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Luers named to list of top Catholic schools

The high school was recognized for merit in academics, religious identity, civic education.

By Charlie Roduta
croduta@news-sentinel.com



By Brian Tombaugh of The
News-Sentinel

Bishop Luers High School senior Kate Cooper, right, releases an egg as Mark Brueggeman, also a senior, watches. The school has just been named one of the top 50 Catholic high schools in the country on the Catholic High School Honor Roll.

A Fort Wayne school was selected for the first-ever honor roll that recognizes the nation's top Catholic high schools, officials said Wednesday.

Bishop Luers High School was among 50 high schools in the nation selected for the Catholic High School Honor Roll, a designation that praises Catholic schools for merit in academics, Catholic identity and civic education. Bishop Luers also ranked in the top 20 of schools in the civic education category. There are 14 Catholic high schools in the state.

"Any kind of award we receive, it's because of our hard-working staff," Bishop Luers Principal Mary Keefer said.

Bishop Luers, 333 E. Paulding Road, is the smallest of Allen County's public and parochial high schools with 570 students this year. The school has a staff of 78, including a campus minister and two chaplains. More than 93 percent of graduates move on to college or a two-year technical or trade school.

"We, as a diocese, are very proud of all of our schools and recognize that they work very hard every day to contribute in extraordinary ways to the spiritual and academic formation of our students," said Rebecca Elswerky, associate superintendent of personnel for the local diocese.

Meanwhile, students said it's the family feel, prayers before class and first-rate teachers that make Bishop Luers a good school. "I love the spirit of our school," junior Bridget Glismann, 16, said.

The honor roll is sponsored by the Acton Institute for the Study of Religion & Liberty, an international research and educational organization based in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Kevin Schmiesing, director of the Catholic High School Honor Roll, said schools were selected through survey responses and school data. He said surveys were sent to 1,300 high schools in the United States, polling principals and religion and social studies teachers.

Schools were given points based on answers that showed commitment and achievement in the three areas. PSAT scores and student participation rates also were taken into account, as was the percentage of Catholic students and faculty; and for having ministers on staff.

For the civic education category, points were awarded for offering and requiring economics and government classes.

At Bishop Luers, all high school juniors are required to take the PSAT. This year, the school had four semifinalists and three commended students based on those scores in the National Merit program, an academic competition for recognition and scholarships.

All students take world history, U.S. history, economics or honors economics, government or Advanced Placement government classes, Keefer said. Other civic events at Bishop Luers in the past four years include: mayoral debates for students, mock elections and a requirement for high school seniors to attend city or county council or school board meetings.

Civic education at Bishop Luers extends out of the classroom, Keefer said. She said all students participate in various service work opportunities, from volunteering at local hospitals to paying \$1 to dress out of school uniform, where the money collected is donated to a charity.

"I look at civic education as teaching students that they are servants of the people," Keefer said. "...Life is hard. If you can help somebody to make life easier, God bless you."

Of the 250 Catholic high schools in the nation that responded to the surveys, six were from Indiana. Bishop Luers and Marian High School in Mishawaka — both part of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend — were the only Indiana Catholic high schools selected for the award. The designation comes a month after Bishop Dwenger High School was named a Blue Ribbon School by the U.S. Department of Education for its students who achieve at high levels.