



## Case Study



Annapolis, MD | Partner since 2014

### School Profile

**Location:** 30 minutes outside of Washington DC

**Student body:** 850 students on four campuses

**Grades:** K-12

**Staff:** 120

## Background

For many years, Annapolis Area Christian School struggled with how to serve students who needed extra support. They had three tutors for their four campuses, and those tutors provided one-on-one tutoring for students with learning disabilities (mostly in reading). This service cost families thousands of dollars each year.

The school wanted to do more but didn't know how. As a result, applications were filtered for "fit." The school thought it was doing the right thing by telling families of children with disabilities that they couldn't provide support. They thought they were saying, "We care." But what families heard was, "You don't belong."

## Starting the Journey

Rick Kempton became the head of school in 2011. He had past experience with more diverse student bodies, and was passionate about helping Annapolis lead the way to inclusive education.

In 2014, Rick, the four principals, and a few teachers came to Michigan for a site visit with All Belong (then the CLC Network). The leaders who came with him had mixed emotions. Some were excited; some were not. They had many concerns, including:

*We don't have enough staff.*

*We can't be a college prep school and do this.*

*We don't know how to meet the needs.*

*We don't have the same resources as the public schools.*

For two days they toured schools that took an inclusive approach to education. The site visits changed minds and turned the conversation around. The attendees voted unanimously that inclusive education was the direction they needed to take. Rather than feeling alone, the staff and leadership realized that the experts at All Belong would walk beside them every step of the way. Knowing other schools were doing it successfully gave them energy and confidence.

## The Results

Annapolis Christian partnered with All Belong because they realized that their mission demanded it. Over time, they had focused more on being a college prep school than on their mission of "helping students become followers of Jesus."

Over time, they implemented several significant shifts in their approach.

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They now have 20 Education Support Staff and six Special Education Teachers. The tutors used to work independently from the general education teachers. Now the education support staff, special education teachers, and general education teachers work collaboratively. The structure is not built for a few students, but rather for all students.

A few parents are paying a bit extra for services, but most are not. Annapolis is moving toward a goal of tuition equity.

Approximately 25% of their students are receiving some kind of support service, reflecting the statistic that approximately one in four people have some form of disability, whether it be visible or not.

They still screen applicants, but now it's for mission fit: they welcome families who want a Christ-centered education for all their children. Enrollment has increased, as has the number of families who are seeking extra services for their children.

In the beginning, some of the staff resisted change. The school had to say "yes" to enough students to generate critical mass, and then figure out how to do the work. The teachers realized that they had to change, but that they also had Educational Support Staff and the resources of All Belong to help them navigate. Now it is a gift to see teachers learn new strategies and build relationships with each family. They are excited about partnering with the support staff and working as a team.

## Financial Considerations

Donors covered some of the increased overhead initially, and the donor base has grown. In addition they have taken advantage of Title II money. The school has worked to realign some roles, but has also had to make choices about investing in inclusive education versus other opportunities. In addition, they have gained students and increased enrollment. They are still working out long-term financial sustainability questions but have faith that God will provide.

## Lessons Learned

Here are just a few words of wisdom that Annapolis Area Christian shared:

- Do a site study. It's a great tool to help you understand where you are and where you can grow.
- Start with current families that have one child who is not being served. Learn to wrap services around those students.
- The teachers will then see how those supports can serve more students.
- This change might feel very big, but the resources and expertise of All Belong will be there every step of the way. You are not alone.
- Don't think you have to do it all and do it perfectly tomorrow. This is a journey, and each school is different. Move slowly and educate people first. Then look for small wins and keep pursuing the goal.
- Realize that families are not asking for perfection. They will be thrilled to have a place to belong.
- Lift up your effort in prayer. Ask God to show you the next best step, and trust that He will meet you there. There will be lots of steps of faith!
- Don't lose sight of the fact that we exist for Jesus. We can't waver from that. This is what Christian schools should be about. All kids should find their place and be loved.