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## Working to Ensure a Place for All Children in Catholic Schools

### Maryland Catholic Conference, CCSE Sponsor “New Faces” Workshop to Encourage Inclusive Education in Catholic High Schools

*“Whoever receives  
one child such as  
this in my name  
receives me”*

(Matthew 18:5)

The Catholic Coalition for Special Education (CCSE) has redoubled its efforts to encourage local Catholic high schools to provide an inclusive education by opening their doors to students with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Earlier this month, CCSE and the Maryland Catholic Conference co-sponsored a workshop for Catholic high school educators titled *New FACES at your School: How to Open Doors for All of Christ's Children*. Designed to demonstrate the academic, social and moral benefits to all students who attend schools that offer inclusive education, the workshop, in fact, demonstrated how the entire school community benefits from this programming.

Since its inception six years ago CCSE has successfully supported 18 Catholic schools by providing over a half million dollars in grants to Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Washington and Baltimore to establish or expand inclusive programming that welcomes students with special needs to the classroom. However, very few local Catholic high schools offer inclusive programs to students with disabilities. And now as students who benefitted from CCSE grants in grade school prepare to move on to high school, the need for such programming has increased.

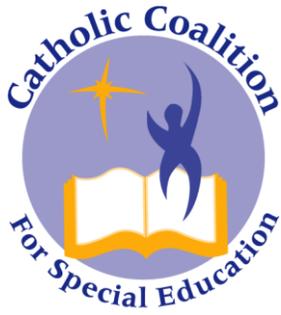
“CCSE wants to let parents know that they now have options for their children with disabilities. What was inconceivable just a decade ago is now a possibility,” said CCSE President and Founder Francesca Pellegrino. “We co-sponsored this workshop with the Maryland Catholic Conference in order to highlight the growing demand for Catholic high schools to open their doors to students with disabilities. Really, it all comes down to our commitment to living out our faith in our schools.”

Representatives from a dozen Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Washington and Baltimore attended the workshop at The Academy of the Holy Cross in Kensington, presented by Dr. Cynthia May, Professor of Psychology, College of Charleston, an expert in the field of human learning and memory. May was instrumental in starting an

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inclusive program at both a South Carolina Catholic high school and at the College of Charleston.

Studies show that students with intellectual disabilities who are integrated into typical classrooms have mathematical, linguistic and social skills two to three years ahead of those who are segregated, according to May. Traditional students without disabilities showed improved academic skills in these inclusive settings, but also enhanced social and moral development, she said.

According to May, many Catholic schools find that “the prospect of including students with disabilities in regular classes can be daunting.” Some respond by saying, “We simply don’t have the resources. We have so many other demands, and we have to educate our typical children.” Dr. May challenged Catholic educators to hear the same message she was given when her daughter Grace was born with Down syndrome:

“God will provide you with the resources you need. You will see, your entire community will be blessed and benefit from this experience.”

Because this message aligns with the Church’s views on the sanctity of all life, Catholic school educators particularly should adhere to it, she said.

“Dr. May had some wonderful stories about how including students with special needs in a Catholic high school enriched the entire school community, not just the students with disabilities,” said Sister Anne Catherine, principal of Mount de Sales Academy in Catonsville. “We attended because we wanted to hear first-hand how schools can translate the mission of Catholic education to more and more families who desire it for their children.”

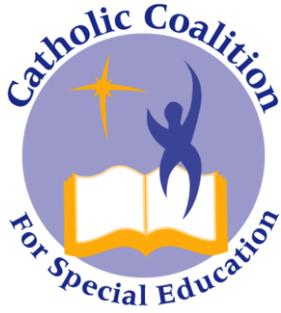
“Cynthia May is a champion for children with intellectual disabilities as well as their parents,” said Cheryl Hall. Hall is a former resource teacher at St. Mary of the Mills in Laurel and now coordinates Mount St. Joseph High School in Baltimore’s St. Giles Program, an inclusive program for students with special needs. May’s presentation “demonstrates how including these children in Catholic Schools is part of our responsibility and honor as Catholic Christians.”

CCSE’s services include providing seed funding to schools and educators seeking to expand their inclusive programming to children with disabilities and offering technical and other support to schools and families. CCSE is believed to be one of only a handful of U.S. Catholic organizations that supports children with disabilities and their families through a variety of means.

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Headquartered in Kensington, MD, CCSE can be found at [www.ccse-maryland.org](http://www.ccse-maryland.org).

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*The mission of the Catholic Coalition for Special Education is to ensure that children with special needs are able to attend, and receive an appropriate education in their local Catholic elementary schools and high schools. In the words of Pope Benedict XVI “no child should be denied his or her right to an education in faith, which in turn nurtures the soul of a nation.” CCSE provides grants and technical assistance to help Catholic schools in Washington, D.C. and Maryland achieve this goal.*

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