



Putting students first in Fullerton

BY ERIK ZYGMONT

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FULLERTON – With the students’ happy shrieking, copious blue balloons and Kool and the Gang’s “Celebration” on a loop, it was clear that something was going on at St. Joseph School.

“Does anybody know why we’re here?” Ken Pipkin asked students at a raucous assembly Sept. 28.

“We have a Blue Ribbon award,” a little girl answered, correctly.

“It’s just a great honor for the school, for all the hard work that’s been done over the years,” said Pipkin, who became principal this year.

He pointed to St. Joseph’s individualized approach to students, with faculty members meeting regularly to “literally get into the nitty-gritty of each student and figure out exactly where they need

support for growth.”

At the assembly, he acknowledged the work of the previous principal, Phyllis Karko, and the former assistant principal, Rose Michaud, both of whom were at the helm for the 2015-16 school year.

He also thanked James B. Sellinger, archdiocesan chancellor for education, who was present for the assembly and, Pipkin said, “a huge, critical part of why we’re here today.”

The kids’ shrieks were loudest when Pipkin called out their teachers, who had donned blue T-shirts for the occasion. Doug Ripley, who is in his second year teaching language arts at St. Joseph and his 26th year teaching for the archdiocese, gave credit right back to the kids.

“A lot of the students here are very much geared toward success and going on to good high schools,” said Ripley, who mentioned another aspect. “There’s

a strong presence here in Jesus, in the way we act and what we say. That’s from the kids all the way up to the faculty and administration.”

“The faculty and staff have taken the initiative to know each and every student,” said Brandon Hermosa, an eighth-grader who has been at the school, which offers pre-kindergarten-through his

ST. JOSEPH SCHOOL

LOCATION: Fullerton

ENROLLMENT: 461 in pre-K to 8

FACULTY/STAFF: 44

PRINCIPAL: Ken Pipkin

PASTOR: Father Jesse Bolger

POINT OF EMPHASIS: High standardized test scores



grade. “We’re not just numbers on a paper to them.”

Parents, too, are part of the picture, according to Jeannette Boze, part of the St. Joseph “volunteer community,” which she called “very welcoming – and very organized.”

“I think a lot of people that give their volunteer time are very talented and have great skills to offer,” added Boze, who has a son in the second grade.

Doree Hudson, whose daughter, Mariana, is in the fourth grade, said that the school’s high standardized test scores – a key factor in the Blue Ribbon designation – were a reason she sent her there.

“I feel St. Joseph will definitely help her for the future – for high school and college,” Hudson said. “I know others who have gone on from here and were definitely prepared.”

Father Jesse Bolger, pastor of St. Joseph Parish since July, acknowledged the work of his predecessor, Monsignor Kevin T. Schenning, now pastor of St. Margaret in Bel Air, as well as the faculty of St. Joseph School.

“The teachers are the reason we got this award,” Father Bolger said. “Their commitment to excellence, to their faith and to the children have borne fruit.” ●



KEVIN J. PARKS | CR STAFF

From left, sixth-graders Janine Sawyer, Kaye Tubal, Gabrielle Del Rosario and Anna Christou celebrate their school’s National Blue Ribbon School of Excellence Sept. 28.

FOR A LIST OF THE 23 SCHOOLS IN THE ARCHDIOCESE WHICH HAVE EARNED NATIONAL BLUE RIBBON SCHOOL STATUS, VISIT bitly/cr-blueribbon16