



IMMACULATE CONCEPTION *of* DARDENNE CATHOLIC SCHOOL

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Dear Parents,

The mission of Immaculate Conception of Dardenne Catholic School calls us to be a community of one Spirit in Christ Jesus. In 2015, the parish developed a new Strategic Plan that included an emphasis on, “expanding educational opportunities for children with exceptional needs.” Since the publication of the plan, the school has implemented the action steps from the plan, including “establishing a special education program committee for the Parish School and PSR program, determining procedures and standards for admitting students with exceptional needs to programs, and determining costs for providing special education services for the Parish School as a budget item.”

Members of the school administration and staff have spent time researching how to expand inclusive education in our school while continuing to ensure academic success for all students. Steps taken include researching inclusion of students with significant needs, visiting schools that currently implement inclusion with students with significant needs, and determining the steps necessary to expand inclusive education at Immaculate Conception. Research shows that students who participate in an inclusive education setting have an increased appreciation and acceptance of individual differences. Inclusive education at ICD will create more opportunities of acceptance and new ways for students to live virtuously.

Beginning in the fall of 2017-2018, with the full support of Monsignor Ted and the ICD School Board, Immaculate Conception of Dardenne plans to accept students with significant special needs into an inclusive setting. ICD will continue to follow current enrollment and class size policies accordingly. Students with significant needs will be accepted based upon a process of review, availability of space, and available resources. The goal is to ensure that ICD can provide opportunities of success for all students.

As part of the expansion of inclusive education, ICD has hired Dr. Katy Schierding as our new Special Educator. Dr. Katy Schierding has 15 years of Special Education experience serving in Rockwood School District and Wentzville School District, where she spearheaded several new programs and initiatives. Additionally, ICD will employ paraprofessionals to provide support for students with special needs and be a resource for teachers as they create more inclusive classrooms. Expanding our inclusion program is an exciting step in continuing to implement the mission of ICD more effectively. We know this experience will provide the students of ICD with more opportunities to share the love of God and grow into saints. On the second page of this letter, we prepared a frequently asked questions page. Further questions can be directed to Dan Mullenschlader, dan.mullenschlader@icdschool.org, or Katy Schierding, katy.schierding@icdschool.org.

In Christ,

Dan Mullenschlader

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is inclusive education?

"Inclusive education is educating individuals with physical or intellectual disabilities in the general education classroom, shoulder to shoulder, with their age peers. Whatever individualized needs a student may have are addressed in the classroom, and not by segregating the student from their peer environment." (www.one-classroom.com)

2. How does this affect tuition moving forward?

Currently, tuition rates are the same for all students. The school has applied for a Beyond Sunday grant to offset costs of expanding inclusive education. This decision is a mission-oriented decision and the parish and school are willing to absorb the cost of the program at this time.

3. How are these students managed in the classroom?

ICD has hired a Special Educator who will assist the classroom teacher in: developing and modifying lessons, writing individual student's plans, provide behavioral and academic management training for teachers, and be a liaison with the public school for special services. Paraprofessionals will be hired to assist the students and teachers during everyday classroom instruction, peer-peer interactions, specialty classes, navigating the school environment, and meeting other needs of the student.

4. What do I tell my child about a student with significant special needs such as Downs Syndrome?

All humans are created in God's image and likeness. Regardless of physical differences or challenges God created us all for love. Having children with a significant physical or mental difference at ICD will give us new opportunities to demonstrate God's love and live as an inclusive community of one Spirit in Christ Jesus.

5. Why did ICD make this decision?

The mission at ICD calls us to be a "community of one Spirit in Christ Jesus." The mission does not have conditions and should be inclusive. The message in our Church should be an inclusive message, as Mother Church has been saying since its inception. Christ called us to reach out to the marginalized and fringes of society. Here in Dardenne Prairie we are privileged to have an opportunity to live this message through an inclusive school. We have families in our parish who have children with significant special needs and want a Catholic education for them. ICD has spent two years preparing to provide an appropriate educational setting for these families. We want to provide an opportunity for all children to experience a Catholic education. God's love is unconditional, so ours should be as well.