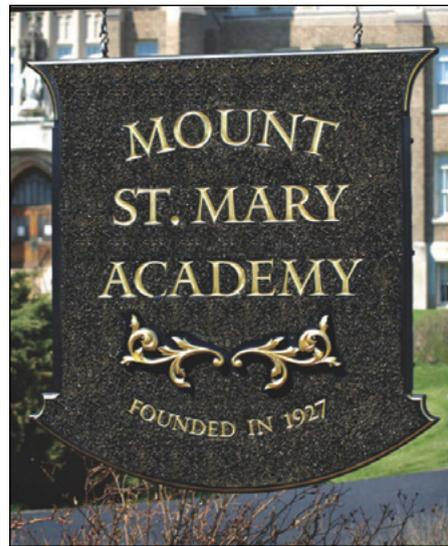
KENMORE — On Jan. 24, officials at Mount St. Mary Academy announced exciting academic and programmatic changes planned for the school beginning with the 2019-20 school year. Principal Katherine Spillman says the changes better reflect the school's mission as well as the expectations of higher education and students' future employers.

Beginning this fall, the school will initiate a two-year phase out of New York State Regents exams as its final assessment tool. Instead, the academic program will focus on rigorous real-world assessments that are both experiential and authentic.

"Research tells us that student learning is not best measured by one high-stakes test at the end of the academic year," said Spillman. "Twenty-first century skills are demonstrated by students who can effectively produce capstone projects, group projects, written reports and other forms of summative assessment."

Spillman noted that Mount St. Mary Academy would not be doing away with traditional examinations because they are an important means of gauging student learning and students will need to be ready to take exams in college. But, she continued, moving forward Mount St. Mary students will not be presented with class material in a setting that has a year-end Regents exam as its focus.

"These changes will allow our talented, dedicated educators to



dig deeper in their teaching of material, harness the excitement of student-focused learning, and create dynamic classrooms all year long where learning is not limited by preparation for one final exam," Spillman explained.

Beginning with the 2019-20 school year, the Mount St. Mary classes of 2022 and 2023 will not take Regents exams and they will graduate with Mount St. Mary diplomas.

Because most members of the classes of 2020 and 2021 will be more than halfway done with their Regents requirements, they will take their Regents exams as scheduled and graduate with Regents diplomas.

All students will experience other visible changes to the

school's academic program. Three new academic centers – STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Math), Humanities and Languages – will be in place to foster robust, interdisciplinary collaboration. Students will enjoy a new Makerspace, where they will experience interactive learning that blends technology and creativity.

The daily schedule will be adapted to include an "intentional pause" to help foster relationship-building and well-being among members of the school community. Additionally, the entire school community will actively participate in Service and Justice Week in the form of experiential learning to emphasize diversity, equity and inclusion.

Mount St. Mary Academy has had positive experiences with longstanding academic initiatives such as the school's award-winning entrepreneurship curriculum, STEAM program, and Foundations of Learning courses, that have provided valuable experience with alternative assessments and hands-on learning.

"Our young alumnae have told us that these experiential learning opportunities are those that have benefited them the most in college and graduate school," Spillman said. "They have encouraged us to broaden these opportunities to more students across the core subject areas."

Spillman noted that school

officials have communicated with representatives from nearly four dozen colleges and universities across the country, who indicated that taking Regents exams does not offer candidates for admissions any advantages. Mount St. Mary Academy, founded in 1927 by the Sisters of St. Mary of Namur, is consistently ranked among the very top public and private schools in Western New York. Graduating seniors in the class of 2018 earned nearly \$18 million in college scholarships, averaging \$240,000 per student.

Student and parent meetings have been set up by the school to provide more details and answer questions.

"The future of Mount St. Mary Academy is bright, and we look forward to providing our students with the best, most personalized educational experience possible," Spillman said. "Our goal is to do all we can to prepare each of our students for the challenges of college and the workplace, and this is an exciting step in that direction."

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