



**INCLUSION IN  
CATHOLIC CLASSROOMS**

**IT WORKS!**

# HOW WE BEGAN

*It started with hopeful parents, courageous educators and supportive priests*

A group of families met and began to share their common dream of having their children with special needs attend their parish schools with their other children.

Through advocacy with their priests, principals, the School Office and our Bishop, they began to plan for two pilot programs.

The FIRE Foundation was started and began raising money to support schools wanting to include students with significant special needs.

Pilot programs began with 5 children in two schools

# WHERE WE ARE NOW?

- 30 Schools including a variety of students
- 18 schools including students with significant needs
- 75 students with significant needs are included
- Of those, 10 have Down's syndrome
- About 8% of our students have special needs

# WHEN WE BEGAN — IT WAS A LITTLE BIT SCARY!

There were  
so many  
questions!

Is this best for kids?

How do we do this?

For how long?

How do we get started?

What training do we need?

# IS THIS BEST FOR KIDS?

**YES!!!**

- By maintaining a focus on academic skills throughout at students education, we prepare them for higher level jobs and a better quality of life.
- By allowing students to work in a learning community that more accurately reflects the real life community they live in, we prepare them for interactions they will have as adults.
- By expanding the toolbox of our Catholic educators we better meet the needs of students with mild/moderate needs.
- When we include the most vulnerable in our community – we are living out our faith for our children (& others) to witness.

# LET'S DEFINE AND CLARIFY!

## ***ACCOMMODATIONS***

REMOVE THE BARRIER OF A DISABILITY

THEY DON'T CHANGE OUR  
EXPECTATIONS OR THE STUDENTS  
ABILITIES

## ***MILD/MODERATE DISABILITIES***

STUDENTS WHO NEED  
ACCOMMODATIONS, SOME EXTRA  
HELP, ARE MOSTLY ON GRADE LEVEL

## ***MODIFICATIONS***

BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN OUR  
EXPECTATIONS AND A STUDENTS  
ABILITIES

## ***SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES***

STUDENTS WHO ARE WORKING AT A  
SIGNIFICANT (2-3+ YEARS) DELAY  
USUALLY NEED PARA SUPPORT

# HOW DO WE DO THIS???

## REALLY!?!

**It takes a village and there is no better village than a Catholic school!**

- **Dedicated Catholic Educators** – Classroom teachers, Special Education teachers, Specials teachers, Counselors, Principals, Paraprofessionals
- **Families** – those of students with special needs and those with typically developing children
- **Parish** – Priest and parish support
- **Community Resources** – educational and financial supports

# HOW LONG CAN WE INCLUDE KIDS (WHAT GRADE)?

**From Kindergarten (PreK) through transition to adulthood!**

**Special Educators** provide support differently at different levels

***Early Years*** – more hands on, in the classroom and pull-out

***Middle School*** – teacher consult and co-teaching

***High School*** – Peer Mentor Programs

**Paraprofessional support** focuses on aiding the class not shadowing the student. This allows support to be given to all students who would benefit!



# HOW DO WE GET STARTED?

## *Assess your needs and resources*

### **Student Needs:**

Physical – how do they move around

Academic – curriculum modifications

Social/Emotional – social skills support

Sensory – staff and material

Medical – nursing, meds, toileting

### **School Resources:**

Certified Special Educator on staff

Teachers Aides and Paraprofessionals

Other Support staff

Private Therapists

Public School Partners

Community Resources

# WHAT TRAINING/ PD DO WE NEED?

## ***ASSESS YOUR NEEDS***

It's like planning for a baby – you read, you research, you plan... then you adjust!

### **Tiered approach**

Train by level, as needed

Specials Teachers are a great investment!

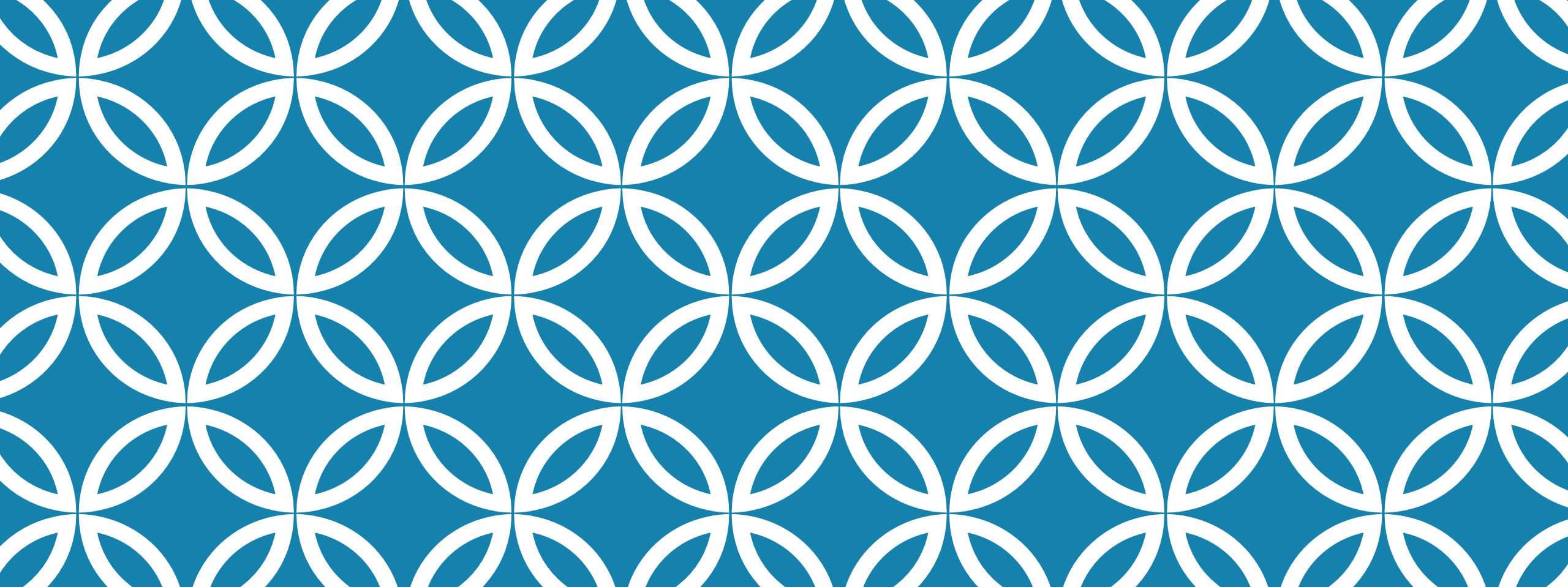
Classroom teachers, Special Educators and Paras must have clearly identified roles and responsibilities – this takes time and patience

# WHAT WE'VE LEARNED

**It's not just the kids with special needs who benefit!**

***We are shaping the leaders of the future and that impacts our community***

- We are shaping advocates for people with special needs
- We are creating a culture of awareness and celebration - This moves us beyond ACCEPTANCE
- This allows true and meaningful relationships to occur – This is where change happens!



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