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Diocese of Providence Partners with SCS to Integrate STEAM in Catholic Schools

Professional Education Center program will help Catholic school teachers tie arts into instruction on STEM subjects



Catholic school teachers and administrators participating in STEAM training workshops earlier this summer. Image Credit: RWU

August 17, 2015 | Public Affairs Staff

PROVIDENCE, R.I. – In an effort to raise the bar on providing high-quality education throughout its system of Catholic schools, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Providence has partnered with the Professional Education Center at the Roger Williams University School of Continuing Studies to create a new professional development program that will help its teachers and administrators integrate STEAM, a curriculum based on science, technology, engineering and mathematics plus the arts.

STEAM is an interdisciplinary framework for teaching that calls upon creative strategies typically used in the arts to increase student engagement and achievement. By integrating artistic and creative endeavors into STEM topics – which, according to neurological research, can boost students’ problem-solving and analytical skills – educators can teach content in different ways to offer more diverse learning opportunities and meet the needs of all types of learners.

A science lesson for second grade students learning about heredity and reproduction, for example, may involve students working in groups to create a theatrical play including costumes and sets depicting the lifecycles of plants and animals. Or third grade students might learn how to tell time and understand fractions by constructing a giant clock, taking turns physically moving its minute and hour hands to different times when prompted by the teacher, while also using pie shapes representing a quarter or half of the circle to indicate half hour or quarter hour times.

Many of the Catholic schools in the Diocese have started to incorporate STEAM methodologies within their curriculum, and the district aims to expand those efforts through the partnership with Roger Williams University. Programs such as the CyberPatriot competition and FIRST LEGO League tournament at All Saints STEAM Academy in Middletown are built on the STEAM framework, giving students opportunities to use their knowledge and apply it to real-world activities.

“What’s professionally very satisfying is seeing an elementary school music teacher sitting side-by-side with a middle school science teacher thinking about how they are going to put the periodic table to music,” says Daniel J. Ferris, superintendent of schools for the Diocese of Providence. “This level of interdisciplinary collaboration and creativity is what Catholic schools do well. We have the instructional nimbleness and flexibility to be able to work together and effect quality classroom instruction in a very creative way. We’re pleased to partner with RWU to integrate STEAM in a unified and collaborative way throughout many of our schools.”

Approximately one third of the Catholic schools in the Diocese, including more than 70 principals and teachers, are participating in the three-day training program, which concludes on Aug. 18 and 19 and features interactive sessions for sharing creative instructional strategies as well as team workshops on how to create project-based lesson plans. The goal of the program is for each participant to create their own lesson plan and learn how to incorporate STEAM teaching and learning strategies in their classrooms starting this fall.

In addition to helping students build creative and real-world problem-solving skills, the STEAM curriculum also creates new opportunities for teachers and administrators to collaborate and share best practices across grade levels and disciplines.

“Educators incorporating STEAM teaching and learning strategies become a lot more engaged and collaborative with their peers because STEAM forces them to come up with extraordinary new and creative ways to deliver the curriculum they’ve been teaching the same way for a number of years,” says Tom Pilecki, Professional Education Center instructor and co-author of *From STEM to STEAM: Using Brain-Compatible Strategies to Integrate the Arts*. Pilecki has built strong arts-integrated programs in Palm Beach County and around the country, serving more than 100,000 children and hundreds of teachers and after-school professionals.

“Many schools across the country are integrating STEAM within their curriculum and classroom instruction methods, but the Catholic school district led by Diocese of Providence may be one of the only school systems implementing it at this level throughout its district,” says Jamie E. Scurry, dean of the School of Continuing Studies at RWU. “We’re thrilled to partner with the Diocese to create unique programming that is helping their schools further integrate STEAM and make a big impact on student engagement and learning outcomes starting in their classrooms this fall.”

Based at the University’s Providence campus, the Professional Education Center creates customized education programs for local corporations, government agencies and community nonprofits that wish to offer specific courses or trainings to help employees build new skills or gain industry knowledge. In addition to the Diocese of Providence, the Professional Education Center has created customized programming for national corporations including CVS Health and National Grid as well as local municipalities and school districts including the Town of North Smithfield and the Pawtucket School District.

The Catholic schools participating in the professional development program this summer include: All Saints “STEAM” Academy (Middletown), Bishop McVinney School (Providence), Father John V. Doyle School (Coventry), Mercymount Country Day School (Cumberland), Monsignor Matthew F Clarke Catholic Regional School (Wakefield), Our Lady of Mercy Regional School (East Greenwich), Our Lady of Mount Carmel School (Bristol), The Prout School (Wakefield), Sacred Heart School (East Providence), The San Miguel School (Providence), St. Augustine School (Providence), St. Joseph School (West Warwick), St. Kevin School (Warwick), St. Peter School (Warwick), St. Rose of Lima School (Warwick), and St. Thomas Regional School (Providence).