

Two diocesan schools earn national honors for initiatives

The Texas Catholic

A pair of Diocese of Dallas Catholic Schools earned nationwide recognition as they each were honored at the National Catholic Educational Association Convention and Expo, held April 3-5 at Duke Energy Convention Center in Cincinnati.

The Notre Dame School of Dallas on April 4 was announced as the grand prize winner in the *Today's Catholic Teacher* "Innovations in Catholic Education" Awards for "Total community involvement, including fundraising" for its annual Spring Show fundraiser.

"This is a tremendous honor for the school and it supports our motto of 'No limits, just possibilities,'" said Theresa Francis, principal of The Notre Dame School. "This event draws not only our students, but also their families, extended families and friends. It is an opportunity for our students to shine."

For the past seven years, Francis said the school's Spring Show has brought the community together in a fundraising effort that supports and highlights the students of The Notre Dame School of Dallas.

"The event features performances by every student attending Notre Dame in an exciting production that allows every child to feel like a



JENNA TETER/The Texas Catholic

Teacher Alex Eckler on April 18 stands with students at The Notre Dame School of Dallas with the "Innovations in Catholic Education" award the school received from the National Catholic Educational Association and *Today's Catholic Teacher*.

true star," Francis said. "With a different theme each year, parent and volunteer involvement makes this event special."

Francis said additional community support comes in the form of donations from more than 50 businesses.

"This event has allowed the school to raise more than \$100,000 to support our students with developmental disabilities," she said.

Administrators at St. Mark the Evangelist Catholic School learned in January that the Plano campus was named as one of three nationwide finalists in the *Today's Catholic Teacher* "Innovations in Catholic Education" Awards for innovative projects facilitated by technology.

On April 4, St. Mark was named as the award's runner-up for its integration of a new SmartLab into



Courtesy Photo

St. Mark the Evangelist Catholic School Assistant Principal Pam Steinkirchner, middle, is joined by teachers Donna Ostermann, left, and Carolyn Eisele in displaying a banner recognizing the school as one of the NCEA and *Today's Catholic Teacher* winners.

the school's curriculum.

St. Mark principal Patricia Opon said the SmartLab enables students to apply the knowledge and skills developed in the classroom to real-world projects using their own ingenuity and creativity as well as cutting-edge technology.

"We are called to educate our students for today, tomorrow, and for what we are unable to envision for them in the future," Opon said. "The majority of the jobs that today's students will one day encounter have not yet been invented, so it is very important that key skill sets are developed such as thinking outside the box, problem-solving, teamwork and using mistakes as an opportunities to try another path."

In 2017 the St. Mark school community built the SmartLab, which Opon said is a first among North Texas schools. Opon said the lab allows St. Mark students to implement diocesan curriculum objectives through practical application across many disciplines.

"To be recognized on a national level for the integration of this facility into our curriculum is truly an honor for the St. Mark community," Opon said. "It not only reinforces our philosophy and our continuing efforts to stay ahead of the curve, but also affirms that St. Mark Catholic School students receive an exemplary education that will help prepare them for high school, college, and beyond."

