

# MAXIMIZING LEARNING FOR ALL STUDENTS

## INCLUSION PRACTICES FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS AND PARISH RELIGIOUS EDUCATION



In Catholic classrooms today, every student is more than a learner, they are an apostle of our Faith, carrying the light of Jesus in their words and actions. When students embrace the gift of being His apostles, they become witnesses of truth, kindness, and acceptance, and they learn with a deeper purpose. At Assumption BVM School, we are rooted in our mission:

***“Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary School exists to foster a community of faith and academic excellence by promoting Jesus’ teachings, celebrating individual student strengths, and supporting individual student needs while providing students with the skills necessary to make responsible and respectful choices based on their Catholic faith.”*** This mission comes to life each day as our students put faith into action—living as apostles, guided by love, compassion, and a desire to serve.



### Being An Apostle: Embracing Inclusion in our Catholic Schools



In early Christianity, an apostle was someone personally chosen by Jesus and given a vital role in sharing the Faith.

Today, we recognize that we are *all* called to be apostles of Jesus. At its core, the word *apostle* means “messenger.” While every one of our students is a messenger of Jesus, I truly believe that certain students are placed in our path to reveal a deeper part of God’s greater plan. Students with disabilities remind us that love and acceptance are not measured by ability or achievement, but by compassion, inclusion, and the ability to love deeply, just as Jesus did.

In the spring of 2022, as the Learning Support Teacher, I was informed that a student with Down Syndrome would be

enrolling in our Pre-K-K3 program. The Archdiocese of Philadelphia’s Rising Together Alliance, which advocates for children with disabilities—specifically intellectual disabilities, committed to support Assumption BVM as we became providers of this link for inclusive education. From the moment Livia was accepted at Assumption BVM School, I knew that God was not only welcoming her with open arms, but also embracing her educators and peers. Her presence is a gift—an opportunity for our entire school community to grow in love, compassion, and faith.

As the Learning Support Teacher at Assumption BVM School, I have the privilege of working closely with students and families of those with learning differences. When I reflect on this past year supporting Livia in Kindergarten, I am in awe, not only of her abilities but of the joy and life she brings into the classroom and school building each and every day.

Students with intellectual and learning disabilities must navigate a world that is not often structured for them. Yet,

they show up daily with courage, resilience, and determination. The determination that Livia demonstrated in the classroom was remarkable. She was a true example of what it means to be carried by faith: when you are fueled by trust, God carries you through. Working with Livia and other students with disabilities has allowed our classrooms and school environment to become more patient, more compassionate, and more understanding. These students teach us to look beyond the surface, to listen with our hearts, and to recognize abilities rather than limitations. Supporting students with learning differences is a daily reminder of Jesus' greatest commandment: *to love one another*.



At Assumption BVM, we are more than a school—we are a family. And by embracing students who learn differently or need additional support, we nurture empathy and grace in every interaction.

In Matthew 5:8, we are reminded: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” Being a messenger of

God means making His love visible for all to see. One of the greatest blessings to witness as a teacher has been the relationship between Livia and her peers. The pure love and acceptance are evident in the smallest moments: when a classmate reaches out to hold her hand during a story, or wraps her in a hug on the playground. These moments are sacred reminders that they see her—and she sees them. And in those exchanges, they see God. Time and time again, little hearts in our classrooms have shown the greatest commandment: to love one another. Livia and her peers remind us that the Kingdom of God is built not on perfection, but on humility, gentleness, and unwavering faith.



Supporting Livia and other students with learning differences teaches us not to be defined by our challenges, but allows us to work through them with dignity and grace. Watching Livia flourish in an environment that embraces inclusivity, is witnessing the Gospel in action.

It is a reminder that every person has a purpose, every life has value, and that God's love

is for everyone, especially those who are so often overlooked.



The journey toward greater inclusion in our Catholic schools is not without its challenges—but far greater are the blessings it brings. In the faces of the children we serve, especially those with learning or intellectual disabilities, we encounter the living presence of Jesus. All children are a gift from God, and those who learn differently are no exception.

As Catholic schools across the Archdiocese of Philadelphia continue to grow in both advocacy and support for students with learning differences, our communities are not just becoming more inclusive—they are becoming more faithful.

Let us continue to walk with Livia and every student with a disability who enters our school family. May we be transformed by their witness to God's beautiful and unique plan, for in their light of faith, we truly see Jesus.

