The Child First Team (CFT) was a project undertaken by a core team of faculty members at Saint Clement School in response to the needs of our students, teachers, and parent community. We are 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 were (and continue to be):

- Provide an organized system for selecting, implementing, and monitoring appropriate classroom interventions.
- Provide on-going 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 CFT served 40 students and their families. Using the collective intelligence, experiences, and resources of the group, we were able to come up with plans to help better serve students in our classrooms. There has been a definite shift in how our teachers and community embrace children who learn differently.
The Child First Team

A Strategic Partnership At Saint Clement School

Project Summary

As Catholic school teachers we are committed to the faith conviction that all God’s children can learn and actively be involved in their own education. At Saint Clement School, teachers seek to meet students’ diverse academic, social, and behavioral needs from those children who struggle to those who excel. The St. Clement Child First Team, now in its second year, works to satisfy our students’ learning needs by utilizing data and best practices that identify, monitor, and support achievement.

After its successful implementation last year, the Child First Team was able to assist 40 students and their families in designing plans for success in the classroom. This is entirely attributable to St. Clement’s hard-working, caring, dedicated staff, and the openness of parents to play an active role in creating a unique plan for their child. As year two is already underway, our goals remain the same for the Child First Team:

- Provide an organized system for selecting, implementing, and monitoring appropriate classroom interventions.
- Provide on-going 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.
The Child First Team

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Process

It was crucial that we selected members of the Child First Team that would be open to ideas, willing to collaborate, and share their gifts to benefit the students of Saint Clement School. First we selected four faculty members that would become known as the “core team”. Those core team members were selected and spent weeks meeting to solidify the goals and objectives, as well as the challenges we would face. Each member of the core team was very clear on their role in addition to the philosophical stance of the team and our mission for year one.

It was also vital to the success of the CFT that we garnered faculty and parent support. The CFT presented to the faculty on our new model and how the CFT would be able to better support our teachers in the work they do everyday to meet all of our students’ needs. We also presented to the parent community one evening. The presentation reviewed the role and objectives of the CFT and how the team could partner with parents to better assist their child(ren) at Saint Clement School.

A referral process was developed with the team and also explained in detail to the parents and faculty. Parents and teachers could refer a student to the CFT by completing the referral form and emailing the Child First Team Coordinator. A wiki was also developed with the pertinent forms and resources.

A letter was then sent to all parents regarding the team (see following page).

The Child First Team met Tuesdays before school at 7:00 a.m. to discuss those students on our caseload as well as 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 team meeting if necessary. The Child First Team Coordinator followed up on each students’ 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 core team members often met informally after school or during lunch hours to discuss/reflect on student progress.
November 4, 2010

Dear Parents,

At St. Clement, we are committed to helping every child succeed. Our goal is to inspire a love of learning in each of our students, through a rigorous academic curriculum grounded in our Catholic faith. We design instruction so that every child experiences successes to build on, as well as challenges to motivate them beyond what they thought was possible. This year, I began meeting with our faculty regarding a model recommended by the Office of Catholic Schools called Response to Intervention (RTI). This model was designed to provide proactive (as opposed to reactive) and data based assistance to all children. The St. Clement School Child First Team, or CFT, is a team we have developed to help meet the needs of children referred for academic, social, and/or behavior issues. The CFT meets to streamline and discuss intervention strategies to help referred children succeed in the classroom.

Should a teacher refer your child to the team, a phone call, email message or letter will notify you of the referral. The CFT meets regularly to assess and monitor interventions in the classroom and respond to student referrals. The CFT will request your input and any additional information you can provide to best help your child. All information discussed will remain confidential.

Together, we can be more effective in helping students achieve success. Whether students are struggling or are ready for accelerated challenges, we know that when we work together in the best interest of our students, amazing things can happen! If you would like to hear more about the Child First Team, please attend our upcoming presentation hosted by the Learning Differences Group on November 16th at 7:00 p.m. We hope to see you there!

Sincerely,

Melissa Dan, Principal

St. Clement Child First Team
Lindsay Johns, Child First Team Coordinator
Melissa Dan, School Principal
Anne Byrne, School Counselor
Marguerite Grizzi, Learning Specialist
The Child First Team

A Strategic Partnership At Saint Clement School

Results

This year our team has served 40 students and their families in coming up with plans to help better serve students in our classrooms. There has been a definite shift in how our teachers and community embrace children who learn differently.

Ten students have received educational evaluations, and at least six students are moving along the process of receiving service plans through Chicago Public Schools Special Education Eligibility Process.

The Archdiocese of Chicago has called upon our CFT to demonstrate our model and intervention model to other Catholic schools.

After its successful implementation, the Child First Team was able to assist students, their families, and teachers in designing plans for success in the classroom. This is entirely attributable to Saint Clement School’s hard-working and caring staff, who committed to take on this project and meet twice a week before school. We were overwhelmed with the openness of parents to play an active role in creating a unique plan for their child. Many of the parents felt relieved after feeling frustrated/isolated in dealing with their child’s issues before on their own.

Testimony from Parent:

The Child First Team has provided us with a sense of relief and support knowing that a specialized support team is really working to help our child. We have found the collaborative approach working with all the members of the Team is the best way to reach solutions; our experience and insight to our child is used to leverage support the team can provide at school. When we meet with the team and a plan is developed and activated, we are gratified to see the same desire for our child to be successful in the Team that we feel for our child. We have been very impressed and grateful with the enthusiasm, expertise, and focus of the team in their efforts. The communication, the listening, the practical and tangible tactics provide the support and strategy to do our best to achieve success with our child.
Analysis

As Catholic school teachers we are committed to the faith conviction that all God’s children can learn. This year our team has served over 40 families and children in coming up with plans to help better serve children in the classroom. There has been a definite shift in our teachers and community embrace children who learn differently. We have faith that our team will continue to serve children and families and become even better in doing so. We know our role is to continue to support our teachers so that they will become stronger members of the team and will be able to better serve our students in the future. The implementation of the CFT has made our school a better place for our students and families.

In reflecting on the past year and this project we have learned the following:

The children come first. From the very beginning, this was an opportunity to change the preconceptions of families and faculty at Saint Clement School and a commitment to putting 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. Frequently the suggestions/interventions we put in to place for a struggling student also benefitted the rest of the class as well.

More ideas and support is needed for parents and teachers. Teachers as well as parents were in need of more ideas and support (interventions and accommodations) to better serve students that are struggling.

Reflection is critical to the success of the team. As a school staff, we need more time to dialogue and reflect on our students, especially those with more significant needs. Through brainstorming, dialogue and reflection, we came up with new interventions that were successful. We must build in time to reflect together and step back to gain better insight.

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!