

Catholic educators learn of latest teaching techniques

By **PATRICK J. BUECHI**
Staff Reporter

Pope Francis has spoken about providing a “moral and religious” education for all children. The diocesan Department of Catholic Education took that to heart when planning the annual education convocation. This year’s theme “All Our Welcome; Learning Knows No Bounds,” addressed the need to provide the strong teaching that Catholic schools are known for to all students regardless of race, economic class or special needs.

“It was really about Francis’ direction that Catholic education has to be for all. That’s what inspired us when we were setting up the theme two years ago,” said Shelly Reidy, professional development coordinator for Catholic Schools.

The Sept. 28 gathering at Cardinal O’Hara High School welcomed Dr. Michael Boyle,

UpSTREAM
Catholic Schools

director of the Andrew M. Greeley Center for Catholic Education at Loyola University in Chicago, as keynote speaker. Boyle has worked as a school psychologist in elementary and high schools, and as a special education administrator. He is the author of the 2010 book, “Response to Intervention: A Framework for Catholic Schools.”

This year’s convocation offered over 60 breakout sessions that introduced the concepts of Makey Makey, Curriculum Mapping and Thoughtful Classrooms. Makey Makey is a kit that teaches making and design thinking. Curriculum mapping involves indexing and diagramming a curriculum to

identify and address educational gaps. Thoughtful Classroom techniques refine teaching to improve learning.

Other topics included literacy, working with children with behavioral challenges, and talking with parents.

“We tried to rightsize it for teachers, so teachers could go to what they knew they needed to learn about, instead of making everybody sit through one thing,” Reidy said. “We did a lot of different types of presentations. We tried to hit special needs. We did tech, music, phys ed.”

“Math, science, you name it,” added Erica Aiken, who manages curriculum, instruction and assessment for diocesan Catholic schools.

The theme had a special message for the Foundation for Inclusive Catholic Education. FICE was established in 2014 by a group of parents who wanted their

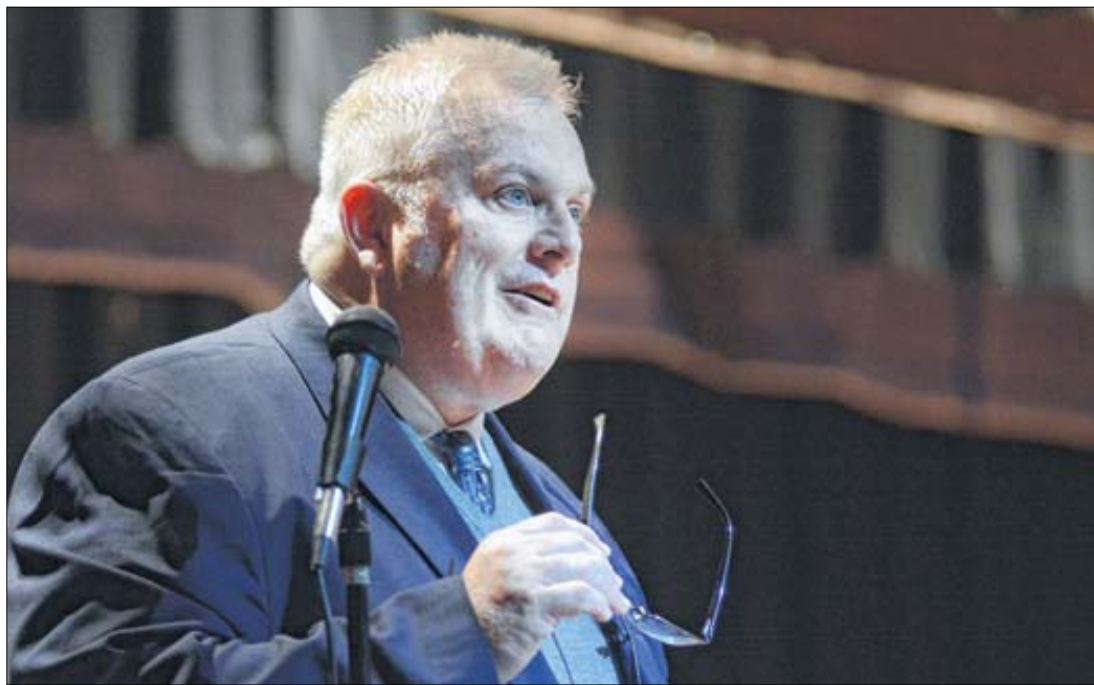
children with special education needs to be educated in their local Catholic school with family and friends. Inclusion is an approach to education which allows all children to learn together in the same school with the necessary services and supports. FICE works toward providing Catholic schools within the Diocese of Buffalo the necessary funding for professional development and other supports that benefits those children with academic, behavioral and social challenges. An inclusive Catholic education can benefit all children by teaching compassion, acceptance and the value of every child of God.

“They said, ‘We really want a Catholic education for our children. So let us develop this foundation to get the support in place and train the teachers to make sure it happens,’” said Reidy.

Through the use of Universal Design, classrooms can be designed to not make exceptions for students with special needs, but have changes that accommodate them and make a better class for all students.

Bishop Richard J. Malone celebrated Mass for the 900 teachers and principals who attended. “You all recognize that your task is not merely to teach subjects, but to touch the lives of young people. You have been given the call and gift of teaching in this time and in this place. I thank you for the inestimable service that you provide to your school and to the Diocese of Buffalo,” the bishop offered in gratitude for the service educators provide. “I pray that you will continue to have the courage to teach the truth in love, the vision to see the effect that you have on the lives of youngsters, and the perseverance to be that light which Jesus is in our world.”

The convocation allows educators to learn of the latest teaching techniques, see the latest tools offered from vendors, and network with other schools. To make sure every teacher had the opportunity to come and learn, Catholic schools were closed for the day.



DAN CAPPELLAZZO/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Keynote speaker Dr. Micheal J. Boyle, director of the Andrew M. Greeley Center for Catholic Education at Loyola University, speaks about the importance of faith and Catholic Education during the Diocese of Buffalo educators’ convocation at Cardinal O’Hara High School.