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FEATURED

Holy Cross Catholic School partnering with Defiance Area YMCA

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Sierra Wall, wellness director and youth center director at the Defiance Area YMCA, speaks to students during an assembly at Holy Cross Catholic School on Monday. Wall announced a partnership between the school and the YMCA in which students can earn memberships to the YMCA.

Holy Cross Catholic School (HCCS) in Defiance has announced a partnership with the Defiance Area YMCA to deliver enhanced social-emotional services for Holy Cross students, while supporting the YMCA with new memberships.

A fundraising effort, E.P.I.C. (Everyone Partners In Catholic Education) by HCCS, is underway to raise money for operating expenses of the school, as well as to provide memberships for all HCCS students and staff to the “Y.”

Aileen Meyer, marketing director of HCCS, explained the school was looking for a way to help enhance social-emotional learning (SEL) for its students, with the need on the rise due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

“We’re concerned now more than ever about the social and emotional health of our students,” said Meyer. “We’ve known for years that SEL is important, that’s one of the main reasons the Leader in Me program was instituted here. Social-emotional skills for youth are just as important as academic skills, especially in preparing them for life when they become adults.”



“Since March, when kids were forced into remote learning, we have been concerned not only about academic slide, but how our students have been doing socially and emotionally,” continued Meyer. “School became difficult for many, parents had to work, there was a lot of worry, and we know from the health system, unfortunately there has been an increase in youth trauma. Fortunately, our students have used their habits to adjust to the many changes.”

Rich Seward, executive director of the Defiance Area YMCA, is excited about the partnership, and the benefits it can have for everyone.

“We hear a lot in meetings about evidence-based programming,” began Seward. “We hear so much about it, but we’re missing the boat when it comes to relationship-based programming. Kids need solid relationships with their teachers, with their coaches, and other adults in the community who support them. If we don’t get this done now, especially during COVID, we’re going to be dealing with the fallout for more than a decade.”

Seward is pleased the Defiance Area YMCA will not only provide support for SEL, but that it will be a place where kids can go just to have fun.

“In addition to SEL, we have a lot of programs that students and staff at Holy Cross would be able to take advantage of at member prices, as opposed to non-member prices,” said Seward. “That includes all of our youth sports, our swim lessons, gymnastics, our Fun Nights ... it’s a lot of activities where kids can be together and just be kids.”

According to casel.org, “SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships and make responsible and caring decisions.

“SEL advances educational equity and excellence through authentic school-family-community partnerships to establish learning environments and experiences that feature trusting and collaborative relationships, rigorous and meaningful curriculum, and instruction and ongoing evaluation.”

Meyer shared the partnership with the YMCA will allow HCCS students and staff to take advantage of the YMCA's wellness and leadership programs by integrating them into its SEL curriculum. The partnership also will enable the school's physical education (PE) program to go to the YMCA for special PE units.

“We'd love to be able to give everyone a full year's membership starting Jan. 1, so we tacked that on to our regular fundraising challenge,” said Meyer. “With COVID-19 really hurting our church-based funds, as well as shutting down our event-based fundraising revenue, we've turned to crowdsourcing and direct mailings to off-set losses in our operating revenue.

“We currently have 27 staff members and 115 students, so we're raising money to provide them memberships, which would total around \$36,000,” added Meyer. “The YMCA has been very generous to us, and they are offering us a discount of \$6,000, bringing our fundraising goal for the YMCA to \$30,000. That \$30,000 is in addition to the \$30,000 we are working to raise for operating expenses, which is something we do every year.

Added Meyer: “With the grant funds we're seeking, we're hoping that money will underwrite the SEL programs we have planned with the YMCA.”

Every student and staff member at HCCS will take part in the fundraising effort. The school has announced that any student or staff member who raises at least \$250 toward the fundraising efforts will be guaranteed a sixth-month membership to the YMCA.

In addition, if HCCS reaches its \$60,000 goal, every student and staff member will get a one-year (instead of six-month membership independently earned by each student/teacher who raises \$250) YMCA membership, and there will be an E.P.I.C. glow and swim party for the school in January at the YMCA.

Said Seward: “We’ve found, since school has reopened, parents want activities for their kids. We figured there would be a lot more apprehension, but there’s not, they want their kids to be involved in activities, because of the benefits they provide. The YMCA will provide options (to HCCS) if anyone wants to upgrade to a couple, or family membership, to really encourage that family time. We love it when families come to the ‘Y’ to have fun.

“We want all families to know that kids (grades 6-12) don’t have to be a member to utilize the YMCA Youth Center,” added Seward. “You do have to be a member to utilize the rest of the building, but if a youth needs somewhere to go after school until 4:30, they’re welcome to come and do their homework and hang out. In addition, we have a scholarship program for youth for anyone who can’t afford one.”

For more information about Holy Cross Catholic School, call 419-784-2021, or go to defianceholycross.org. For more information about the Defiance Area YMCA, call 419-784-4747 or go to defianceymca.org. To donate toward the fundraising efforts, go to defianceholycross.org/support.

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