



Burke Scholars

Established in 2009, the Burke Scholars Program is the first of its kind in the Archdiocese of Chicago and one of a small selection of such programs in the United States. Notre Dame College Prep believes that all students should have the opportunity to participate in a Catholic high school experience regardless of ability or disability.

The Burke Scholars Program at Notre Dame College Prep is designed to provide an inclusive Catholic high school education for young men with mild to moderate cognitive disabilities or significant learning disabilities that place students academically below grade level. Young men with disabilities, such as Down syndrome, Autism, and other genetic and learning differences are given the opportunity to partake in a religious educational setting.

While at Notre Dame College Prep, the Burke Scholars have the ability to engage in many academic and elective courses with their typically developing peers. There are currently two special education teachers that work with the Burke Scholars, their families and the general education teachers. The Burke Scholars teachers work with the general education teachers to provide modifications, interventions and accommodations to assist in the inclusion and education of the Burke Scholars. The Burke Scholars teachers instruct leveled sections of math and English and provide one-on-one support to students during study hall periods.

The Burke Scholars Program offers two graduation options. Students and their families may choose to earn a certificate of completion or a diploma once they have completed their four years here at Notre Dame College Prep. Students in the Burke Scholars Program typically receive a certificate of completion at graduation. This is the most common option because it allows the students to continue receiving special education services until they turn 22. As soon as a student receives a diploma, they are no longer eligible to receive special education services.



Burke Scholar **Tim McDonough '20**, leading the Dons into Legends Field before the 2018 Homecoming game. Tim is student-manager for the football team and involved in many other ND activities.

The Burke Scholars participate in many extracurricular activities, clubs and sports as a part of the Notre Dame student community. The student body has always strongly supported the Burke Scholars Program. The students have formed a club that is designed to encourage the interaction and acceptance between the Burke Scholars and their typical peers in the Notre Dame community. This club is called the “Burke Buddies Club.” Many Notre Dame students are involved in this club and organize activities both inside and outside of the school setting.

There are many amazing qualities about the Notre Dame College Prep environment, but the most unique quality is the ability to provide a previously unattainable faith-based education for students with special needs. All of the students at Notre Dame College Prep benefit from this program, whether it is by receiving a more typical high school education than a student with special needs and his family ever could have hoped for or by other students learning, accepting and understanding that not all people are the same and that these differences should be embraced. Notre Dame College Prep and the Burke Scholars Program are forever changing the face of Catholic education.

We are all ND.

“I love having fun with my friends at Notre Dame. Notre Dame is my home and will always be my home. We are ND!”
— Sean Nelson ‘18, Burke Scholar

“Burke Buddy Club has without a doubt been the highlight of my high school life. I love getting to know the Burke Scholars better and just hanging out with them. Nothing is more fun than getting to play heads up with Sean, Connor, John, Alex, Aidan, Tim and Mike. I can’t wait for white activity day so I can be a part of this awesome club!”
— Kyle Svachula ‘19

Eligibility Requirements

- Eighth grade student at current grammar school
- At least 14 years old
- Math proficiency at a 2nd-6th grade equivalent
- English proficiency at a 2nd-6th grade equivalent
- The ability to follow high behavior expectations
- The ability to appropriately interact with peers
- The ability to initiate written and verbal expression
- The ability to participate in classroom and social activities without the use of an educational assistant
- The ability to maintain self-care independently

Acceptance Process

- Evaluation of current individualized education plan
- Evaluation of current psychological evaluation
- Shadow day for prospective student at Notre Dame College Prep
- Observation of the prospective student in their current educational placement
- Evaluation form from 8th grade teacher
- Interview with the prospective student, their family, the Burke Scholars team, the principal and the director of enrollment



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For more information, please contact:
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Check out the Burke Scholars Program video!
www.niddons.org/burkescholarvideo