



The SPICE Program: A New Beginning

*By Janet Weisner, Principal
St. Catharine School*

The following is the presentation by St. Catharine School principal, Mrs. Janet Weisner, at the School Town Meeting on April 21, 2002 explaining the vision for SPICE at St. Catharine School.

Sometimes student programs arise from a need and occupy a space in the St. Catharine School curriculum that is outside the instructional Diocesan Courses of Study. Generally this need is seen by either a group or by individuals. They react to this need by developing programs that meet the needs that they have seen. A vision is formed from that need that gives direction to a particular program.

For example, Partners in Education was formed a few years ago when a few individuals within the school community saw a need to provide funds that would support enriching opportunities. These opportunities would extend the classroom curriculum and give students exposure to a number of artists, authors, programs or materials that might not be available through the normal school curriculum. The need gave way to a vision that provided direction to a program that has helped to enrich the lives of our students. Their lives are enriched throughout the

year in small groups, sometimes by grade levels only, and sometimes for the entire student body.

A few years ago, an Enrichment program was added to the school curriculum because an individual or individuals saw a need for helping students with special learning needs. Their special learning needs were that they needed to be challenged and encouraged to think beyond the normal grade level curriculum. This program impacted the lives of a group of children who presented needs—their special learning needs.

Three years ago, an Algebra program was added to the school's basic curriculum because individuals saw a need to challenge a certain population of our school who had special learning needs—the need to be challenged and serviced in their advanced math needs. A program was developed to provide this opportunity to service their needs as they began the middle school level of instruction. The special learning needs of this small number of children were addressed through a program that gave direction and challenge to their lives.

So, too, with the newest of our programs, created for Special People in Catholic Education, the SPICE program. This program was developed from a need that was seen by individuals who had a vision for this program.



*Education Specialist Marian Knox and
Principal Janet Weisner.*

This program addresses the special learning needs of children with diagnosed learning disabilities, or developmental learning disabilities, or those who struggle with certain aspects of the regular curriculum. These are children who have organizational issues of ADD, reading difficulties, auditory processing problems, writing difficulties, and other roadblocks to successful learning. These are children that we openly accept as kindergarten students, yet along their educational journey, they stumble. They, too, need and deserve a program that addresses their needs. St. Catharine School is no different than any other private, or Catholic, or non-public school in the number of children who have learning issues or the number of children who need to be challenged beyond the

normal curriculum or the children who lie somewhere on this learning continuum. Just like Enrichment and Math programs address the special learning needs of children, or just as the classroom teachers address the needs of children who need encouragement or challenges, so also does the SPICE program. You see, all of these programs address special learning needs. The interesting thing about the SPICE program, and maybe the reason why some feel that they didn't realize that there was a need for this type of program, is that children who benefit from its funds are often not the children that we talk about. Learning disabilities are like that—it really is a private life of struggles and successes that are shared between those students, their teachers, and

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Questions and Answers About SPICE

What is SPICE?

SPICE stands for Special People In Catholic Education. It was initiated for a twofold purpose:

- to provide financial support to the philosophy and efforts that have already existed at St. Catharine for years, i.e., that everyone is special and that St. Catharine Parish is committed to try to meet the needs of each of our student parishioners.
- To raise awareness in the parish and beyond of the needs that exist and what St. Catharine Parish has been doing to meet these needs.

SPICE has its own advisory board and is for the benefit of the entire parish. SPICE reports directly to Msgr. Sorohan, and derives its direction and focus from Monsignor, Mrs. Janet Weisner, School Principal, and Sr. Christella Ritchey & Mrs. Chris Schleicher, Directors of the Religious Education Program.

Is SPICE going to make St. Catharine a Special Needs School?

Absolutely Not! SPICE was established to help St. Catharine meet the needs of our Parish Children, most of whom were already enrolled in our school or Religious Education Program before any special needs were even identified. It is our hope that SPICE will bring an awareness and guidance to other parishes, so that they can do what St. Catharine is doing in their own parishes.

Can St. Catharine meet all student's special needs?

Good Question! The answer is probably not, but St. Catharine is committed to "try" to meet the needs of all of its parishioners. Everyone has different learning styles and needs. Sometimes the parochial school environment supersedes the benefits a more publicly funded school system can provide for a student. The bottom line is what is best for the individual student!

Why does St. Catharine bother trying to meet everyone's needs?

Think about that! This question is best answered by another question. Why didn't God make us all the same? Does everyone have the same needs and learning styles, and should those with special needs be ignored? Our Parish is an extension of the family, the basic unit of the Catholic Church.

SPICE Mission Statement

St. Catharine SPICE Program recognizes that each of our parish children are unique individuals with different learning needs. The SPICE Program supports serving the educational needs of these children. We believe that children have different learning styles that provide diversity in the classroom environment.

Working together with the support of the SPICE program, the parish community, pastor, administration, teachers, and parents can help to provide understanding, information, creativity and willingness to address special educational needs.

Just as parents try to do all they can for all their children, so does St. Catharine for all of its members.

Why haven't we heard of what St. Catharine is doing before now?

People's needs are a very private issue, and especially when they involve inadequacies and special needs. Everyone loves their children and when they excel, people tend to talk about it. However, when they have problems, whether it be to protect the child, or for denial or embarrassment, parents tend to keep it confidential. Our parish understands and respects this, and has gone about its duties without making it public what special things that they are doing and how often they are doing it. Unless you are personally involved with a student with special needs, and unless these needs are "visible" (and typically they are not), you have no idea what the parents, parish and school are involved with. St. Catharine has been doing great things for years for a large number of families, and the general population has not been aware of it.

What is the future of SPICE?

Excellent! SPICE has the complete support of the Diocesan Vicar of Education, our Pastor, School Principal and Religious Education Program. We have received tremendous support and encouragement. Our Board is meeting this spring to plan for next year. SPICE will be an ongoing event in our parish, both in its fund-raising and awareness efforts. We will meet periodically with Monsignor, St. Catharine School, and the Religious Education Directors to discuss their needs and assist in meeting them.

A SPECIAL THANKS TO THE GRIFFITH FAMILY!

Earlier this year the St. Catharine SPICE Program was blessed with a major contribution from the Robert & Pat (McJoynt) Griffith family. Not only is this gift a cornerstone for our fund-raising efforts, but it is also meaningful for the thought that is behind it. Robert & Pat's son Kevin died in February, 1998 of AIDS. In his memory and in appreciation for the loving support of the St. Catharine family, they made a substantial contribution to St. Catharine School. Robert and Pat have thought long and hard about how to make their donation most effective and useful - one that would truly enhance the entire St. Catharine Family. When they learned of the intent of the SPICE Program, their response was "The more we learn about the dynamics and needs of St. Catharine, we remain more convinced that our contribution can best be utilized through the SPICE Program". **Thank you Robert & Pat, and may SPICE be added to your life, as you have added it to St. Catharine's!**



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Beatitudes for Those With Special Needs

***Blessed are you who take the time
to listen to difficult speech
for you help me to know that if
I persevere I can be understood.***

***Blessed are you who never bid me to "hurry up" and
take my tasks from me and do them for me,
for I often need time rather than help.***

***Blessed are you who stand beside me
as I enter new and untried ventures,
for my failures will be outweighed
by the times I surprise myself and you.***

***Blessed are you who understand
that it is difficult for me,
to put my thoughts into words.***

***Blessed are you who with a smile,
encourage me to try once more.***

***Blessed are you who never remind me,
that today I asked the same question two times.***

***Blessed are you who respect me
and love me just as I am,
and not like you wish I were.***

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their parents. It's a little easier to share with others that one has a child in an Enrichment program or one has a child that is successful in Math, or a child that reads above grade level, or a child that writes well for publication. The SPICE program supports another level of special needs—those who struggle for the successes—those whose successes are difficult to achieve—those whose successes have been shared privately with their parents and that child—those whose successes come in very small steps over a very long time—those who also have a right to the same level of service that all children at our school have and deserve. That's our responsibility as educators—to provide opportunities or programs that strive to meet needs of every child at St. Catharine School.

Only in operation since November, the SPICE program has started, as other programs have, with a look at the funding of the program. We are currently in the process of developing a direction for its financial support for the next school year and years to come. We hope to see its financial use in such ways as materials in classrooms, workshops for teachers on learning styles, and personnel support to alleviate some of the workload of our current educational specialist.

We appreciate the strength of our current educational programs and also the financial support of these additional support programs that have been established to meet the varied learning needs of all children at St. Catharine School.