

## “STM for ALL”

**Mission Statement:** *“The Mission of ‘STM for All’ is to ensure that all aspects of Saint Thomas More are committed to welcoming all of God’s children by providing the resources, acceptance, compassion and love necessary to support the development of their true potential.”*

STM for All is a new school ministry devoted to developing a welcoming community that offers the resources necessary to embrace all its members. All of God’s children are welcomed into His community through Baptism. Unfortunately, Saint Thomas More school is not adequately equipped to support some of our members that have special needs. The needs that must be supported include a broad range of educational, mental and physical challenges, ranging from different learning styles, autism and dyslexia to students in wheelchairs and everything in between.

The members of STM for All will be focused on making student needs known and implementing the actions necessary to enable STM to be more supportive of these needs. In the area of education, to be truly inclusive STM must take actions to include or welcome all its parish children, in some way, in the school and church. Children who learn together live together, and that is the benefit all children can expect to receive when inclusive education is embraced. STM for All promotes the thinking that ALL children at STM are special and language that labels or separates some children into groups is not welcoming. Success in this area will be measured not only by the direct support services implemented in our school, but by the cultural shift we will experience as a result of educating ourselves and our children in a more diverse environment.

The immediate actions being undertaken by STM for All are to further expand our school resources and our understanding of various special needs required to provide an inclusive Catholic education. Following, please find some Frequently Asked Questions with answers that may provide a clearer understanding of some of the topics involved in this area:

### **How will inclusion at STM be supported?**

An attitude of acceptance is needed from our parish and school community to achieve a truly inclusive educational experience that so many of our other

Diocesan schools have already embraced. Saint Thomas More School needs additional financial support from our parishioners as well as parishioner involvement. Financially, inclusion will be supported partially through grants from the Foundation for Inclusive Religious Education (F.I.R.E.), but will require additional funding. For our families with school-age children, there is an obligation to help educate their children on what inclusion means and the importance of accepting all people. For those families without school-age children, they can do their part to ensure that Saint Thomas More parish is a welcoming environment for all students. Financial assistance would also be very helpful!

### **What is F.I.R.E.?**

F.I.R.E. is the Foundation for Inclusive Religious Education, a non-profit organization that provides financial grants to schools within the Diocese of Kansas City~St. Joseph. F.I.R.E.’s Board of Directors considers grant applications from schools that show a commitment to provide inclusive education and satisfy the necessary eligibility criteria contained in the grant application. F.I.R.E. provides funding for Special Education teachers (high school level), para-educators (adults who are trained to work under the supervision of teachers), materials, equipment and continuing education for faculty and staff. Founded in 1996, F.I.R.E. currently provides financial grants to seven diocesan schools to assist with the cost of special education services in an inclusive setting. As a participating parish school, our parish must support F.I.R.E. in their fundraising efforts, e.g. “Bonfire” event last fall, the F.I.R.E. Golf Tournament and other events currently being planned. F.I.R.E. is not a defined program nor is it a group of children with special needs at our parish schools. **F.I.R.E. is a resource for partial financial assistance.** Children benefiting from the foundation grants are not designated as “F.I.R.E. kids” as the funds that are used benefit the entire school and parish.

### **How does STM work with F.I.R.E.?**

STM is currently receiving grant money from F.I.R.E. to assist with the costs of our para-educators and continuing teacher education. The grants received from F.I.R.E. will unfortunately not cover the cost of all the additional resources that are required. Therefore, STM for All is working to increase awareness of the need for inclusive education and to raise additional funds.

## **What do I do if my child needs specialized services?**

If it is known prior to Kindergarten that the child has an identified need, the parents should contact the STM school office to let them know. Also, the parents should contact F.I.R.E., and take steps to join and become active in the F.I.R.E. Parent Group. If a child has a need that appears after starting school, the first step is to make contact with STM's Resource Room. The Resource Room team will meet with parents and teachers to determine what services are needed for the student. Often, an evaluation is warranted and will either be done through the Grandview School District or by the Resource Room staff. If a child qualifies for services through the school district, an Individual Educational Plan (IEP) will be written and services will be provided. If the child does not qualify through the district, the Resource Room team uses the information to put together the best educational plan for the student at Saint Thomas More School. If the child receives services from the district and it is decided that a para-educator is essential for the child's success, contact should be made with the F.I.R.E. office. Once a year grants are written to the foundation requesting funds for assistance with our students with special needs.

you have questions or would like to assist in making inclusion strong at STM, please call Tricia McCullough at 942-0838 or Teresa Doty at 942-3949.

## **What can STM offer now?**

STM can offer educational interventions in the Resource Room, consultation for outside evaluations and para-educators and teachers aides through a program with Avila. *STM for All* is currently developing an after school tutoring program and working with the school administration to develop a plan for an additional full-time special education teacher and expanded Resource Room. In order for Saint Thomas More to be successful and reach our goals for inclusive education at STM, we need the support of our parents in giving of their time, talent and treasure. *STM for All* welcomes participation from all of our school parents and parishioners, as inclusive education will benefit all of our children and shape the future of our Catholic community.

## **Who should I contact if I have questions or would like to be part of the *STM for All* team?**

Many lives have been forever changed by inclusive Catholic education! You can make a difference in the lives of all STM children by getting involved. If