

# *From PIE's Desk to Yours*

The Program for Inclusive Education  
at the Alliance for Catholic Education

WELCOME  
SERVE  
CELEBRATE



## From the Director . . .

The Program for Inclusive Education (PIE) believes that Catholic schools are called to serve justly and inclusively while celebrating the God-given potential of every learner. Therefore, our mission is to prepare Catholic educators to meet the needs of each student, regardless of diverse learning needs. PIE is committed to working tirelessly and joyously to equip Catholic schools with a culture and the foundational knowledge and skills to meet the needs of all learners.

This mission and vision resonate with the PIE faculty, who dedicate their time and gifts to advocate that Catholic schools say “yes” and open their doors to all students. We provide state-of-the-art instruction and learning opportunities to ensure educators across the country have the skills necessary to serve all students. We collaborate with extraordinary educators who are changing hearts and impacting students’ lives. In doing so, PIE has been blessed!

Please enjoy the following words of affirmation from inclusive educators who participated in our second cohort. PIE 2 educators have witnessed struggles and successes, yearned for more for every student, and joined our mission to ensure everyone has a seat at the table. In addition to their encouragement, they each provide an [evidence-based practice \(EBP\)](#) that they learned during PIE, which is effectively supporting diverse learners in their classrooms. Explore the EBPs and try them in your classroom.

You too, can inclusively meet the needs of all students in your classroom. PIE invites you to join the PIE family as we welcome, serve, and celebrate all students in Catholic schools.

Christie Bonfiglio, Ph.D.  
Director, Program for Inclusive Education



## Abby Giroux

Assistant Principal/STEM Teacher, All Saints Academy  
Grand Rapids, MI

I offer PBIS as the best practice that I learned from PIE as a way to support students in our school. I'd also like to advocate that you participate in PIE, given the many valuable ways it will impact you as an educator. It will provide you the knowledge and skills to become an inclusive-education leader in your building. When I reflect on how I have changed and the students who have forced me to grow the most, I am humbled. I also realize I have a lot to be proud of, and yet much to still do. In PIE, you will work hard, meet amazing people, and have awe-inspiring experiences. I took the time to soak it all in, and I'd advise anyone joining to do the same.

A leader's job isn't to take people where they want to go, it's to push them a little bit further to where they should be. You can be that leader! In whatever capacity you fill at your school you can light the path for others to follow. Pray, persist, and reach out to others!

## Evidence-Based Practice: PBIS

At All Saints Academy (ASA), we have been developing our [Positive Behavior Intervention Support \(PBIS\)](#) system over the course of the last four years. ASA began our [PBIS](#) work by learning about the framework through professional development from PIE and ensuring we were ready for implementation. Our faculty positively defined and stated building expectations, and we familiarized ourselves with behavioral teaching and intervention strategies, as well as data collection and reporting strategies. Through various professional development offerings, ASA learned of valuable resources like [PBIS World](#).

In the past two years we have begun transitioning this work and language to involve our students more directly through explicit instruction and then gradually releasing various responsibilities. Students have designed posters as visual prompts in the hallways and participated in "teach days" to both practice and model positive behavior expectations.

We initially sought to implement PBIS because teachers were concerned with behavior challenges. Over the past few years, teachers have said that discussing our expectations and timelines so that students know what to expect and when have clarified expectations and procedures. Moreover, students have started verbalizing that they would both like to see more accountability for behavior and also be involved in helping to provide accountability. Although successful implementation of PBIS takes time, ASA has made great strides in creating a culture of prevention and positivity that enables our students to be successful behaviorally and academically.



## Julie Higgins

Fifth-Grade Teacher, Our Lady of Perpetual Help  
Scottsdale, AZ

I encourage you to say yes to inclusion in your Catholic schools and join PIE to give you the necessary knowledge and strategies to support all students. As part of PIE, I joined a community like no other. PIE is hard work, but the rewards that you earn in learning strategies, understanding marginalized children, creating an environment of inclusion, and bringing it all back to your school is immeasurable.

I hope that inclusive education in Catholic schools becomes commonplace so that parents who have a child with a disability can send their child to the same school that their siblings attend. I hope that teachers use evidence-based practices to create learning environments where everyone can achieve success and be valued for who God called them to be.

I offer Collaborative Strategic Reading as an EBP to support your students. It has been effective in meeting the needs of my students. It is not a special education strategy, but a best-practice strategy that will work for your students, too.

## Evidence-Based Practice: Collaborative Strategic Reading

PIE has prepared us to effectively meet the needs of all learners through evidence-based practices. One that I use on a regular basis with my fifth-grade students is [Collaborative Strategic Reading \(CSR\)](#). [CSR](#) is a strategy within the [Reading Rockets](#) literacy program that works well with all students regardless of comprehension skills because it reinforces good reading practices, especially with informational texts found in science and social studies.

Stronger readers already do many of these practices on their own, but the additional practice increases their ability to recognize and articulate what they are doing while they read; therefore, they become models of good practice with other students. In addition, CSR allows students who struggle with comprehension the opportunity to practice needed comprehension strategies without feeling singled out. Many times, I will strategically pair students to complete the assigned reading. They enjoy being able to talk to each other about the text, make predictions about what they will be reading, challenge each other to find and define new vocabulary in the reading, and summarize what was read. Students complete a form that focuses on their reading for the class period and turn them in for a quick review from me. The forms I use are self-made, but you can also find [pre-made templates](#).



**Patti O'Donnell**  
Principal, St. Patrick School  
Malvern, PA

The Program for Inclusive Education was an amazing journey that transformed my life and the lives of my students and school forever. The journey wasn't always easy—it pushed me further than I ever thought possible. But the practices I learned, like the one I share below, have made an amazing impact on my students. I'm excited to open the doors of my school and to truly be able to say, "All are welcome!"

I want to encourage you to consider PIE too. Open the door and dream big. Overcome your fears and open yourself to the incredible knowledge and experience of the PIE team. Apply to PIE, work hard, and celebrate and embrace PIE's journey. Go welcome, serve, and celebrate!

## **Evidence-Based Practice: Graphic Organizers**

Graphic organizers (sometimes called concept maps) are visual representations that allow students to arrange information. Although they have been around for a long time, I never appreciated their impact on learning before my PIE experience. Following coursework with the PIE faculty and their expertise in evidence-based practices, I became a true believer and advocate for their use.

As an elementary school principal, I have demonstrated the use of graphic organizers and require their implementation in all of our classrooms. As we work toward becoming a fully inclusive school, their use has become the standard for our teachers. The visual representation of content, connections, and planning helps all students. Graphic organizers help focus the teaching and student learning, while also providing opportunities for interaction. Many online graphic organizers are available and have been shown to increase student engagement, collaboration, and deeper thinking, especially with middle school students. I highly recommend the use of graphic organizers.



## Sarah Witt

Third-Grade Teacher, Christ the King School  
Nashville, TN

I offer the Responsive Classroom as an evidence-based practice that will work in your classroom. PIE has taught me how to find evidence-based practices, how to build student support teams, how to advocate for inclusion, how to understand special education laws, how to progress-monitor students, and so much more.

PIE is an intentional community striving to welcome, serve, and celebrate every learner. In this program, you learn what inclusive education means for Catholic schools, given that it is built on academics, community, and spirituality. You will grow in your faith as you reflect on how Jesus has called us to live and the Church's call for inclusion. PIE is purposeful about its mission, and I hope you will consider joining our PIE family.

## Evidence-Based Practice: Responsive Classroom

In PIE, I learned about numerous interventions to help my students behaviorally and academically. One evidence-based approach to teaching and management is the [Responsive Classroom](#), which posits that necessary social and emotional competencies are needed to effectively learn in a classroom. One of the practices from this theoretical framework that I have implemented in my third-grade classroom is the [morning meeting](#).

Every morning, students gather in a big circle on the carpet. Students are greeted by name and then answer a question about a silly or serious topic, complete a team-building activity, or reflect on a social-emotional topic. My students love the morning meeting and get excited about it every day. I have seen the class form a community with the team-building exercises, and confidence grows as students answer questions. Students light up when they are acknowledged by their classmates. Morning meeting also helps me to check in with every student and see who is ready to go for the day and who needs a check-in after the meeting. Beginning every day with a morning meeting helps students feel welcomed and celebrated and helps us start each day on a positive note. Give the morning meeting a try—it will set the tone for the rest of your day.



## Jenny Zander

Early Childhood Center Director, St. Theresa  
Phoenix, AZ

PIE offers something for every educator. As an early-childhood educator, I found strategies to help my young students. The evidence-based practice I share below is segmenting and blending.

In PIE, you will learn inclusive practices in every classroom: what they look like, how to support a variety of learners, how to implement frameworks to support behavior and academics in your school, and how to remove barriers in instruction. You will understand the importance of having a growth mindset. You will become familiar with a variety of tools, teaching strategies, and technology options to implement in class. You will learn ways to support all students and their families within the classroom and greater community. You'll gain a deeper understanding of the laws and policies regarding students with disabilities. You will hear personal accounts from students and families, collaborate with other educators, and be supported by professionals.

PIE requires work and dedication, but don't let that deter you. You will collaborate with other like-minded educators and professors supporting you on your journey. Dedication and focus promote great growth, and you will end the program inspired and ready to implement all you have learned.

I was inspired to join PIE by advice from students who shared their experiences of inclusive environments. Be open to growth, dream big, and don't wait to participate—jump right in.

## **Evidence-Based Practice: Segmenting & Blending**

As an early childhood educator, I'm working to build students' knowledge of letter and letter-sound pairs through evidence-based strategies. Segmenting sounds allows readers to break a word apart, while blending combines the sounds to create the word. This process is part of decoding, which is an important part of learning to read and leads to reading fluently.

[Reading Rockets](#) is a validated literacy program with varying interventions for diverse levels. I begin with [Alphabet Matching](#) and [Matching Books to Phonics Features](#). For students who have mastered this pre-reading skill, I utilize strategies that focus on blending and segmenting including [Drive-Thru Blending and Pound and Sound](#). Students' progress is tracked with each student recording data on a self-assessment. When a letter or letter sound is mastered, students get excited and are motivated to keep learning. With these little learners, movement and play incorporated into the instruction keeps them engaged and having fun while they practice and strengthen foundational pre-reading skills.