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DIVINE MERCY ACADEMY EXPANDS FACILITIES, ENROLLMENT

BELGRADE, MONTANA—Enrollment at Christian schools around the country is increasing and Belgrade's Divine Mercy Academy (DMA) is no exception. DMA's enrollment rose 28 percent in the past year, with new local students enrolling as well as students from Georgia, Hawaii, Texas, and Colorado.

The school hired four new teachers and recently completed a capital improvement project, including a two-story addition, new driveway and parking lot, and plumbing infrastructure that enables the school to connect with the city water system. The addition includes new classrooms, common space for assemblies, lunch and school activities, a commercial kitchen area, restrooms, and storage space.

According to Megan Stout, chair of the DMA board, "With the completion of this addition, Divine Mercy Academy expanded instruction into high school and broadened offerings for our preschool and K-8 classrooms. The new space allows us to accept more students in those younger grades, and it freed up a space for a dedicated science lab, which we wanted especially for upper-level science courses."

The new high school program is based on the Catholic intellectual tradition, offering classes in Theology, Philosophy, Math, Science, Literature, Composition, and History.

A fall [New York Times article](#) pointed to a trend in enrollment increases in Christian schools nationwide; it attributed the phenomenon to the COVID-19 pandemic, which pushed children out of classrooms and into online instruction, homeschooling, or private schools offering in-person education.

"DMA is now able to continue growing, and we expect increasing enrollment for the next several years," Stout said. "We will, likely within the next 2-3 years, reach capacity in St. Faustina Hall, which serves our high school, and we are exploring options for either renovating that building to provide larger classrooms or constructing a new classroom building."

The capital improvement project was funded through grants from the E.L. Wiegand Foundation and Gianforte Family Foundation, and contributions from numerous private donors.

The project was designed with the greater needs of the community in mind, including parents, parishioners and outside faith-based groups. Gymnasium use has already increased for Christian homeschool athletic teams, group exercise, conferences, meetings, and celebrations.

Stout envisions continued growth over the next five years. "I expect classrooms that are nearing capacity, with total enrollment around 100, including an expanded preschool program. We will also have high school graduates by then," she projected. "Each year we continue to develop our curriculum, and we seek to provide more opportunities to our students in areas of athletics, entrepreneurship, and the arts, while keeping our focus always on Christ and the development of intellectual and moral virtue."