

MAXIMIZING LEARNING FOR ALL STUDENTS

INCLUSION PRACTICES FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS AND PARISH RELIGIOUS EDUCATION



IEP? Who, Me?

Supporting Children with Exceptionalities in Catholic School: *What Teachers Need to Know*

When a family desires a Catholic education for their children, they usually mean for *all* of their children. Families with this desire seek a foundation in their Catholic faith that a public school simply cannot provide by law. For a child with a disability, public schools are mandated to provide FAPE (Free and Appropriate Public Education), which includes supports and services through a student's IEP, (Individualized Education Program).

The IEP enables the child to receive specially designed instruction, and supports and services in their LRE (Least Restrictive Environment), with access to the general education curriculum.

What happens when the desire for a Catholic education and the needs of a child with an IEP collide? The answer is "it depends", but it is a question about which educators need to be informed. In the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, families of children who are blind, deaf or who have an intellectual disability may choose one of the 4 [specialized schools](#). The Diocese of

Allentown has its Aquinas Learning Support Programs and Special Learning Centers. Other Diocese may have similar special programs. But families may also wish to enroll their child with an IEP in a more typical Catholic school for these or other exceptionalities, such as a speech language impairment, attention issues, Autism Spectrum Disorder or a learning disability. They may be in search of both an inclusive and a Catholic education.

How might this work?

School districts have an obligation called *Child Find*, in order to identify and serve children needing special education services, even those in private schools.

Child Find emanates from IDEA, the Individuals with Disabilities Act, which protects the rights of all students with disabilities. It is possible for families and Catholic schools to work together to decide if, how and where to provide a child services in order to address the child's areas of need.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE DESIRE FOR A CATHOLIC EDUCATION AND THE NEEDS OF A CHILD WITH AN IEP COLLIDE?

To learn more about FAPE, IEP's, *Child Find* and IDEA:

www.wrightslaw.org

www.paiu.org

www.understood.org

Diocesan Special Programs:

Philadelphia: www.aopcatholicschools.org/special-education/

Allentown: www.allentowndiocese.org/index.php/education/special-education

Savannah: www.diosav.org/news-2015-1-8-first-fully

Programs of Study

Loyola University Chicago

Leading Inclusive Schools:

www.luc.edu/gcce/inclusivepractices/certificateinleadinginclusiveschools/

University of Notre Dame

Program of Inclusive

Education: www.ace.nd.edu/inclusion/about-the-program-for-inclusive-education

NCEA

Resources for Inclusive Catholic Schools:

www.ncea.org/NCEA/Learn/ExceptionalLearnerResources/NCEA/Learn/ExceptionalLearnerResources.aspx?hkey=deb998c-4f2e-4554-8d0e-8056a7d279ee

The child's school district or Intermediate Unit (IU) may evaluate the child, and a decision will then be reached about how best to support the child. Admittedly, a student will probably receive services most fully aligned with the law in a public school. If a family still chooses to stay with the Catholic school, the student may receive some services, such as speech-language therapy, through the district or IU, and they may be delivered on- or off-site.

According to Dr. Andrew McLoughlin, Secretary of Elementary Education for the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, an estimated 30% of Catholic elementary schools have a dedicated learning support teacher or room, and eight of the seventeen archdiocesan high schools also have support services. The [National Catholic Education Association](#) (NCEA) chronicles efforts of other Dioceses to be inclusive of all learners, and how teachers and administrators are seeking strategies, best practices and resources to help serve the needs of exceptional learners in the classroom. In addition, many teachers are earning degrees with dual certification in Elementary and Special Education. Still, families need to keep in mind that even if a Catholic school can provide some or all of the services their child needs, currently they could possibly receive a fuller, legally mandated version of FAPE in a public school. Families have to weigh this reality against their dream of a Catholic

education for their child and make a tough decision.

Still another scenario may surface. What if you, as the teacher, become concerned about a child who is struggling and want to get them additional help beyond what your school may be able to provide? Students can be referred for evaluation of the need for specially designed instruction by their home school district or IU. The child then may be referred for an "Equitable Participation" consultation. Teachers and school administrators, in partnership with families, can decide on strategies and materials to enable the student to access the curriculum. They may also at this point reflect upon the dream of a Catholic education and, as in the case of a student who already has an IEP, make choices about whether or not they feel the Catholic school can provide adequate resources.

Supporting children with disabilities in Catholic school boils down to a question for you as the teacher: How can I best support students and their families when a student in my class needs special education supports provided by my school, by the district or by the IU? It helps to keep in mind that students are students, and your classroom is always going to be diverse, so:

Be welcoming of the student and of their family, as you would be of any other in your class.

Respect the "why" of this student's presence in your class, because the student and their family believe

that they are in the best place – your classroom.

Presume competence and intelligence, because intelligence shows itself in many ways. Be open to this student's gifts as well as their challenges.

Learn about your student, about their exceptionality, about yourself and about new ways to create a classroom that meets the needs of all your students.

Ask for help when you need it. Recognize the wisdom of your colleagues, of the student and of the family as supports. It's okay to be a little apprehensive, but allow your concerns and questions to be a guide in your own faith journey as well.

You can do this!

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Initiatives Related To Inclusion In Catholic Schools: To provide children with special needs the opportunity for an inclusive Catholic education in their home parish schools.

Diocese of Kansas City Initiative:
www.firefoundation.org

Catholic Coalition For Special Education:
www.ccse-maryland.org

National Catholic Board On Full Inclusion:
www.fullinclusionforcatholicools.org

Toledo Diocese Inclusive Education:
www.toledodiocese.org/page/inclusive-catholic-education

Each edition of **Maximizing Learning for All Students** will explore inclusion practices and evidenced based strategies that minimize barriers and maximize learning for ALL students.

Questions or contributions, please email:
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