

Mrs. Fran Alberta is the new Principal of Immaculate Heart of Mary School, having taken the reins from Mrs. MaryAnn Oesterle who retired in June after 30 years of service.

Welcome to IHM. Your enrollment is up 15% this year. How do you account for that?

Mrs. Oesterle, and the faculty and families have put years worth of effort into building an excellent school. Based on academic excellence, IHM has been awarded the U.S. Dept. of Education Blue Ribbon award, Diocesan Star School status, and Middle States Accreditation. It is also a wonderfully supportive faith-filled community for the children, so the word gets out and parents want their children to come. I plan to put a lot of effort into spreading the good news even more this year. This school is an awesome resource and it's my job to make sure that every member of the community knows that IHM is a great opportunity for their child. Our new website describes all our programs and has generated much interest among families searching for a great learning environment.

What surprised you about the school?

The resources available here are beyond what I had imagined. The dedication of the faculty is immense and the school is blessed with so many educational assets. A real effort has been made here to optimize educational benefits for all learners. At one end of the spectrum for example, IHM offers advanced math classes in middle school, giving our gifted kids a chance to complete their Algebra I requirement for high school. At the same time, we provide an inclusion aide to benefit our students with special learning needs. I was thrilled to learn that the aide is here five days per week. And the overall technology program is top-notch for all our students. I also think it is critically important that our students receive foreign language instruction twice each week.

Many Catholic schools have closed recently. Is that a concern for you?

Proactive long-range planning and prudent fiscal management keep us a strong and viable educational choice. Enrollment and finances must always be a concern for any parochial school and the economy has been incredibly difficult for everyone, but IHM has been blessed with an incredibly supportive parish community and managed by very capable hands.

How did your first month as Principal go?

I love it. Any new job is daunting and I am following in the footsteps of Mrs. Oesterle, a much beloved figure here for the past 30 years, but the families and the faculty have been wonderful. And of course, the students make it all worthwhile. They are incredibly energetic and they have been so welcoming.

To borrow some of their lingo, they have just been so “psyched” for school this whole month, and with IHM’s faculty, I have a feeling they’ll maintain that enthusiasm throughout the year.

It sounds like you walked into a great situation. Is there anything you’d change?

Because all the most important aspects of this school are already established on such a strong foundation, it gives me the chance to work on topics that are very important to me.

Environmental awareness is critical and I want our school and our students to respect and care for our God-given planet. To that end we have already “gone green” with our communication systems. I’ve collected (and tested and corrected!) email addresses for every family in the school and as of September 20, we no longer send home paper-based notices and announcements. Our communications are now organized into a weekly email and I’m so pleased with the savings, both environmental and financial.

Another topic that is crucial is school security and I was really impressed with the system already in place at IHM. Doors are locked and monitored on a closed circuit system. Our pre-school is locked with controlled access and is completely self-contained: the little ones have right-sized bathrooms within the pre-school. We are taking the system one step further by requiring identity badges for faculty and staff and visitors badges whenever a parent comes into the school.

Sounds like you’re busy. Good luck!

Thank you.