The Child First Team (CFT) was a project undertaken by a core team of faculty members at Saint Clement School with the focus of this year-long project. After much reflection, as Catholic school teachers and administrators, we were committed to the faith conviction that all God’s children can learn, succeed, and should be actively involved in their own education. At Saint Clement School, teachers seek to meet students’ diverse academic, social, emotional, and behavioral needs—from those children who struggle to those who excel far beyond their grade level. The Child First Team works to meet our students’ learning needs by utilizing data and best practices that identify, monitor, and support achievement.

The goals for the Child First Team:

- Provide an organized system for selecting, implementing, and monitoring appropriate classroom interventions.
- Provide ongoing support for teachers as they address the needs of students with differing learning needs in the classroom (across the continuum of ability).
- Collaborate and communicate with families to ensure that all supporters of the student are “on the same page” with goals, interventions, and achievement expected.
- Make all decisions with the child’s best interest in mind; putting the child first. We strive to work with families, students, and faculty to ensure we are best serving our students in the classroom.
- Follow practices that are grounded in the respect for the human person.

The Child First Team would circle back each month and faculty education and presentation on the Child First Team. The CFT core team members were selected and met to discuss their role and the philosophical stance of the team. The core team members often met informally after school or during lunch hours to discuss/reflect on the student progress.

A referral process was developed. Parents or teachers could refer a student to the CFT by completing the referral form and emailing the faculty member who was named Child First Team Coordinator. A wiki/blog was developed with pertinent forms/resources.

The Child First Team met Tuesdays before school at 7:00 a.m. to discuss those students on our caseload and hold internal meetings.

The Child First Team scheduled meetings before school on Thursdays at 7:00 a.m. to meet with parents, teachers, clinicians, students (when applicable) to develop and/or review the plan for the child to allow them to be more successful.

The Child First Team would circle back each month and review the data and document or call another child team meeting if necessary. The Child First Team Coordinator followed up on each student’s progress and scheduled additional meetings when necessary. Parents or teachers would also reach out to the team if they needed further support or interventions.

The Child First Team would meet every child first. There is no room for egos or agendas when dealing with a child who has special needs. Time is of the essence.

Good teaching and strategies benefit all students.

Strategic collaboration is key. As Catholic Schools in the city of Chicago, we are all doing many things to support our learners, and we need to share these strategies with each other! Our Child First Team Coordinator started a Learning Resource Group that meets three times per year. Teachers, counselors, and administrators share ideas and resources. Together we are better!