



MEDIA RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

St. Mary Catholic Schools to Implement Project Lead The Way

(Fox Cities) In keeping with its commitment to providing an outstanding Catholic education for students, St. Mary Catholic Schools will be participating in Project Lead The Way (PLTW) beginning in the fall of 2016.

There is a heightened concern within the Fox Cities business and manufacturing communities that many potential employees do not have the technical and problem-solving skills that are essential in today's evolving workplace. SMCS researched ways to best prepare students for the future while acting as responsible members of the greater community, and found that PLTW stands alone in addressing these core objectives. Project Lead The Way is the nation's leading provider of K-12 STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Math)-based programs. Its project-based curriculum and high-quality teacher professional development, combined with an engaged network of educators and corporate partners, helps students develop the skills they need to be successful in post-secondary education and beyond.

SMCS has developed a three-year implementation plan for PLTW involving SMCS principals and science teachers as well as a visionary group of community professionals in STEM fields. The plan includes the following "Launch" (elementary), "Gateway" (middle school), and "Pathways" (high school) program components:

- For 2016-17, SMCS will incorporate two Launch modules for the 4th and 5th grade students at all SMCS elementary campuses, as well as Gateway computer science units for grades 6 and 7.
- In 2017-18, SMCS plans to add two more Launch modules in both grades 2 and 3 and introduce a Pathways computer science module at the high school. The high school modules will be elective (rather than required) courses.

- By 2018-19, all SMCS K-12 students will have access to PLTW, with additional modules in engineering science and perhaps other areas being incorporated at the high school level.

“The importance of STEM education cannot be overestimated in today’s world,” stated St. Mary Catholic Schools President Helen Englebert. “We are proud of the education our knowledgeable faculty provides, and are pleased to equip them with additional tools to best prepare our students for success. Even those students who do not go on to STEM-oriented careers benefit from the 21st century skills such as critical thinking and collaboration that are integral to PLTW. Our three-year plan will enable us to implement the program effectively and thoroughly.”

To prepare for the first phase of implementation, three SMCS instructors—Jill Ahles (who is also the project leader), Rob Srnka and Karie Ann Zeinert— are attending training sessions over the summer to become PLTW-certified and will return to SMCS ready to share what they have learned and lead collaboration among their peers to ensure a strong foundation for the program. In addition to teacher preparation, a visionary group of community professionals with expertise in STEM-related fields or businesses has been established to act as resources, help implement innovative ideas and act as classroom consultants to support the PLTW curriculum. This partner group will also involve SMCS educators and representative students who will be asked to be part of the advisory panel. The next meeting will take place in mid-August, and the group will meet several times a year thereafter.

St. Mary Catholic Schools (SMCS) includes St. Mary Catholic High School and the new St. Mary Catholic Middle School in the Town of Menasha and St. Mary Elementary Schools (St. Margaret Mary and St. Gabriel in Neenah, and St. Mary in Menasha). SMCS is dedicated to the individual development of each student in grades Pre3-12, by providing the highest quality education focused on faith, academics and service in a rapidly changing world.

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