

***Transcript of
National Catholic Partnership on Disability
Access in Catholic Education for Students with
Special Needs Part 2: High School
February 16, 2010***

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Participants

Marie Powell
Dr. Karen Tichy
Doreen Engel

Presentation

>> Operator: Greetings and welcome to the NCPD webinar "Access in Catholic Education for Students with Special Needs Part 2: High School."

At this time all participants are in a listen-only mode. (Operator instructions)

It is now my pleasure to introduce your host, Marie Powell. Thank you, Marie Powell, you may begin.

>> Marie Powell: Thank you. Good afternoon and let me welcome you to "Access in Catholic Education for Students with Special Needs: High School." My name is Marie Powell. I serve as the Executive Director of the Secretariat of Catholic Education of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in Washington, D.C. and I'm the moderator of today's program.

I'm very pleased to welcome you to this second webinar focusing on "Access in Catholic Education for Persons with Special Needs." Our presenters for today are Dr. Karen Tichy and Doreen Engel. I will introduce them more fully shortly. For today's presentation the PowerPoint is available for download, but because of the size it needs to be downloaded in three parts.

Also, some of the great resources that are referenced in the conversation today may not be on the website at this point, but please check back later in the week and they will be.

The Bishops of the United States, beginning with their 1978 Pastoral Statement on Persons with Disabilities have consistently called for the Catholic community to welcome the full participation of persons with disabilities into all aspects of church life. Subsequent documents such as Guidelines for the Celebration of Sacrament for Persons with Disabilities, Welcome and Justice for Persons with Disabilities, a Framework of Access and Inclusion and the National Directory for Catechesis Chapter



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7, further expand and define the Church's belief and practices for and with people with disabilities.

I am especially pleased to be participating in this webinar and would like to express my gratitude to the National Catholic Partnership on Disability for sponsoring both of these webinars on Catholic elementary and high schools to support the application of these teachings more fully in our school settings.

Our first program, held in October 2009, related to serving students with disabilities in Catholic elementary schools. If you missed it, and wish to view it and the accompanying resources you may do so at the website of the National Catholic Partnership on Disability. The link is www.ncpd.org/webinars. There is no charge for viewing NCPD webinars, which are archived on their website. You are welcome to access any of them and their downloadable resources that may be helpful to you.

Today's webinar addresses ways of serving students with special needs in Catholic high schools. We are emphasizing the term "special needs" in this webinar to indicate that we will be addressing the needs of a broader range of high school students than those with a specifically identified disability. Some high school students struggle if provided only traditional methods of instruction. Other students, during their high school years, have medical, mental health or family issues that require a sensitive response from administrators and teachers.

As one who has both taught and been academic dean in Catholic high schools I've been privileged to see how a Catholic high school is enriched when it makes adaptations in its programs so that it can include more students who learn differently or have health conditions or a disability which requires special response from a school community.

Before we proceed further with our webinar, I invite all of you to participate in our opening prayer that you can view on your screen.

Loving God, you make each living person in your image. Guide our hands to build access and welcome. Guide our actions to create school communities, open to the gifts of each individual. Give us understanding that your body is incomplete if people are left behind. Give us an appreciation of the role we must play in spreading your Good News to all we meet. Guide us always, Lord, in your way. Amen.

We are particularly fortunate today to have two presenters for this webinar who have extensive experience in assisting Catholic high schools to serve students with special needs. Dr. Karen Tichy currently serves as Associate Superintendent for Instruction and Special Education in the Catholic Education Office of the Archdiocese of St. Louis and has many years of experience developing procedures and training staff so that Catholic schools can address effectively the needs of a broad range of students.

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Doreen Engel, is Director of Special Education for the Archdiocese of Washington. Her prior experience includes establishing a program for students with special needs in a Catholic high school which had students with special needs, but no structured approach about how to help them succeed.

In preparing this webinar, the three of us have also benefited from the insights of Dr. Nancy Thompson and Jan Benton of the staff of the NCPD. In addition to coordinating the webinars, Nancy brings the background of teaching in a Catholic high school to her current role as Director of Programs and Diocese in Relations at the NCPD and Jan has broad experience as Executive Director of the National Catholic Partnership on Disability. Thank you both, Nancy and Jan.

Since we have presenters with considerable experience in including students with special needs into a Catholic high school, I am pleased to say that the last part of this one-hour program will be used to respond to questions our audience may have. If you wish to submit a question, please click on the Question button in the upper right-hand corner above the slide and click send. If we do not have time to answer all the questions submitted today, please feel free to e-mail one of us later with your question. Our contact information is available on the webinar website in our resources handout at www.ncpd.org/webinar/highschool. Scroll down the high school web page to find all of the handouts to which we will refer during this webinar.

Right now we want to get to know our audience better, so we are going to ask you to take the poll that you see on your screen. From the choices given, would you indicate what you believe is the most significant challenge you face in educating Catholic high school students with special needs? Please just select one answer. We'll give you a minute to record your choice. And these are ones that we think we have heard that many schools try to address and in some cases faculty members have come to conclusions, which is the most challenging one. So look through, pick out your most challenging one, and then click Vote.

Let's see what we have. That's a good-looking screen. Our most -- it looks like the main one is determining what special needs your school can reasonably address and close behind those are developing positive attitude toward educating students with special needs and providing appropriate professional development. So these are the main ones and we have suggestions on that as to things that might be helpful to you and also financing is significant and so we also have some ideas on that. Thank you for letting us know from the very beginning what are some of your concerns.

Before we get to the heart of our discussion today I would like to share with our audience some of the assumptions on which these presentations are based. They are the following. Catholic schools at all levels are called by their faith to welcome and integrate into their communities students with many different talents and needs. A school community is enriched when it successfully does this. Almost all Catholic high schools provide an academic education, which prepares students for education

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beyond high school. They rightfully take pride in the large number of graduates who enroll and succeed in college.

Educating students with special needs does not diminish the academic atmosphere of a Catholic high school, if school personnel are willing to work with parents and students to assess a particular student's needs and make efforts to respond to those needs. Catholic schools are as unique as the students they educate. Thus we know that their ability to educate students with special needs will vary according to the physical layout of the school and the personnel and financial resources which are available. Some Catholic high schools will be available to accommodate only those students who need minor adaptations and instructions, others have developed programs to serve an extensive range of disabilities.

All Catholic high schools serve some students with special needs, even if those needs were not evident or did not exist at the time of enrollment. The latter might include a serious illness or accident or family emergency that interferes with a student's ability to succeed in school. The key is having a logical approach to determining how particular students can be supported.

At this time, I would like to ask both Karen and Doreen to provide us some additional details about their own involvement in educating students with special needs in Catholic high schools. Karen, can you tell us how you began your work in this field?

>> Dr. Karen Tichy: My very first year as a high school teacher my principal wrote on the evaluation form at the end of the year, "if you are going to stay in education, you will have to learn that everyone does not learn as easily as you do." That really got my attention and I began developing sensitivity to students with special needs.

The last year that I was a high school principal I taught an extra class, an extra section, as it was easier to teach it myself as principal than to find someone else to take it. These were all students who came from our Archdiocese in the special education learning centers in St. Louis.

At the end of the year, one boy said you gave us work like the smart kids get and believed we could do it and we did. I had come a long way in 20 years. The next year I came to the Catholic education office and that began my work in researching and promoting the learning consultant model for addressing special needs.

>> Marie Powell: Thank you, Karen. Doreen, tell us a little bit about how you began working with students with special needs in Catholic high schools.

>> Doreen Engel: Thanks, Marie. I first began working with high school students with special needs when I was principal of a Catholic school for students with developmental disabilities in the mid-1980s, then later I worked for six public school systems in Rhode Island arranging job training for high school students with disabilities. Most recently I was hired in 1998 by St. Johns College high school here

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in Washington, D.C. to help create and develop the Banel program, designed to help high school students access college preparatory curriculum.

>> Marie Powell: Doreen, having had experience in a variety of settings, can you say something about why you believe it is important for Catholic high schools to be interested in the education of students with special needs?

>> Doreen Engel: I'm often asked this question and usually I answer by asking our high school teachers and administrators to reflect on several realities, some of them are the following: First of all, parents are asking us for help for their children. Much like the encounter Jesus had with the Samaritan woman we may feel we have to say "no" to some students because they might detract us from the original mission or purpose of our school, however, many schools have found that also like Jesus they are able to respond and in fact this response actually enhances the mission and purpose of the school.

Yet another reality is good education is good education, period. Once a school begins to look at creative and effective methods for providing access to a wider range of students, it's fairly typical to find all students at the school begin to perform better.

And finally, Catholic high schools nationwide are doing this work and they are doing it very well. There are many myths and misunderstandings about what is required, effective and beneficial. Those Catholic high schools that haven't taken a look at this issue for a while could be astonished at what is available to support students and what the research now shows about the benefits of providing greater access to the curriculum.

By way of example, I particularly remember one student that I had at St. Johns. She did have significant special needs, many stemming from the fact she spent the first nine years of her life in an orphanage in Romania. As a senior she did an outstanding project on the moral consideration surrounding international adoption. Her classmates were given a profound insight into this topic, one which encompasses so many aspects of Catholic social teaching. Had this young woman not attended a Catholic high school, I think many people, myself included, would have lost out on an important opportunity.

>> Marie Powell: Thanks, Doreen. Karen, I'm sure you might like to add something to those comments in light of your own work.

>> Dr. Karen Tichy: I too see educating students with special needs as essential elements of the teaching needs of Jesus and his church. On occasions when people question whether people with special needs should be in Catholic schools, I will say as our Bishops told us in 1972, we are *To Teach as Jesus Did* and if there is one thing Jesus is not, it's exclusive. Catholic social teaching emphasizes the dignity and worth of each individual human person, solidarity with people who have characteristics different than ourselves, special care for those who are vulnerable and working for the

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common good of all. At the same time, our Bishops have also stated and as we also believe, the Catholic schools are the best and most effective means available to the Church for passing on our faith to future generations. Based on these teachings we have to do what is humanly possible to provide Catholic education for all who desire it and that certainly includes students with special needs.

There are success stories of students with relatively severe special needs in Catholic schools. I'm reminded of a student I know who in the third grade could not read, hated to read and in fact cried at the sight of a book. Through the dedication and expertise of his teachers, he completed grade school and high school and he became a competent reader. He completed college and now he is earning a master's degree in whatever one earns a master degree in to become of all things an archivist. And this was a student who had a severe reading disability.

Catholic high schools across the country, I'm sure, have their own success stories of students whose special talents developed during high school. Talents that sometimes, in fact maybe even often, highly academic students do not have. I think again of that class I taught during my last year as a high school principal. Many, many, many of those students had an amazing talent at predicting what would happen in a given circumstance, a higher order of thinking skill to be sure. They stand in contrast to many honors classes I taught over the years where students craved a definite right or wrong answer.

Most of all, the presence of students with special needs, indeed the diversity of a school student body on a variety of characteristics, enhances the spiritual dimension of the Catholic school. It enables the school to be a microcosm, a mirror of the universal church and it gives the entire school community a daily opportunity to understand the true meaning of the word "Catholic," which has root in a Greek word that means "universal." If we are open the presence of students with special needs can deepen our appreciation of human persons and human life itself.

>> Marie Powell: Karen, I couldn't agree with you more, I was privileged to be on the staff of Paul VI Catholic High School in Fairfax, Virginia for years. The school opened in 1983 and serves primarily suburban families who place a high priority on having their children well prepared for college. From the beginning, however, the school made a commitment to include in the school community students with a variety of special needs. From this commitment administrators and teachers learned that students with learning disabilities or attention deficit disorder could be well prepared for college if given the proper support.

Because the school offers a variety of AP, honors and regular courses, along with smaller specialized classes, it's not unusual to find a student with a learning disability taking one type of class in one subject and honors level class in another subject. Course selection is based on a student's specific strengths and challenges. In the 1990s, the school added a wonderful program for students with intellectual disabilities and I'm going to refer to that later.

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Doreen, let me go back to you and ask what kinds of special needs are most often seen at the high school level?

>> Doreen Engel: Research would support the statement that every high school, whether or not it is a Catholic high school, has a significant number of students who have special needs, such as ADHD, a specific learning disability, anxiety, and/or depression. These are the needs that really every high school must be prepared to encounter and to help address.

>> Marie Powell: Knowing that, Doreen, can you identify the supports that are most effective for high school students with special needs?

>> Doreen Engel: First a culture that is open and accepting about the fact that students with special needs can and do succeed academically when they're given the assistance they need.

This assistance should include school personnel and parents working cooperatively to support the student. Such a culture includes a clear understanding of how to handle confidential information appropriately and a shared commitment on the part of all faculty members to educate every student enrolled in the school. Clearly identifiable support is also a key component. For example, exactly who can a struggling student turn to for help?

Next, schools should consider what they can offer in terms of accommodations. Accommodations are those good educational practices that allow students with special needs access to the curriculum. Accommodations don't change what a student learns or how much a student learns. Teachers should be aware that accommodations such as extra time on exams have been thoroughly researched. Others, such as priority scheduling, allow students to take difficult courses at the time of day that is most effective for them.

If high school teachers familiarize themselves with the accommodations that are routinely available on the SATs or the ACTs, perhaps they may feel more comfortable with providing them in course work to students who need them.

Finally, how do individual students come to understand and ultimately advocate for their own learning needs? Adolescence is of course a natural time of self-discovery, a time when all our students are rightfully trying to develop a clear picture of themselves. This includes an accurate understanding of how they learn and what they'll need to do in order to learn effectively for the rest of their lives. At the same time, teens are trying to become more independent from their parents in age appropriate ways. It's very common for students with unidentified or under-identified learning needs to suddenly and often painfully experience serious academic problems in ninth grade, although they may not have done so in the past. This could be because of demands increased or may be the teen is understandably unwilling to accept help from a parent. Anticipating this problem and providing the support to

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prevent it will benefit many learners through their high school years, as well as send a positive message about individual responsibility and self-knowledge.

>> Marie Powell: Thanks, Doreen for describing ways which help all Catholic high school students to succeed. Karen, you refer to the learning consultant model earlier. Can you describe how Catholic high schools in the Archdiocese of St. Louis, use the learning consultant model?

>> Dr. Karen Tichy: The primary job of a learning consultant is to work with classroom teachers. The learning consultant provides a learning profile for each student with a diagnosed special need. This profile explains the student's disability in "teacher language" and describes how the disability impacts this specific student. All students with ADHD, for example, are not affected in the same way. The learning profile also states the specific classroom adaptations that are likely to have a high payoff for this particular student.

The learning consultant consults, hence the name, with the teachers about those adaptations, supports the teacher in implementing them, demonstrates them in the classroom if necessary and checks to see if the adaptations are indeed bringing the student success. If not, a plan B is developed with different strategies.

>> Marie Powell: Karen, are there other things a learning consultant does?

>> Dr. Karen Tichy: Yes, but these are secondary roles to the primary role of consulting with the classroom teachers around specific students. These secondary roles include serving as liaison with the parents and with professionals working with the special needs students outside the school, assisting parents with accessing the external resources available in the community, working with students on self-advocacy and learning strategy skills, and identifying a course of action to help struggling, but not yet diagnosed students.

>> Marie Powell: Karen, how did you start this approach in St. Louis?

>> Dr. Karen Tichy: Almost 20 years ago I researched what was being done in the literature that described a consultative, indirect service approach. I saw that consultative approach as a way that many more students could be helped by one special needs professional than was possible via direct instruction. I also saw the approach as affecting students learning in a positive way during all 30 instructional hours a week because adaptations would be made in the regular classrooms. I wrote a grant to a local foundation requesting funds to pay the salary and benefits for a start-up pilot-type program to pay the learning consultants salary and benefits for one year.

Two partner high schools had agreed to split the position if I could obtain the grant. They also understood that if they found this position valuable they would need to fund it going forward. At the end of the year both high schools said they couldn't live

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without their learning consultant. From this beginning almost all of our 28 Catholic high schools have a learning consultant position today and about 10% of our students have one or more diagnosed disabilities.

>> Marie Powell: Karen, what information do the learning consultant and other school staff use to determine who the school can serve?

>> Dr. Karen Tichy: When there is a question about whether a student can be served almost always that student has one or more diagnosed special needs or there are clear indications that an evaluation for the presence of a disability is indicated. In such cases we rely very heavily on information from the external professional such as psychologists, physicians, public school psychological examiners and so forth who have assessed the student and we seek three very special types of information from them. First we want to know about the student's strengths and challenges as identified during the assessment process and the resulting diagnosis from the evaluation if there is one.

Secondly, we want to know how this diagnosis or the pattern of strengths and weaknesses is likely to affect functioning in school for this specific student and then finally we want to know what adaptations the professional recommends be provided in the school setting. With that information, the school then discerns its ability to provide the recommended adaptations. No disability labels are included or excluded categorically. This approach is used both with incoming students and with current students whose special needs are identified after enrollment.

>> Marie Powell: Karen, can you tell us what factors you have found as the most important for success in using this model?

>> Dr. Karen Tichy: Well, it is not only what I have found, but it is also what the research shows. It's important that faculty believe students with special needs can learn. It's important that the consultants have time to consult and have crystal clear support from the administration that teaching students with special needs is an essential element of our educational mission. Those are the keys to success.

>> Marie Powell: Karen, thank you for giving more detail about this very successful approach used in the Archdiocese of St. Louis. I know those participating in this webinar will find the resources you provided on the website to be quite valuable. Doreen, you have used student assistance teams in your work. Can you describe how these operate in the Archdiocese of Washington?

>> Doreen Engel: There are many other names for the group: teacher assistant team, student support team, etcetera. They provide essentially the same service. Basically a group of faculty members meet regularly to discuss students who have academic or behavioral problems. Students can be referred to the team by either teachers or parents. Many dioceses are using the model throughout schools with great success. A student assistance team is helpful to students in a variety of ways. The team

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members can receive targeted advanced training so they have extra ideas for how teachers can help specific students. Then the team can document their concerns so that if a student does need to be referred outside of the school for additional help the paperwork needed to accomplish that can be efficiently and professionally completed.

Having a group of people looking at a concern, each from his or her perspective means that sometimes a quick and helpful solution is found and the team brings a level of professionalism that parents really appreciate. More information about how to develop such a team at your school, as well as the research that supports this model, is available on the NCPD site.

>> Marie Powell: Doreen, I have another question for you. Karen referred to the importance of faculty members believing that students with special needs can learn if given the appropriate supports. What would you recommend so that faculty and staff of a Catholic high school could become more familiar with the supports available for students with different types of special needs?

>> Doreen Engel: I recommend that they contact their local universities and colleges. The person responsible for arranging accommodations for local college students would be an excellent resource for professional training for the faculty. There are organizations also devoted to helping persons with disabilities, such as CHAD, which stands for Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. LV Online, and the Council for Exceptional Children, which is abbreviated CEC. They all have excellent free news letters that one can subscribe to and the links to these organizations, as well as Catholic groups that provide information on working with persons with disabilities, are also posted on the webinar site.

Another practical approach is to find out if any of the Catholic middle schools in your area have a particularly effective way of working with their students. Many of the methods used with middle school students are easily transferable to the high school level.

Of course they also recommend talking to your local public school community. It may be that faculty could be included in in-services that are already planned for area public schools. And if possible, consider a membership in a national organization such as CHAD or CEC. Ask department heads or guidance counselors to circulate pertinent articles from the organizations to every faculty member on a regular basis.

Also, high school leaders can take a look at a new resource that will soon be available from the National Catholic Educational Association. It's one that is designed specifically for high schools. This book entitled *Serving Students with Disabilities, a Resource for Planning and Implementation*, will address in more detail many things we'll be touching on in this webinar.

>> Marie Powell: Thank you, Doreen. Karen, do you have anything else to add to Doreen's suggestions?

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>> Dr. Karen Tichy: In the case of students with diagnosed special needs we rely heavily on the advice of the professional who diagnosed the student's condition. That professional knows the student very well and can help us identify what strategies out of all the possible strategies that might help a student with a certain type of disability are most likely to help this particular student. It helps us tailor our approach to the specific student with an attention disorder or an anxiety disorder or whatever the case may be, rather than to the "typical" student with this diagnosis if such a person as typical student exists.

>> Marie Powell: Doreen, you've had considerable experience with various kinds of technology that assists students with special needs to learn. Can you describe some of the assistive technology you judge to be the most valuable?

>> Doreen Engel: Assistive technology is a gold mine for students with special needs. Software that helps students to access textbooks or take notes, work math problems without pencil, and paper or organize assignments is easily available. In some cases these programs are free and in most cases they can be easily purchased for under \$100.

The access that technology can provide to students with special needs is truly amazing. For example, here in our archdiocese it is literally possible for a student with low vision or dyslexia to attend Catholic school from pre-Kindergarten all the way through graduate school using just one specific type of text to speech software called Carswell. Learning to use this one program would provide the student the access to print that he or she needs for a lifetime of learning. To give our viewers and participants more detail about different kinds of technology which can assist students with special needs there is a PowerPoint presentation posted on the NCPD site at www.ncpd.org/webinar.

>> Marie Powell: Thanks, Doreen, for the suggestions. Another area I would like us to explore relates to some of the reasons why some Catholic high schools are hesitant to enroll students with special needs. One of those is the cost that doing so may entail. Karen, can you describe how the learning consultants are funded in the Archdiocese of St. Louis.

>> Dr. Karen Tichy: Learning consultants are considered nonteaching faculty members, just like guidance counselors, library media specialists, athletic directors and so forth. Our high schools have found that successful students with special needs contribute to maintaining enrollment. On average, if the presence of a learning consultant enabled just about eight students to be admitted and retained, the increased tuition revenue would cover expenses.

In all but a few cases, students with special needs pay the same tuition as any other student; there is no extra charge. Philosophically this is an inclusionary stance and practically the learning consultant builds the school's capacity to use a wide range of

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instructional methods and all children benefit from this variety. It's just about the best kind of professional development possible because it's tailored to meeting the needs of students right there in your own school.

>> Marie Powell: Thanks, Karen. Doreen, what is your experience about funding for special programs in Catholic high schools?

>> Doreen Engel: Well, of course there is a cost associated with providing services to students with special needs. But schools can begin with the supports whose cost is negligible and I'll define that in under \$100. These would include a wide range of accommodations, having free materials about LD and ADHD available for student access, developing a student assistance team to respond professionally to students who are struggling and offering a variety of free and low-cost assistive technology for student use. Then once these items are in place, a school should begin to retain and graduate students who would have previously failed out or been asked to leave. This is a real financial benefit to the school and then a portion of this tuition money could be diverted to provide even more sophisticated support such as the learning consultant model that Karen has been discussing.

Other schools have found even more creative solutions. In our area the Catholic Coalition for Special Education was formed specifically to raise money to support inclusion exclusively for Catholic schools in the Archdioceses of Washington and Baltimore. Within its first five years CCSE has given over \$500,000 to our area Catholic schools who are seeking to hire special educators. With such professionals within, the school community schools can reach out to students with more significant special needs. Perhaps other dioceses would find interest in starting a similar group in their area.

>> Marie Powell: Thanks, Doreen. I'm familiar with other diocese whose foundations or special fundraising organizations have been founded to assist students with special needs to access Catholic education either at Catholic schools or parish religious education programs. For example in the Kansas City-St. Joseph Diocese in Missouri, in 1996 the Foundation for Inclusive Religious Education, frequently just referred to as FIRE, was started to provide financial assistance so students with special needs could attend Catholic schools.

Even earlier in 1971, the Knights of Columbus in Virginia established Covar, a part of the Knights to provide financial assistance to programs which aide citizens with intellectual disabilities. Covar has been quite generous to Catholic schools which have begun programs to serve in Virginia.

Let me, though, switch to another question some Catholic high schools have about enrolling students with special needs. That is: Will doing so lead to the perception that the academic excellence of their school is undermined? Doreen, how would you respond to that concern?

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>> Doreen Engel: Well, I have to ask why would there be an assumption that disability should be equated with lack of excellence? Students with disabilities vary in academic performance just as students without disabilities do. Some already excel and others could excel if their needs were properly addressed.

Schools that worry about undermining their academic excellence if they enroll students with special needs quite frankly have not accepted the fact that such students are in their school already. Perhaps a student's special needs developed after being admitted or the student is such a hard worker or so bright he or she is able to perform well despite significant challenge. Whatever the case, such students may eventually be faced with enormous stress and difficult choices. They may not be able to participate in extracurricular activities because they are weighted down with home work or choose course work that is truly too easy for them to give themselves breathing room. Identifying students and addressing their needs will enhance a school's academic standing rather than detract from it.

Of course, schools are rightly concerned about being academically excellent, that is what we as a society ask them to do. But the problem becomes when a school feels that the only way to academic excellence is "one size fits all."

I'm reminded here of a student I had at St. John's who I'll call Gary. He had behavioral problems in public middle school and his grades were in the C and D range. He had two siblings, both of whom were significantly disabled and who took up a significant amount of his parent's time. So Gary wasn't the type of student that a Catholic high school might brag about accepting. However, once he came to St. John's he received targeted help from the faculty and along with his parents, Gary came to understand that he had been struggling with undiagnosed ADHD for his entire school career. This helped him to feel he had a fresh start and became open to trying various support to help him learn well and demonstrate effectively what he knew. Eventually he became an outstanding student, took certain AP and honors courses, graduated from one of our local honors colleges, and is pursuing a professional career. And during this time at St. John's, Gary decided to become a Catholic. He's the type of person that any school would rightfully be proud of.

>> Marie Powell: Thanks for that example, Doreen. I also had the experience of working with a wonderful young man with Asperger's Syndrome. He needed special help in math but was able to take AP French. As academic dean I noted that some students with identified disabilities were more successful on standardized tests than some other students, possibly because they had learned to compensate for their disability. They were not pulling down PSAT or SAT scores just because they had a disability.

Let me move to another topic related to a Catholic high school accepting a very academically diverse range of students. What about students whose special needs are uncommon or seem to be in contrast to the college prep mission of the school? Doreen, what are your thoughts on that?

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>> Doreen Engel: It's true that some conditions such as intellectual disabilities, deafness or visual impairment are not that common in adolescents. However, the education needs of students with these and less common conditions may be able to be well met at their local Catholic high school.

Now I know that may seem surprising to some, but it is critical to remember that individual needs vary enormously, even though technically two people may have the same diagnosed condition. Therefore it is really important to get the facts about an individual student's specific needs before deciding whether a particular student can be successful at a school or not. Also, our knowledge of how to teach students who have special needs associated with uncommon disabilities has expanded enormously. The effective technology, research, Federal law and community support is now making certain types of education feasible when in the past it may not have seemed so.

And also when schools are considering who they serve, it's very important that they think about their physical layout and providing physical accessibility. Many schools have found that plans to arrange for physical accessibility are actually more manageable than one might expect. Once a school is accessible it becomes possible for not only students but teachers and parents who have mobility needs to be fully participating members of the school community. So let me give just a few examples of what is available for students with uncommon disabilities.

Many students with intellectual disabilities are attending Catholic high schools and are going on to college. See the links available at the NCPD site regarding such nationwide programs as well as research that supports their effectiveness.

I'll also mention the Zobrest Decision, a Supreme Court ruling that came in the 1980s. It requires public schools to pay for sign language interpreters for deaf students who wish to attend Catholic or other religious schools. And as mentioned earlier, text to speech and dictation software give visually impaired student the opportunity to access any course material and to produce documents equivalent to those written by their sighted peers. Unless the school works with such students they may not realize these and other resources are available.

I'd ask high schools that are approached by the family member of a student with uncommon disability to please take time to find out what is possible before deciding out of hand that a particular student cannot attend.

>> Marie Powell: Thanks Doreen. Karen, what is your experience in this regard?

>> Dr. Karen Tichy: My best advice is, it's really important to delve into what are the specific adaptations this particular student needs to succeed. Then we just really have to ask ourselves whether our school can provide those adaptations. Don't focus on the particular disability label. Focus on what are the particular things this student needs and if your school can provide them, provide them.

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>> Marie Powell: As I mentioned earlier, along that same vein, Paul VI Catholic high school began a program in the late 1990s. It came about because parents of a teen with intellectual disability had had siblings go to Paul VI and wanted the same kind of supportive community for this son. The parents described a program at Eastside Catholic High school in Washington State that successfully integrated students with intellectual disability into the life of the school. After much research and planning Paul VI opened a similar program.

This Options Program has been wonderful, not only for the students who have been in it, but for the whole school community. It really has broken down many stereotypes about what individuals could and could not do. Many students have been trained as peer mentors for Options students and have assisted them in classes and becoming involved in the social and athletic activities of the school.

At least one other school in Virginia and a school in South Carolina have begun similar programs. We would love to have those of you in our audience tell us about other Catholic high schools which have included students with uncommon disabilities. There is a question on our evaluation at the completion of this webinar that asks you to provide contact information for such exemplary Catholic high schools. We know that the ones listed on our resources is not a very comprehensive list, so we're asking you to identify the schools that you know about so that we can spread the word to others.

Another area I would like to explore is how Catholic high schools can aide students with special needs to be prepared for post-secondary education. Our Catholic high schools do an excellent job of preparing students for education beyond high school. Karen, how can they ease the transition of students with special needs from high school to college or to some specialized training?

>> Dr. Karen Tichy: It's very important to start early and to plan individually. Our learning consultants help students who need help in developing self-advocacy skills and in learning how to approach a university access office and university professors to obtain the accommodations they need. Other students may need assistance with making realistic post-high school plans. Still other students need to be connected with government and community agencies that can provide them with post-secondary support services. All strategies to help students with special needs work best when they're tailored to the individual and provided at the optimal time.

>> Marie Powell: Thank you, Karen and Doreen for all the ideas you have offered today. And for putting so many resources on the webinar website. I am sure they will be quite helpful to our audience. At this time we will try to respond to some of the questions you have been e-mailing us.

As we mentioned earlier, if you wish to submit a question, click on the Question button in the upper right-hand corner above the top of the slide and click send. If we don't

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answer your question today we will try to e-mail you later. You may also e-mail one of us later and we will try to respond. Our e-mail addresses will be on the resource sheet at the web page of the webinar. We would love to hear from you.

Now we'll take the first question. This is from Mary Angela. "How do we get our students to accept the help openly? High school students are under such pressure they often don't want our help because it makes them feel less than adequate compared to their peers?" That is an excellent question. Doreen, do you want to tell us your thoughts on that first and then I'll get Karen's?

>> Doreen Engel: Well, anyone who has taught for any length of time encounters this not only at the high school level, but at the elementary school level. I think there are three key factors. First, when the school culture emphasizes that we are all individuals with responsibility: individual responsibility for our learning and for our self knowledge, I think students feel less pressure to compare themselves to others and rightly address looking at their own needs.

Secondly, schools have to look at how they handle confidential information. It is very important that the faculty room, the hallways, other places are not spots where students are discussed in any negative way who may have special needs. And then finally, you need a few upper classmen with good common sense who have found things that work for them that are willing to talk to younger incoming students, that is actually what I found to be the most effective.

>> Marie Powell: Thanks Doreen, Karen, do you have things to add to that?

>> Dr. Karen Tichy: I thought Doreen made many very important points. I would just add that in our experience as our learning consultants have worked with individual students on their self-advocacy skills they are encouraging the student to make use of the adaptations that would bring them success and as these students become more successful they become more confident in using the particular accommodations that they need and likewise the classmates see that maybe the students aren't all that different as what somebody might have thought in the beginning.

>> Marie Powell: Thanks, Karen. Here is another question that is really very practical for students. This is from Robert. "For students that need extra time on tests and are qualified to get that, should they take their tests in the classroom?" His experience is that sometimes if they do and everybody else is finished long before they are, they feel rather uncomfortable, but then I think it's always a challenge as to where in fact they should is take the test. Doreen, would you like to answer that?

>> Doreen Engel: Yeah, I heard of schools with several creative solutions and here are just a few. At some schools students take a complete course in the summer before the school year starts so that they have a free period everyday. And this not only emphasizes personal responsibility, but also gives a practical time of day for extra time. Teachers have two options. They can split tests in half so that students

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only do part of it in the classroom with their peers and take the other part in a designated location later. Or students can collect the test when the period is over and send the test to a location where the student will continue. Naturally there's an honor component to this. Students have to understand that the responsibility would be not to look at material, but in schools that I've been associated with, they have found both of these solutions to be very practical.

>> Marie Powell: Thanks, Doreen. I had a couple requests coming in for description of a learning consultant and we will be posting that on the web, so check back after tomorrow for that. Another question that came in is from Julia. "How do we explain that students with special needs are part of the school community without making them feel singled out?" Karen, would you like to address that?

>> Dr. Karen Tichy: I think that goes to the point we discussed earlier about the inclusionary approach that the administrator would verbally and visibly take and support. And if it's framed as that, everybody who is here belongs here. Everybody who is here has particular strengths, everybody who is here has particular challenges and they can be framed in some of those manners I spoke of earlier that would not make the point really that you do or don't have a disability or that you do or don't have a special need as much as the point is everyone who is here is a human being with all their gifts and with all their imperfections and we're all here to do our best and to achieve our greatest God-given potential, whatever that is.

>> Marie Powell: Thanks Karen. There is another question here and it's very good. It's from Missy and it's: "Do all the students receive the same diploma or do you have differentiated diplomas like some public schools?" I want to answer that just on my experience from Paul VI. Everybody receives the same diploma except for those students who are in the Options Program and were only the ones who had intellectual disabilities. They received a Certificate of Achievement and in opening the program there was a lot of investigation as to what should be done.

It turned out that had you given them a diploma they wouldn't have been eligible for the public services that they are eligible for until they are age 22. So they got a different certificate. They went through the graduation ceremony and participated in all the end of the year events and were generally there for four years so they were considered freshmen, sophomore, juniors, seniors, and went through the completion of the year. Everybody else with a learning disability and every other kind of particular special need, they all were able to earn a regular diploma. Karen or Doreen, do you have something you want to add to that?

>> Doreen Engel: Yes, exactly. Once you understand students are taking the same course work fulfilling the same requirements demonstrating they know the same information and can use it effectively then it becomes clear that of course they should get the same diploma.

>> Marie Powell: Karen, anything else?

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>> Dr. Karen Tichy: No.

>> Marie Powell: Okay. Karen, this is a question specifically for you. The questioner asks if he or she understands you to say the primary role of the learning consultant is to help students with diagnosed disability and secondarily to work with struggling students who do not have a diagnosis? Could you explain that a little bit more?

>> Dr. Karen Tichy: Sure. The -- many times when the student is struggling it's the classroom teacher who can best sort of look for the patterns of where the problems lie. Are there certain triggers to the difficulties, certain kinds of areas that are difficult for this student? Whereas for the students who have a diagnosed disability, we have more -- oh, guidance if you will, in terms of knowing what they need, so the learning consultant is primarily working with the teacher around those. But one of the blessings of the learning model is by using these more varied instructional methods, many times the students struggling won't be-- aren't struggling anymore. Maybe the teacher's change in methodology wasn't made for their particular case, but because the instructional capacity has expanded, now the needs of unidentified students are being better met, too.

>> Marie Powell: Thank you, Karen, for talking about that. Another question is, "How can teachers be convinced that a student's needs are real? What do we need to do so that what needs to be done for one student, does not necessarily seem unfair to another student?" Doreen?

>> Doreen Engel: The question of fairness always comes up and many people answer by saying fairness is that everyone gets what they need. Certainly when one looks at students that need glasses or other things that have become such a part of our society, we don't ask those questions anymore, but students whose needs are internal, they are not visible, students with anxiety disorders or specific learning disabilities for example. It just seems it can be harder for faculty to conceptualize these are real. Asking faculty to read quality research I think is the best way to go. We are educators. We should be convinced logically with information.

>> Marie Powell: Thanks Doreen. A couple other things I want to mention. We've had questions come in about educating students with Down Syndrome or whether or not there is a teacher tool kit. I would suggest that for those of you whose questions don't get answered today in this part, would you look at the resources on the website, if those don't answer some of your questions then we would be happy to hear from any of you.

Most of the programs that are listed as serving students with intellectual disabilities do serve students with Down Syndrome. So I think you will find quite a number of things on there.

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Okay. I think that's the last of the questions that we're going to be able to take during this time. We really thank you for your participation in this webinar and your interest in serving students with special needs in Catholic high schools.

Karen, Doreen, Jan, Nancy and I have thoroughly enjoyed preparing this webinar and spending time with all of you. We would also like to thank Bob Quinlan, who works with the NCPD and for the VCall staff, all of whom provided wonderful technical support for today's webinar.

We encourage all of you to explore the dozens of disabilities ministry resources that can be found on the NCPD website. Just click on webinars and the drop-down button at the top of the home page to find replay links and resources for all of the previous webinars. You will also be able to view future webinars that are scheduled for this year.

We are convinced that our faith inspires us to look at all options for making Catholic schools, programs and parishes as inclusive as possible. The Catholic community is so fortunate to have the personnel of the resources of the National Catholic Partnership on Disability to assist us in our work. Some 14 million Catholics have some type of identified disability. The NCPD relies on funds from organizations, Affiliate (arch)dioceses, donors and grants. I encourage you to consider supporting the work of the NCPD with a donation.

As the final part of this webinar, please complete the evaluation on your screen. You must do this within 20 minutes because at that time the site will be closed. But please note that there is a box there that you can list any school that you know that's doing a particularly good job of including students with special needs in its Catholic high school. We really want to expand our list.

May God bless all your efforts to teach all of His children. Thank you again for joining us.

>> Operator: Ladies and gentlemen, this does conclude today's teleconference. You may disconnect your lines at this time. Thank you for your participation.

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