

Snyder school looking forward to banner year

By **PATRICK J. BUECHI**
Staff Reporter

Driving down Main Street through Snyder, one can see a huge banner declaring Christ the King School as a Middle States Accredited elementary school. It was easy to make the banner, but the accreditation took a year of hard work on behalf of the school staff.

The school, founded in 1929, went through an in-depth self-study of every aspect of its governance, finance, student life, and academic courses. This information is used to outline its strengths.

“When you identify your strengths, you then find out there are gaps. So, there are weaknesses,” explained Principal Samuel Zalacca. “The school has to go through a questionnaire listing its strengths. Then after the strengths are listed, the school is able to step back and find that there are some gaps in areas that maybe the school can be doing better in.”

Accreditation does come from the things the school does well, but from identifying the areas for improvement and designing a detailed action plan to make those improvements.

After the preliminary assessments, the school creates its action plan with three academic and one “outside academic” goals. In this case Zalacca and his team choose to increase students’ proficiency level in math; place more technology in the hands of students; and work effectively to increase enrollment. The plan needs to be very precise, give indicators, and have a seven-year timeline.

“So, by the year 2025, students



DAN CAPPELLAZZO/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Principal Samuel Zalacca and Vice Principal Maria Wangler give the thumbs up as their school was awarded the prestigious Middle States Accreditation.

at Christ the King will have achieved proficiency (85 percent) or above in mathematics as measured by the individual iReady progress assessments, the New York state assessments in math and the local assessments,” Zalacca read. “So, it’s very specific.”

To reach those goals the entire staff broke into subcommittees for every school subject, not just math and technology. The small staff meant some people had to be on two or three of these subcommittees. Vice Principal

Maria Wangler served as internal coordinator, organizing the different subcommittees.

“We still came up with things we wanted to work on internally even though Middle States wasn’t looking to see if it was a specific action plan,” she said of the process. “Even though it wasn’t something we had to focus on, we still made changes in places where we felt we needed to make improvements.”

Wangler made sure the group stayed on task and on time, then compiled all the information into one 300-page document that is thicker than a textbook.

“It was a lot of work, but everybody pitched in and we were able to accomplish getting our Middle States Accreditation by all working together,” she said.

Christ the King was reviewed by the Middle States Commission in October 2018, then received accreditation last May, which is fast. The process could take up to a year and a half. In three years, things will be reviewed to make sure the school is on track with the

strategic plan and timeline.

“By the end of the seventh year you should have reached your goals. Then you may renew and find you have other goals and just keep on going,” Zalacca explained.

Receiving accreditation is a lengthy and costly process, but Zalacca, who has spent 45 years in the education field, thinks it makes the school better. By having a strategic plan, the school becomes more stable.

“You’re making everything better. Not just academics, but the whole operation of the school,” he said.

The school now uses the accreditation to promote itself, which in turn will help meet the goal of increasing enrollment by five students every year. The school also hired a director of development, is advertising, and offers tuition assistance to achieve that goal.

“It’s a win-win situation because the school realizes what they’re doing well, and it has a strategic plan of how to make things even better,” Zalacca said.

After learning they received accreditation, everyone at the school – students, teachers and staff – threw a party so loud, their noisemakers drowned out the sirens from an emergency vehicle rushing down Main Street. State Senator Michael H. Rzenhofer read a proclamation.

Christ the King is now one of eight elementary schools in the Diocese of Buffalo with Middle States Accreditation.

The others include: Immaculate Conception School, East Aurora; Nardin Academy, Buffalo; Northern Chautauqua Catholic Regional School, Dunkirk; St. Amelia Catholic School, Kenmore; St. Andrew’s County Day School, Tonawanda; St. Christopher Catholic School, Tonawanda; and St. Stephen Catholic School, Grand Island.

The Middle States Commission is a voluntary, non-governmental, membership association that defines, maintains, and promotes educational excellence across institutions with diverse missions, student populations, and resources. It examines each institution as a whole, rather than specific programs within institutions.

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~ Principal Samuel Zalacca