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First Friday half-days coming to an end

by Tom Gallagher

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The Archdiocese of New York is pitching an initiative to get Catholic schoolchildren spending more time in the classroom, a move that could spell an end to the venerable tradition of First Friday half-days. And parents are rejoicing.

Superintendent of Schools Timothy McNiff is encouraging principals to limit the number of half-days in the school year to 11. Schools may have an additional two half-days for teacher workshops.

Kim Longo, a South Beach mother whose daughter attends St. John Villa Academy in Arrochar, said it was about time the archdiocese stepped in.

As vice president of the Staten Island Federation of Catholic School Parents, she hears complaints from parents all the time about how their children barely have enough time to settle into their classrooms and open their books before it's time to pack them up and head home again after 11 a.m. dismissal.

"It's a joke," she said. "And the children know it's a joke the older they get. They say, 'Do I have to go to school? We don't do anything?' Not to mention the inconvenience for parents who have to pick up their children so soon after dropping them off," she said.

This seems like an unusual Catholic school tradition that deserves a quiet death.

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