

'Wait Until 8th' pledge program encourages parents to delay smartphone usage

DUNMORE – Two Catholic schools in Lackawanna County are piloting a new program to empower parents to delay giving their children a smartphone until at least the end of eighth grade.

The “Wait Until 8th” program officially kicked off at Saint Mary of Mount Carmel School in Dunmore on March 6 and Our Lady of Peace School in Clarks Green on March 12.

As a part of each school’s kick-off, parents of students in pre-K through third grade were invited to attend a community panel discussion on the possible harm that smartphones can pose to young children.

Melissa Gregory, a parent and licensed professional counselor, said smartphone use amongst children can increase the risk for anxiety, depression, eating disorders, body image issues and addictions.

“The human brain isn’t fully developed until after 25, so the pre-frontal cortex isn’t yet developed. That is your decision-making skills,” Gregory said. “Your executive functioning comes from that. That is why it is so important to delay kids’ exposure to certain things, before they’re able to emotionally handle that information.”

Ten years old is now the average-age children get their first smartphone.

“Let your children be children. Let them go outside and play with each other. Let them go ride a bike,” Kristen Donohue, Diocesan Secretary for Catholic Education/Superintendent of Schools, said.

As a mother of three children, Donohue knows first-hand the struggles parents face when their kids ask for a smartphone



A community panel discusses the possible harm that smartphones can pose to young children as part of the 'Wait Until 8th Pledge' at Saint Mary of Mount Carmel Church in Dunmore on March 6, 2025. (Photo/Eric Deabill)

because many of their friends have one.

In unveiling the “Wait Until 8th” pledge, Donohue said parents – especially parents of young children – can rally together to delay giving children a smartphone until at least the end of eighth grade. She said banding together will help decrease the “pressure” to have a phone at an early age.

“If you band together and say, ‘we’re doing this together,’ that decision does get easier,” Donohue noted. “If we can make that shift, we will do a tremendous amount of good for generations to come.”

Panelists at each kick-off meeting included members of the Lackawanna County District Attorney’s Office, Pennsylvania State Police, a pediatrician, psychologist, and pastor.

At the kickoff meeting at Saint Mary’s,

Father David Cappelloni, pastor, Saints Anthony and Rocco Parish and Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish, discussed the moral implications of smartphone usage.

“Our primary relationship should be with God,” Father Cappelloni noted. However, as he held up a smartphone, he said that many young people believe, “this is God.”

Trooper Robert Urban, Public Information Officer for Pennsylvania State Police Troop R, played several videos for parents – including one that highlighted the dangers of location tracking – of which many people are unaware.

“Every single app that you use, whether it’s on your electronic device, tablet, or cell phone, has location services in them. You need to know, as a parent, to turn these off,” Trooper Urban explained.

Trooper Urban also touched on several other topics – including smartphones putting children at risk for cyber bullying and exposing them to sexual content.

After the initial kick-off meetings earlier this month, parents are being invited back for a second session in which they will be able to sign the “Wait Until 8th” pledge. The second session at Our Lady of Peace School will be held April 9, and April 10 at Saint Mary of Mount Carmel School.

“Take this information and please share it,” Saint Mary of Mount Carmel principal Maryelizabeth Shattin said. “There was a lot of eye-opening information.”

Nationwide, nearly 100,000 parents have already taken the “Wait Until 8th” pledge, saying they recognize the distractions and dangers of smartphone usage for their children.

For more information on the pledge, visit waituntil8th.org.

St. Clare/St. Paul School takes State CYO Title

SCRANTON

Congratulations to the Saint Clare/Saint Paul 8th Grade Boys’ Basketball Team, which won the 2025 Catholic Youth Organization (CYO)



Pennsylvania State Championship on Sunday, March 16, 2025.

The team beat OLP from the Diocese of Erie 63-23 at Marywood University. The last time Saint Clare/Saint Paul’s School won the State CYO title was 18 years ago. The team finished with a 35-0 record and over the last three years has had a 102-3 record overall.

The Crusaders also beat teams from the Diocese of Harrisburg and Archdiocese of Philadelphia to take the CYO State Championship title.

HEALING MASS FOR SURVIVORS OF ABUSE

Celebrated by Bishop Joseph C. Bambera



Thursday, April 10 at 12:10 P.M.
Cathedral of Saint Peter, Scranton

Diocese to hold annual Healing Mass for Survivors of Abuse April 10

SCRANTON – The month of April is Child Abuse Prevention Month. It is a time to recognize the importance of families and communities working together to prevent child mistreatment.

The Most Rev. Joseph C. Bambera, Bishop of Scranton, will celebrate a Healing Mass for Survivors of Abuse at 12:10 p.m. on Thursday, April 10, 2025, at the Cathedral of Saint Peter in Scranton.

The Healing Mass provides space for those affected by abuse to find solace, strength, and support. Through prayer, reflection, and healing, the Diocese of Scranton remains committed to offering care and compassion to survivors

The Mass will be broadcast live on CTV: Catholic Television of the Diocese of Scranton and livestream on the Diocese of Scranton website, YouTube channel and social media.

Diocese of Scranton
CATHOLIC
 SCHOOL SYSTEM
 FAITH • ACADEMICS • SERVICE

The Diocese of Scranton is committed to educating our students in an environment that is academically excellent and facilitates the development of moral judgment and Christian decision-making. We are proud to share the following successes of our students in the classroom and in their service to others. Each day, our schools are fulfilling their mission of preparing today's youth and young adults to become tomorrow's faith-filled leaders.

The Most Reverend Joseph C. Bambera, Bishop of Scranton, continues his visits to each Catholic School in the Diocese of Scranton during the 2024-25 academic year. In his homilies, the Bishop asks the students to allow Jesus to live in their lives and hearts and, in gratitude for all He does for them, serve one another by becoming like Him: loving, forgiving, caring, and healing others



Our Lady of Peace School in Clarks Green



La Salle Academy in Jessup



Holy Rosary School in Duryea



Saint Mary of Mount Carmel School in Dunmore



Saint Nicholas/Saint Mary School in Wilkes-Barre



Mrs. Ellen Spain, mathematics teacher at **Notre Dame Jr./Sr. High School in East Stroudsburg**, distributes ashes to student Emilee Thompson during the Ash Wednesday Liturgy.

In honor of "Read Across America Week," students at **All Saints Academy in Scranton** take a week to celebrate literacy by having a variety of dress-up and dress-down days, all themed around Dr. Seuss and his classic stories. Part of the celebration includes guest readers, which this year included Officer Joe Flesher from the Scranton Police Department.





Students at **Holy Family Academy in Hazleton** discovered a new way to enjoy geography with a visit from “The Earth Dome,” a 19’ by 22’ inflatable that teaches all about our planet on the outside and the inside of the balloon.



Students in grades 4-5 at **Wyoming Area Catholic School in Exeter** participated in the NEIU Reading Tournament, placing fourth against many other schools and sending them to the finals.



At **Saint Agnes School in Towanda**, the Stations of the Cross are presented by the sixth grade students with their first grade buddies holding hand-drawn depictions.



Seventh grade students at **Saint John Neumann Jr./Sr. High School in Williamsport** dive into the world of biomes, with students creating shadow boxes bringing to life a scene from their biome.



Carson Che, first grade student at **Notre Dame Elementary School in East Stroudsburg**, stands next to his teacher, Mrs. Kusienski, proudly wearing the medal awarded to him as the regional winner in the Zaner-Bloser Handwriting Contest.



Madison Gallagher, Ella Daderko, and Brynn Deom, students at **Saint Jude School in Mountain Top**, celebrate Read Across America Week with kindergarten students reading with their second grade buddies.



Pre-Kindergarten students at **Saint John Neumann Elementary School in Williamsport** celebrated Valentine’s Day with arts, crafts, and a snack.



Pre-Kindergarten students from **Saint Clare/Saint Paul School in Scranton** took advantage of some winter weather to explore and learn more about snow.



Several of the Individualized Instruction graduates from **Good Shepherd Academy in Kingston** returned to read to several library classes, and as shown here, Grace Ferretti and Morgan Morrissey assisted the current students with checking out books during Read Across America Week.