**Overcoming Concerns**

**Concern over academic gap:** Focus should not be on the academic gap between special needs student and typical peers, focus should be on special needs student's progress towards their own potential.

**Concern that special needs student is “too delayed”:** All students with special needs are “delayed.” This concern stems from lack of familiarity with special needs people and the miss-perception that the special needs student should keep pace with typical peers.

**Concern special needs student will be disruptive:** Special needs students aren't usually any more disruptive than any other student. This concern stems from not understanding how special needs students communicate or not understanding their behaviors. The specialized teaching resources have the correct training and experience to understand behaviors, manage behaviors and promote development.

**Parish school requires support of special education office of Archdiocese in the form of vote of confidence and specialized resources:** Doing something new can be scary, but it shouldn't stop us from trying. This support is not required to operate a successful program. This is a “nice to have.” This concern stems in part from the special education’s office promoting the old model of segregation and not embracing full inclusion.

**Concern it sets bad precedence and uncertainty over what to do if another parent comes along:** Resources, financial and professional, are an important component. “Dump and hope” doesn’t work. The parish or parents should plan to resource the program and future programs. Surprisingly, a private school, especially in cooperation with other schools, can implement inclusive education at a very reasonable cost. The Kansas City F.I.R.E program for example estimates average total cost per child at $6,000 per year for the 70+ children they assist. Some children need more resources, some less, and the resource requirement will change as the student and school matures. A vital understanding is that inclusive education means the entire school community, from parents, to teachers, to administrators, to students are stakeholders and contribute. Leveraging these existing stakeholders means a program is truly inclusive, benefits all students, and becomes very efficient. The goal is not to resource an entirely separate and independent infrastructure. The best approach is to communicate broadly in your parish, create awareness, work with professionals to dispel fears and create sound estimates. The many parishes that have embraced inclusion clearly demonstrate that communities respond to the opportunity and support inclusion financially. That is a precedence to be thankful for.

**Concern that private funding isn’t an appropriate model of funding for a Catholic School:** Catholic schools around the country regularly receive outside financial and resource support to support specialized programs. The key is planning and appropriate forward commitments.

**Concern it will lead to a financial burden:** Inclusive programs typically do not require any capital investment. Funding supports existing teaching resources and some additional specialized resources. Inclusion also means these resources aren’t just for the child with special needs, but for all children. All students will show better academic achievement from inclusion, student retention will improve, enrollment typically increases as siblings join the school and other families of children with special needs come to the school. Well planned inclusion will improve a school’s financial standing.

**Concern it will consume limited human resources:** Different schools manage inclusion differently. Sometimes a principal is heavily involved, sometimes only the special-ed resources, sometimes a committee of volunteers are formed. Typically a school will pass through a learning curve of a year or so before things normalize. Many hands make light work. The key is to trust the experts, ask for volunteers, and invite the whole school to engage in the program. Inclusion will change your school if you let!

**Concern Gen Ed teachers will push back:** This typically isn’t the case. Most teachers are professional in their approach and are supportive. What teachers need is training and support. What resistance and fear that may exist can be overcome with training and increased familiarity with inclusion. Success breeds success. One teacher said “Having “Student” in our school is like having Jesus in the school.”

**Concern Gen Ed teachers aren’t qualified:** This isn’t a requirement and most general education teachers in schools with successful inclusion do not have special education training. What limited training that would be helpful is funded by the parents. The key resources are the specialized teacher’s aide and the inclusion consultant and these are provided by the parents. Inclusion is actually pretty simple. The critical resource is attitude.

**Concern this isn’t the best educational option for Student:** There are over fifty studies that say otherwise. There hasn’t been a study done since 1970 that shows segregated or self-contained environments are superior to inclusive environments. Advancements in inclusive educational models clearly demonstrate superior results for all special needs students regardless of the extent of special needs.