

## FEATURE

## Integrated social ideals 'SPICE' up city school

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff Writer

ROCHESTER — A few years back, Cynthia L. Allen, 31, broke her arm and lost her ability to work on the assembly lines of the factories where she had been taking temporary jobs through an employment agency to support herself. The injury required a lengthy healing process and, since she was no longer able to lift heavy items and couldn't find a job, Allen was compelled to go on public assistance.

Then she learned about B.E.S.T. — Basic Employment Skills Training — a job readiness training program run by the City of Rochester. The program offers six weeks of training, a stipend and assistance with job leads and searches. Through B.E.S.T., Allen decided she wanted to work in day care and took a one-week job training internship at St. Monica School. This led to her becoming a full-time assistant teacher, working in kindergarten to help instructors with the children. Allen, who attends Our Lady of Victory Church, also works in the school's summer day-care program.

"I love it here," Allen said of St. Monica's, where she's worked for more than a year. She added that the school's instructors treat her as an equal in the classroom, using her input on dealing with the kids.

"The people are great. The teachers are great. They don't put you down. They don't act like you're beneath them."

Sister Dianne Crowley, SSJ, the school's assistant principal, said that the school has given one-week internships to several B.E.S.T. participants as part of its Catholic social mission to uplift those on the bottom rung of the economic ladder.

"They get a sense of empowerment," she said. "The teachers are really good role models to them in terms of work ethics."

Allen's success story is one of many that has earned St. Monica's national recognition. At a July conference in Boston, cosponsored by the National Catholic Education Association and Boston College, St. Monica's "School Partnerships" program was selected along with 14 other programs from around the country as "SPICE" initiatives: Selected Programs for Improving Catholic Education.

SPICE programs are chosen by the NCEA as examples of secondary and elementary school initiatives that should be adapted by other schools, and amounts to



Andrea Dixon/Staff photographer

From left, Charnise Galloway, Tyrlik Walker, Brittney Dennis and Khalil McRay laugh as Cynthia Allen catches some of them doing the wrong move while playing "Simon Says" on July 27 at St. Monica's School in Rochester.

the placing of a "seal of approval" on a particular institution, according to NCEA officials. This year's SPICE programs had to integrate Catholic social teaching into all aspects of a school's life, a theme chosen to mark the church's Great Year of the Jubilee 2000. In its application for SPICE, St. Monica's administrators maintained their school upheld church teachings on the dignity of the poor, the dignity of work and the common good, among other things.

"I just was so convinced that what was happening at St. Monica's in the day-to-day consistently integrates the social teachings of the church in a way the school community doesn't even think about," commented Sister Elaine Englert, SSJ, assistant superintendent for WIN Programs, who had encouraged the application. "I knew they had great ideas and realities to share."

According to the school, 88 percent of St. Monica's students live at or near the poverty level. Many come from single-parent homes or are being raised by grandparents. Almost all the students, 98 percent, are black and non-Catholic. Sister Mary Marvin, RSM, principal, noted that a number of Catholic parishes and schools in Monroe County support the school financially and with volunteers, who are also drawn from groups including the federal service program AmeriCorps. AmeriCorps pays stipends and gives financial educational assistance to volunteers who spend a year with community groups.

"We know we can't stand alone," Sister Marvin said. "We know we need the partnership of many areas."

In addition to B.E.S.T. and AmeriCorps, the school named other "partnerships" as examples of Catholic social teaching in action. For example, St. Monica's requires its students' parents to sign a contract with the school stipulating that they will perform 10 hours of volunteer service there, work on fundraisers, attend monthly parent-teacher association meetings, and attend weekly religious services at the church of their denomination.

"It makes the whole community, and the faith community, and the school work to-

gether to bring the necessary support systems to help our children," Sister Crowley said.

She added that the contract ensures the school's programs will be manned by parent volunteers like Jackie Clegett whose husband, Anthony, coaches Catholic Youth Organization basketball at St. Monica's. Clegett herself has assisted teachers with grading exams, has monitored the school's lunchroom and worked on candy sales. Her son, Markus, will be in sixth grade this fall, and her daughter, Alisha, will be in fourth. As nondenominational Christians who attend a Rochester church, she and her husband were happy, however, to sign the parent contract with St. Monica's, she said. It is St. Monica's emphasis on family and God that makes her so willing to volunteer.

"The children know that their parents are there, and that you care, and the children do better," Clegett said.

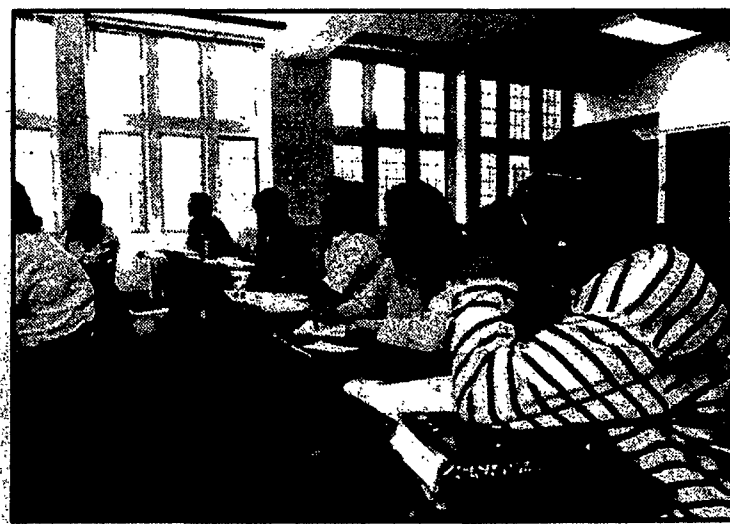
Yet another partnership St. Monica's cited, the youth credit union of the Progressive Federal Neighborhood Credit Union, encourages students to open savings accounts. The school has "Savings Tuesdays" during which student "tellers" collect children's savings books on behalf of the credit union. The school also offers consumer education to students and parents.

"We hope to provide some valuable tools for financial understanding and goal setting for our students through (the youth credit union) which will carry them into their adult years," the school stated in its SPICE application.

Sister Marvin said the best part about being recognized as a SPICE school is that St. Monica's learned it had been realizing the high-minded social ideals of the Catholic church simply by pursuing programs it felt an inner-city Catholic school should.

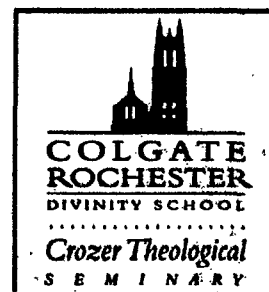
"This was just part of our life," she said.

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## Heartful help

From left, Brian Loesung, John DiPippo and Jonathan Corney pick up bags of clothes at St. Louis School in Pittsford on May 2. The annual Heart & Home service project collected donations, including 500 bags of clothing, that filled 55 vans and cars destined for 14 area agencies.