

**Top 10 Frequently Asked Questions Regarding
SLCS' Plan to Serve Students with Special Needs**

1. What will the program for students with special needs be called?

S.P.I.C.E. (Special People In Catholic Education) recognizes that each of our parish's children is a unique individual with different learning needs. Working together with the support of the S.P.I.C.E. program, the parish community, pastor, administration, teachers and parents help to provide understanding, information, creativity, and willingness to address special education needs.

2. Who will S.P.I.C.E. serve?

S.P.I.C.E. serves students who are struggling to meet the demands of the current, regular classroom setting. We will serve students that have educational needs that require accommodations and modifications to the regular curriculum through multi-sensory teaching strategies. Specifically, we can serve students on the Autism Spectrum, those with Specific Learning Disabilities and developmental delays. Additionally, we can serve students with intellectual disabilities, and/or manageable behavioral disorders. Overall, we can serve the current St. Laurence students on accommodations who just are not thriving within the inclusive academic classroom setting because the pace and/or the content is overwhelming.

3. Who will this program not serve?

We cannot serve students that are medically fragile, not potty trained, unable to feed themselves, require intense therapies and/or specialized equipment, or those who exhibit severe behavior and/or emotional challenges in our S.P.I.C.E. Program.

4. What will the S.P.I.C.E. Program “look like” for our current students?

The current students will notice that we now have two classrooms, the current BASC room for elementary and the Learning Resource Center (LRC) for middle school, that are being used for a small group of students with teachers. They will see these students joining them for some core classes, auxiliary classes, lunch, recess, and special activities in which they can participate. They may notice that a student needs some special assistance for certain activities, but it will not be disruptive to their learning environment or experiences. They will notice that they are given more specific opportunities to model good social skills for their peers, and they will see that all of us have some kind of special need as learners and unique, wonderfully made creations of God.

5. How will the S.P.I.C.E. Program affect the core content area teachers?

The S.P.I.C.E. Program will provide additional training for our teachers by allowing them to plan more universally, to better understand child development practices from current brain research, and to meet the needs of all students effectively. They will partner with the S.P.I.C.E. teachers and staff to serve these students.

6. Do S.P.I.C.E. students pay additional tuition?

Yes, S.P.I.C.E. students pay the regular school tuition in addition to their S.P.I.C.E. tuition. S.P.I.C.E. tuition is based on the amount of time a student receives specialized services and can range from \$3,625 - \$30,000 annually.

7. Do S.P.I.C.E. students attend Mass and other special activities?

The students in the S.P.I.C.E. program certainly attend Mass, Saints Families, and other special activities as they are an integral part of the St. Laurence Catholic School family.

8. I chose SLCS for its strong academic reputation and its ability to help prepare my child for Catholic high school. Will this change?

No, the academic expectations of students in the regular classroom will remain high. We continue to do our best in achieving high acceptance rates into the Catholic high schools and scoring well on our standardized tests. If anything, the S.P.I.C.E. program teaches our students valuable life lessons that make them stronger, more compassionate people whose perspective is expanded to be more inclusive, accepting, and appreciative of each individual's unique gifts and talents. This serves them in developing a strong character and a broader outlook, better preparing them for high school. We continue to provide additional differentiation training to our teachers and help them to best serve the needs of all students.

9. Are we turning into the public school system if we have S.P.I.C.E.?

We are absolutely not turning into a public school system. We are a Catholic school first and foremost, and we are filled with opportunities for our Catholic identity to be practiced and experienced. We pray several times a day and participate in liturgies and traditions unique to Catholic schools. We are a Christ-centered school and will only enhance our Catholic identity by being more open all of God's children. Academically, our plan is different from the way in which the public school system is handling inclusion practices for students with special needs. Unlike public schools, we are able to customize to the academic needs of each student. The demands on the regular education classroom teachers will actually be lessened with this model of inclusive practices.

10. Why does St. Laurence open its doors to a more diverse population of student needs?

Families want their children to receive a Catholic education, and as a parish school, we can do so without sacrificing a faith based learning environment and separating families to different schools.

In an article entitled, "A Rationale for Special Education in Catholic Schools" by Thomas J. Long & Merylann J. Schuttloffel, the following church documents are noted:

The decision to move parish or Catholic school educational programs to an inclusion model is not without controversy. There are questions about quality of services, the financial burden of services, and the preparation of teachers and support personnel. In spite of these barriers, a Catholic educational orientation grounded in Church teaching provides a rationale for the inclusion of the majority of students with special needs who choose to apply to Catholic schools. In addressing the 1999 Conference on the Family and the Integration of Disabled Children and Adolescents, John Paul II said that, "the value of life transcends that of efficiency" ([section]4). This statement should ring strongly in Catholic schools and parishes in which every child deserves whatever is needed for them to learn, and every person deserves whatever is needed in order to be integrated into the life of the parish, each in accord with his or her ability. This is the definition of fairness.

The Church teaches a positive anthropology that each person is a reflection of the divine, and as such, each is bound together in a community of faith that must respect and care for one another. It is the obligation of all members of the Christian community to develop a deeper understanding of those with disabilities and to work to integrate them into society. This obligation includes integrating students with special needs into Catholic schools and parish education programs. Parents have the primary responsibility not only for the education of their children, but also for their integration into the larger society. But this responsibility is shared by Catholic schools and by the whole Catholic community. Contemplative practice engages decision making that honors the authentic Catholic identity of Catholic educational institutions. In the declaration, Gravissimum Educationis, the school is seen as a community and not just as a sociological concept, but also as a theological one "as a genuine and proper instrument of the church" (Vatican II Council, 1966, [section]6). In order to facilitate the integration of those with disabilities, the clergy, teachers, and lay leaders have a responsibility to become educated about the rights and needs of those with disabilities and an obligation to honor those rights in all aspects of Christian life.