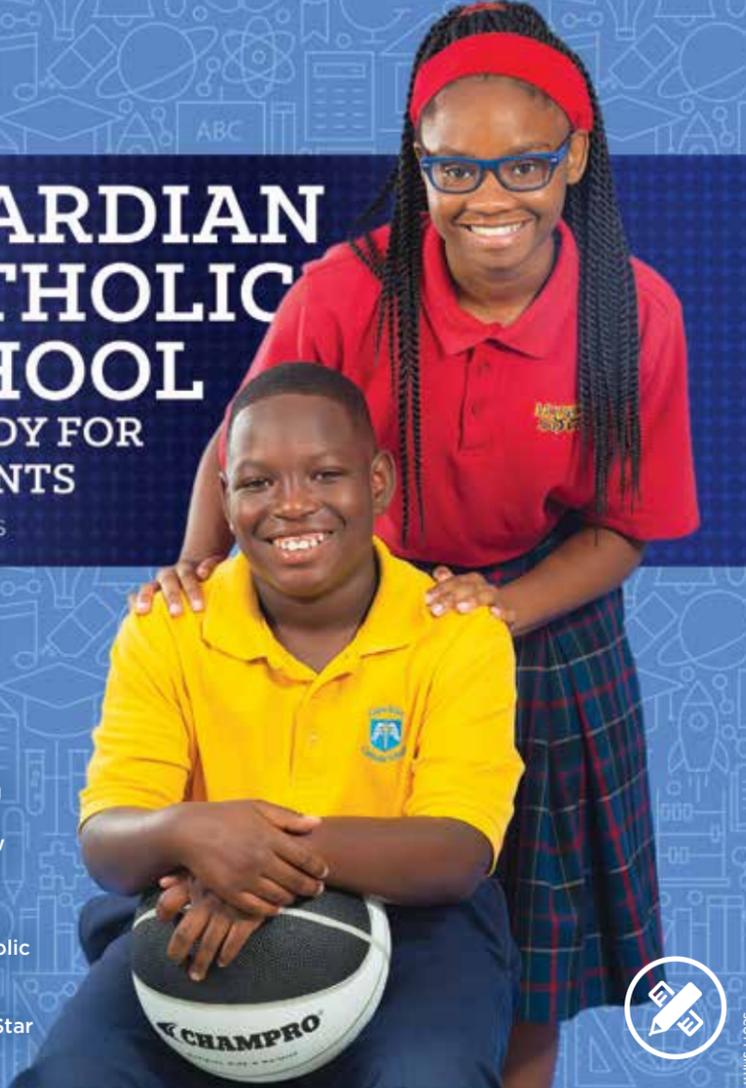


# GUARDIAN CATHOLIC SCHOOL IS READY FOR STUDENTS

BY LILLA ROSS

■ Representing the schools with brand new campuses this year are Eric Hodges from Guardian Catholic School and Meracle Smith from Morning Star High School.



**THE DIOCESE'S NEWEST SCHOOL** – Guardian Catholic – opens August 9, completing the merger of St. Pius V and Holy Rosary schools in Jacksonville.

The new \$10.3 million campus, at 4920 Brentwood Ave., has an early learning program for 3- and 4-year-olds and two classes for each grade level through eighth grade. A new gymnasium will be open by fall.

The decision to merge the schools on a new campus was made because the old buildings were in such bad condition.

“Guardian Catholic will be an all-new facility with a gym for the first time. That will be a huge plus. It will give them a complete educational experience,” said Deacon Scott Conway, diocesan school superintendent.

Guardian Catholic will have twice the capacity of the old schools, accommodating 500 students. It will continue to serve a predominantly African-American, non-Catholic student body.

“We’re not downsizing,” said Notre Dame Sister Dianne Rumschlag, executive director of education. “We’re combining schools to accommodate growth.”

The new Northside campus demonstrates the diocese’s commitment to breaking the cycle of poverty and helping students build faith-based lives, she said.

Construction began last semester while school was still in session and it was completed over the summer. Skanska along with Auld & White construction companies and ENB Architects built the school.

“It happened fast,” said Sister Dianne. “The teachers and staff have been incredible about being responsive to the demands of being on a construction site. And the students enjoyed watching the construction in progress.”

The site supervisor, Jason Taylor, visited

the Pre-K class and showed the 4-year-olds what was happening, using Tonka trucks, said Sister Dianne.

“So, the 4-year-olds built a school on the sand table with the Tonka trucks,” Sister Dianne said. “Someone brought in fluorescent vests so they could be construction workers. It was very cute.”

Sister Dianne will continue as executive director of education. Sister Cynthia Shaffer, former principal of Holy Rosary, will be the principal of grades 4-8 and Therese Jackson, was hired as principal for PreK-3.

The schools have been preparing for the transition for more than a year. New uniforms were introduced last year, and the students chose a new mascot – the Eagles.

The students, faculty, and parents from both schools were brought together in a variety of get-acquainted events.

“There’s always some nostalgia,” Sister Dianne said. “But we have a new opportunity and see the positive benefits of coming together and building on the foundations of both schools.”

The large stairwell in the main two-story building will be a word wall with words chosen by the students about who they want to become: Words like respect, integrity, faith, joy, champions and confident.

“We think it will give them a sense of ownership in the new school that will be a special place,” she said.

And memorabilia from the old schools will also be on display.

St. Pius, founded in 1921, and Holy Rosary, founded in 1958, have been supported since 1995 by a nonprofit for the diocese, Guardian Catholic Schools.

The board raises about \$1 million annually through donations of cash and in-kind goods and services, community partnerships and fundraisers, like the annual golf tournament. The board also offers tuition assistance along with educational and spiritual outreach to low-income families.

The \$10.3 million capital campaign, spearheaded by the board, is ongoing and has received a lot of support from the community, Sister Dianne said.

For information about contributing to the campaign, go to [www.guardiancatholicschools.org](http://www.guardiancatholicschools.org).



## MORNING STAR HIGH SCHOOL OPENS THIS FALL

BY LILLA ROSS

**THE DIOCESE'S NEWEST HIGH SCHOOL,** Morning Star, opens in August and several former students will be returning to the campus where they will find two new wings have been added to the building.

The \$1.5 million construction project adds four classrooms each for the middle school and high school and a media technology center. The middle school classes have been meeting for the last five years next door at Christ the King School in Jacksonville.

“It’s gone so smoothly,” Principal Jean Barnes said. “The contractors have been great. Everyone has been wonderful. And the kids are really excited.”

Barnes said that when classes resume August 9, the enrollment is expected to be 148, an increase of 30 students from last year. And three more teachers will be on the faculty.

Founded in 1956 by Archbishop Joseph P. Hurley, Morning Star School serves students who have a diagnosed learning disability, attention deficit disorders, high-functioning autism and mild intellectual disorders. The school has a unique model – a 12:1 student-teacher ratio and individualized education.

Morning Star also has a mentoring partnership with Bishop John Snyder High School. Morning Star students are invited to participate in Bishop Snyder pep rallies, Homecoming, and other events. And Morning Star’s seniors will join the graduation ceremony at Bishop Snyder.

The students are taught the same curriculum used in other

CELEBRATING OUR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

■ Visiting the school’s construction site are members of Morning Star’s Circle of Friends, from left, Rick and Patty Jones, Mary Pat and Dave Kulik, Lou Walsh and Jean Barnes, principal.

diocesan schools, with an individualized study plan. Morning Star also offers speech and language therapy, guidance services, music, art, physical education and religious education. The school also has a STEM lab, iPad lab, and netbook.

As part of the capital campaign, the Morning Star Circle of Friends was organized to help the philanthropic community learn about the school. The honorary chairs, Bob Shircliff, Jay Demetree and Lou Walsh, helped host a fundraiser in March at Epping Forest.

“I don’t think we would have gotten as far as we have without them,” said Maria Johnson, development director. “They have opened a door for us. Not a lot of people know about us.”

The first two \$100,000 donations came with naming rights. Dave and Mary Pat Kulik will name the high school wing, and Rick and Patty Jones will name the middle school wing. The gifts are pledged over five years.

A \$500,000 donation comes with the naming right for the entire school, Johnson said.

Barnes, who began teaching at the school in 1986, said she had seen the need for a high school for years. Too many students have a good educational experience at Morning Star but then struggle when they go on to high school, usually in public school with large classes. That could explain why several former Morning Star students are coming back.

Casey Wingerter said her daughter Madison attended Morning Star for grades third through seventh. But she really struggled in high school.

Wingerter said she enrolled Madison in Peterson Academy of Technology, a vocational magnet school. But that wasn’t a good fit, partly because of the large class size.

“She had an incredible experience at Morning Star,” Wingerter said. “It wasn’t just the teacher/student ratio, which is a third of what it is in public school. It’s such a close-knit staff. Everyone took an interest in her.”

To donate to their campaign, visit [www.morningstar-jax.org](http://www.morningstar-jax.org).