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Holy Rosary-St. Richard Catholic School balances modern knowledge with faith

BY JESSE SCHECKNER

Our Lady of the Holy Rosary-St. Richard Catholic School (HRSR) is hosting an open house on Jan. 24; it will be the perfect time for parents to learn about the school's exciting and unique educational environment.

Though its roots in Catholicism remain active and strong, HRSR is a forward-thinking institution intent on producing well-rounded students capable of succeeding in a technologically advancing, multicultural world. To achieve this goal, the school has established several programs including bilingual immersion, special education, one-to-one iPads and a diverse afterschool curriculum.

HRSR is the first Catholic school in Florida to implement a dual language curriculum (English and Spanish). The program, Two-Way Immersion Network for Catholic Schools (TWIN-CS), is an initiative created at Boston College that began at the school two years ago at the pre-K level. This year, kindergarten was added. Every subsequent year, another grade will be included in the program.

As its name suggests, TWIN-CS compels students to become bilingual by making it a constant part of their daily scholastics — from language arts, math and religion to social studies and science. The school also offers three Spanish language classes: one for native speakers, one for non-native speakers and a third conversational class combining the two. And in addition to its bilingual mass, every week HRSR has "Spanish Tuesday," where all prayer is conducted in Spanish.

"It's a full-blown bilingual program and is not so much about learning the basic letters and numbers as it is learning how to communicate with one another," said Maggie Cunill, pre-K Spanish teacher.

The school is one of only a few Catholic institutions in Miami-Dade County to offer a full-time special education program, Academy 2000. Designed for students from third to eighth grade, the program addresses deficits in reading, mathematics and writing in an environment with a low student-teacher ratio, a state certified special education teacher, one full-time assistant and many hands-on resources.



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"Our Academy 2000 program is very unique in a Catholic setting because most of the time those children are sent to public or clinical schools," said Cristina Perez, assistant principal. "Here, we have a program for them and the students are still able to partake in sports, religious education and other standard aspects of school life."

After the final bell rings, students have access to a robust afterschool curriculum and sports program that includes soccer, flag football, volleyball and basketball. Students interested in crafts might be attracted to the school's sewing club, while others with a penchant for composition might enjoy the music program. Some may find themselves enamored with one of HRSR's most exciting features: a fully functional AV newsroom, complete with a green screen, in which students produce their own news programs.

"Our goal is to prepare our students for high school," said Chris Becerra, a parent and former Home & School president who was critical in the AV program's development. "We want to be part of the transition to using more technology so that

when they go to high school they understand it, from our one-to-one iPads to the AV program in which students learn how to shoot, edit and write a news show, and film commercials on things like recycling."

Fully accredited by the Florida Catholic Council, HRSR has for more than 50 years imbued its teachings with both modern knowledge and traditional faith, providing its approximately 300 students with a balanced learning experience.

"The Catholic identity of the school helps us conduct our classes with more responsibility because a Catholic who believes in the faith believes in its virtues, like being responsible, honest and compassionate," said principal Ilma Ninnette Lozano, EdS. "The faith helps make better students, classmates and fosters a better understanding between teachers and parents. For us, it is the best way."

Our Lady of the Holy Rosary-St. Richard Catholic School will host an open house on Jan. 24, 7 p.m., at 18455 Franjo Rd. For more information, call 305-232-5442 or visit <www.HRSRSchool.com>.