

Catholic School Educators Open Doors of Opportunity to More Children



Photo by David Rycke

CCSE board members, grant recipients and friends gather at the Fall Fest and Grant Awards Ceremony

Balloons flew, the moon bounce was rocking, and congratulations were in order as the Catholic Coalition for Special Education (CCSE) celebrated its ninth annual Grants Awards Ceremony on September 28, 2014.

The Stephen and Mary Brogan family graciously hosted the fresh-air event, which drew nearly 150 participants from across the entire state, some driving more than two hours each way. The barbeque dinner from Red, Hot

and Blue drew raves from the crowd, and with full stomachs, participants saluted the 2014 CCSE Grant Awards recipients from five area schools.

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Educator Busts Myths, Offers Inspiration At Workshop

“You can’t learn to swim in the parking lot of the swimming pool.”

Inspired by the words of renowned disabilities advocate Norman Kunc, a group of educators from the Archdioceses of Washington and Baltimore gathered last June for a day-long CCSE-sponsored workshop on inclusion for students with disabilities. Educator Cynthia May, Ph.D., from the College of Charleston, led the interactive workshop, along with Martine Boudreaux, Options Program Director, Bishop England High School, Charleston, S.C.

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CCSE’s 2014 Benefit Supporters Expand Chances for Inclusive Education

Fans and friends of the Catholic Coalition for Special Education, along with archdiocesan representatives, high school and parish educators and administrators, gathered for the 2014 Annual Gala on March 7, 2014 celebrating Catholic education for all.

CCSE President Francesca Pellegrino set the stage for the celebration as she greeted the crowd of nearly 300 with the story of purple and gold, the colors of the CCSE logo.

Auxiliary Bishop of Washington Barry C. Knestout was among the guests, represent-

ing Cardinal Donald Wuerl and conveying his gratitude for CCSE’s work. (See the Cardinal’s letter to CCSE, page 7.)

Master of Ceremonies Father Bill Byrne, Secretary for Pastoral Ministry and Social Concerns of the Archdiocese of Washington, called for all to be generous as they bid on Silent Auction items, raffle offerings and Live Auction treasures.

“Unlike other events, though you may leave poorer, this is one where you also will leave richer, by contributing to make a Catholic education accessible to all, because all are welcome

in God’s church,” he said. At evening’s end, his prediction rang true, as nearly \$200,000 was added to CCSE coffers.

As guests enjoyed a delicious dinner, siblings Kathleen and Theresa Brogan spoke of their joy in sharing an educational experience. Thanks to the open doors of St. John the Evangelist School in Silver Spring, MD, Kathleen noted, her sister Theresa joined her five siblings as a Catholic elementary school student. Theresa’s announcement of her exciting plan for high school, “I’m going

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Academy of the Holy Cross students with and without disabilities enjoy each other’s company

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Grants Mean New Programs, Innovations at Five Catholic Schools

This year, five schools in four Maryland counties received technical assistance and seed grants totaling \$75,000 to create new programs and strengthen ongoing initiatives.

The 2014 recipients are:

- **The Academy of the Holy Cross, Kensington:** The grant will help to fund the creation of the Moreau Options Program at this preparatory school, an ambitious endeavor that will provide inclusion in regular classes for students with intellectual disabilities; small group and/or individual sessions to strengthen skills as needed; and support for inclusion in extracurricular and social activities.

- **Holy Redeemer School, College Park:** Funding will continue to support an aide position in the preschool classroom for a student with an intellectual disability.



Haslyn Kelly plays with a classmate at the pre-school program at Holy Redeemer School



Seton Keough High School teacher Cheryl Hall works with students in the Options Program

- **St. John's Regional Catholic School, Frederick:** A new grant recipient, St. John's, a pre-K-8 school, will fund a salaried position to provide teacher support for students with learning disabilities and autism during the 2014-15 school year.

- **St. Mary's School, Landover Hills:** This Title 1 pre-K-8 school devotes its

grant money to partially fund the salary of a resource teacher for a rising first grader with intellectual disabilities.

- **The Seton Keough High School, Baltimore:** Funding will help to expand the existing Options Program, which has enrolled students with varied intellectual disabilities for the past two years.

Catholic Schools Education

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CCSE President Francesca Pellegrino opened the ceremony, announcing, "This is the best part of my job! Today we will be awarding \$75,000 to five deserving schools."

Principals and program heads were effusive in their praise for the programs and services CCSE funding supports.

"We are now able to fulfill our belief and mission of accepting all children committed to receiving a Catholic education and, in particular, those children with intellectual disabilities," said Holy Redeemer School Principal Maria Bovich, accepting a CCSE check on behalf of her school. "You have a dream that all children can go to school where their siblings go."

Speaking of the Options Program at Seton Keough High School in Baltimore, another seed grant recipient, Principal Angela Calamari remarked, "The Program has afforded all of our students the opportunity to grow in mutual respect and the awareness that God is present in us all. It fosters a spirit of acceptance and teaches tolerance."

Seton Keough Options student Caroline Bodley put it simply: "I am happy to



Photo by David Rycke

Students, families and educators take a break from Fall Fest fun to gather for a tasty meal from the buffet table

be in classes with my friends," she said. "I feel smarter when I get to be in class with friends my age and I like doing fun things with them. It helps having Mrs. Hall work with me."

The Fall Fest wrapped up with applause and the commitment to empower an even greater number of students with disabilities in the future. "We are delighted to see all the schools, families, CCSE friends and supporters, and especially the children, who joined us today," said Grants Committee Chair Ferdinand Lavallee. "As we celebrate the gift of

our brothers, sisters and children of different abilities, we are truly grateful for everyone who has shared their time, talents and treasure to make this first decade of CCSE's service possible. We embrace our next 10 years resolved to doing even more to ensure no child is denied a Catholic elementary and high school education because of his or her intellectual abilities. I pray that our friends and supporters will continue to be generous so together we will make that resolution a reality!" For more info, read this article: <http://www.ccse-maryland.org/ArticleAHC-CCSE.pdf>

Spring Benefit 2014

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to Holy Cross!" as a student in The Academy of the Holy Cross' brand-new Moreau Options Program, was met with a standing ovation.

A rousing Live Auction featured spirited bidding for a wide array of gifts, trips and experiences, including Nationals tickets, a week in County Cork, Ireland, a champagne brunch for 10, a football training camp experience for young fans, and a week in Key West. The crowd was encouraged to bid with passion and purpose.

Co-chairpersons and long-time CCSE supporters Mary Brogan and Anna Vitak saluted the spirit of the event. "This

evening was the culmination of months of preparation and hard work from an extremely dedicated group of volunteers. The fact that it is going off without a hitch is a testament to all of their planning," Vitak said.

Brogan noted, "I so enjoyed watching our older students interact with all the guests. They loved the opportunity to deliver thank-you gifts to our Live Auction bidders - and it certainly seemed our guests enjoyed the chance to chat with them!"

Father Byrne summed up the event, saying, "We've seen amazing things tonight!"



Photo by Erin Werking, Amazing Grace Photography

Hand in hand, Carin Collins and her daughter Lucy at the CCSE Spring Benefit



Photo by David Rycke

Gathering at this year's Spring Benefit are Anna Vitak, Benefit co-chair, Missy Lesmes, CCSE board member, Mary Brogan, CCSE vice president, and Francesca Pellegrino, CCSE president and founder

Purple & Gold: Why CCSE Picked its Colors

When Catholic Coalition for Special Education designed its logo, it chose purple and gold because these colors have a special significance and connection to our faith and our mission.

For Catholics, purple represents anticipation, penance - especially during Lent and Advent - and ultimately Christ's Passion and our Redemption. At CCSE, purple likewise represents anticipation, wrapped in parents' dreams of a Catholic education for their children with disabilities and their hope that all Catholic schools will open their doors and welcome all of God's children.

Gold was one of the three precious gifts presented by the Magi to the baby Jesus. For CCSE, gold - in the form of grants and technical services for schools and parent support and advocacy - is the gift we offer on behalf of God's precious children with special needs, whom he has entrusted to our care. Gold represents the marvelous generosity of all our donors and many volunteers and educators who embrace these children and allow them to have an inclusive Catholic education.

Thank you for believing in and making our work possible!

We Can Help Your School

"Believe in Me!" Grants

If your Catholic school is located in Washington, D.C. or Maryland and is considering expanding or creating a program to enroll two or more students with developmental/intellectual disabilities who would benefit academically and spiritually from qualified special education instruction, CCSE invites you to submit a proposal for a "Believe in Me!" Grant. Funds from CCSE can be applied to hiring special education staff and to purchasing materials necessary to provide appropriate accommodations and adaptations to the curriculum.

Tech Assistance

To promote and facilitate implementation of special education instruction in Catholic schools, CCSE will fund a limited number of technical assistance seed visits in Washington, D.C. and Maryland.

Technical assistance includes support in:

- developing a Disabilities Awareness Program;
- in-service training;
- co-teaching and collaborative teaching strategies;
- establishing and designing a new program and a daily schedule specifically tailored to the students' needs;
- defining the Admissions process, reviewing IEP's and educational reports;
- establishing a peer mentoring program;
- implementing appropriate modifications and accommodations.

Tuition Grants

Advanced Studies in Special Education

CCSE recognizes there is a chronic and pervasive shortage of special education teachers qualified to provide individualized special education instruction in the classroom. To help offset this shortage CCSE has established the Teacher Tuition Assistance Program to provide financial assistance to teachers and other professionals pursuing advanced degrees in special education.

- To learn more about "**Believe in Me!**"

Grants or technical assistance see:

www.ccse-maryland.org/schools.html.

- For online information about Tuition Grants see:

www.ccse-maryland.org/tuition.html.

- For more information, contact CCSE at 301.933.8844 or grants@ccse-maryland.org

The President's Message

In its First Decade CCSE Has Offered Surprising Revelations

Dear Friends,

I've learned startling things in the decade since CCSE was first born at my dining room table.

I've discovered when Catholic schools decide to welcome all children, even those with special needs, into their communities, the most profound transformation often occurs not in students with disabilities but in their classmates and peers without disabilities. Research indicates typically developing students (i.e. students without disabilities) derive academic and social benefits from their involvement and relationships with their peers with special needs. These "special" students provide a catalyst for learning opportunities that students with and without disabilities might not otherwise have.

I've discovered the most generous school communities – in terms of opening their arms to children with special needs – are often those very communities that, on the surface, appear the least able to afford to be generous. CCSE has awarded grants to Catholic schools in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods whose communities insisted they first welcome children with disabilities into their schools, trusting



Francesca Pellegrino with husband Frank and son Alex.

God would provide the resources they lacked. And He has. The educators and administrators in these schools are quietly and humbly going about God's work, witnessing to his love.

As CCSE prepares to celebrate its 10th anniversary we recount how far we've come since that group of determined Catholic parents and educators gathered in 2004 to find a way to help their parish K-8 schools develop safe, strong inclusion programs for their children with Down syndrome, autism or other special learning needs

Since then, CCSE, now a 501(c)3, organization, has supported more than 5,000 students of all faiths, their families and teachers, and awarded over three-

quarters of a million dollars in grants to 24 Catholic schools in six Maryland counties within the Archdioceses of Washington and Baltimore. We've provided technical assistance to help schools create or expand programs to students with disabilities and to help transform them into inclusive educational communities that truly embrace the fundamental meaning of One Body in Christ.

Today, CCSE is leading local and national dialogue about special education in Catholic schools – a concept barely considered, much less implemented, in most Catholic schools just over a decade ago. Schools are no longer considering "if" they can offer inclusive education, but "how" it can be done.

CCSE has become an extended family for me and our Board. Our founding Board members and benefactors believed in that vision of a welcoming Catholic education for all. We've met so many inspiring children, parents, educators, clergy and volunteers who have supported CCSE through its growing pains. On a personal note, none of this would be possible without the loving support of my husband, Frank, and the inspiration of my son, Alex.

This decade has been one of the most memorable, powerful, challenging and rewarding of my life. We are at the vanguard of new opportunities for our children with disabilities. Thank you for your generosity and willingness to help build this dream – and please join me in making CCSE's expansion into the next decade even more remarkable.

Francesca

*Francesca Pellegrino
President and Founder*



Photo by Francesca Pellegrino

Toddlers enjoy a quiet moment at the CCSE Fall Fest

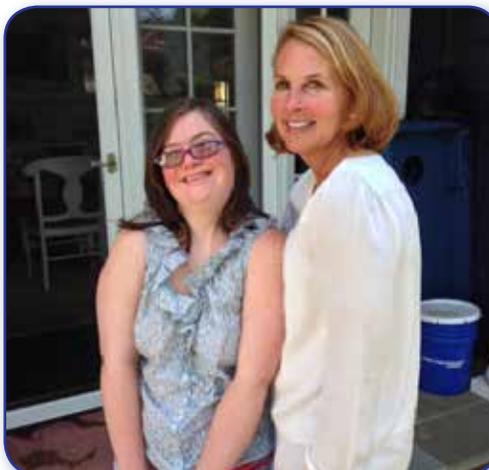
Volunteer Spotlight

There are some special people who touch the lives of others in a meaningful way. For CCSE, Kerri Gardiner has been such a person. Kerri saw a need, and brought her talents to bear.

For the past three years, Kerri, who has no immediate family connection to individuals with disabilities, has taken on the Spring Benefit Basket Raffle. She plans the themes, buys the baskets, and obtains enticing offerings to fill them, often purchasing the items herself. She then creates the splendid packaging that highlights each collection, working her design magic to draw in the buyers.

“There is no event that warms my heart like the CCSE fundraiser. It is a great group of families and the children are the best!”

Kerri’s talents add a special dimension to the process of preparing for CCSE’s largest annual fundraising event, notes past Benefit Chair Carin Collins. Collins says she was working with a small group



Lucy Collins and Kerri Gardiner



The basket table at the CCSE Spring Benefit

Volunteer Spotlight is a regular feature highlighting an individual or family who has offered distinguished service to CCSE.

of volunteers, all of whom were part of the CCSE community. “I never thought of pulling in anyone who didn’t have a connection with CCSE,” Collins admits. But, she says, “Kerri has known my daughter Lucy since birth. That connection is what got her involved in the Benefit.”

When she took over basket assembly, says Collins, “she made everything look so fantastic! She likes to do everything, from A to Z. Kerri is such a hard worker in terms of getting things done. She’s a can-do person.”

“I have always been so happy to support CCSE,” Kerri says. “There is no event that warms my heart like the CCSE fundraiser. It is a great group of families and the children are the best!”

Through Lucy Collins, Kerri witnessed the benefit of inclusion for students with special needs. “The benefit is twofold,” she notes. “Every student, teacher and administrator benefits from having a student with disabilities in their classroom. It helps us to be more understanding, more compassionate and more loving.”

The CCSE Spirit

The CCSE Spirit is published by the Catholic Coalitions for Special Educations, Inc. (CCSE)

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Social Security Workshop Helps Those Preparing for School-to-Work Transition

Open to anyone who has the interest of a person with a disability at heart, CCSE hosted a free Social Security Benefits Workshop last fall, in conjunction with the Blessed Sacrament disabilities Ministry.

The interactive two-hour forum featured Amy Wallish, a Social Security Administration-trained and certified benefits counselor and founder of Full Circle Employment Solutions. Wallish focused on what families, caregivers and self-advocates need to know for a successful transition from school to work, and allaying their fears of moving through the transition process -- primarily the fear of losing a SSA cash or health benefit because of confusion about rules surrounding those benefits.

Starting with the government’s definition of a disability, used by both the SSI and SSDI programs, Wallish described Social



Photo by Francesca Pellegrino

Benefits counselor Amy Wallish, founder of Full Circle Employment Solutions, led the Social Security Workshop

Security disability programs and eligibility requirements, including what happens to recipients at age 18 when their eligibility must be reviewed. She presented various Social Security work incentives and detailed specifics on maximizing their use while working.

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“ ‘You belong here.’ Inclusive schools convey this powerful message to all students, and the message is evident from the classroom to the ball field and beyond.

For Catholic schools, the goal of creating an inclusive environment should supersede all others, as development of the spirit is a prerequisite for the development of the mind and body. When schools are inclusive – when students have a sense of belonging, when teachers innovate to reach diverse learners, when classmates and teammates collaborate to support each other – everyone wins.”

— Cindi May, Ph.D.
CCSE workshop presenter

Inclusion Workshop

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The workshop focused on the benefits of all students learning together.

“The purpose of school is to enable students to live as productive, fulfilled members of the adult community,” said May, adding this is true for all children. Inclusion takes time, preparation and collaboration, May said. What does inclusion for students with disabilities mean? Attending regular classes, being challenged at their own level, and being expected to learn and progress, she said.

May challenged attendees to learn how Universal Design for Learning can be applied in order to differentiate assignments, tests, and learning methods to meet the needs of students with special needs. She busted some common myths about academic accommodation: that it is very expensive, that students with disabilities cannot make decisions and need to be protected from failing, and that they should not be held to the same behavioral standards as other students.

May pointed out road blocks to inclusion, challenging teachers to think of ways to design learning tools that fit the need

of the individual, and to convert their own materials to reflect accommodations. She encouraged them to develop an academic support plan for each student; maintain the integrity of the material while reducing the density; use guided or copied notes; define terms; add graphics; and use detailed worksheets as learning tools.

May also covered the testing process, and suggested digestible techniques, including visual and oral prompts – “Repeat, repeat, repeat!” she urged – along with allowing oral exams that focus on core learning.

She held up the high school Options Program as a successful strategy, noting Options students achieve gains typically double or more the expected goals set for them. May cited research indicating school communities thrive and benefit socially, academically and morally by including students with disabilities.

The successful inclusion school, May said, offers “an environment in which the student learns acceptance, tolerance, inclusion, empathy, and understanding...where many learning styles are acknowledged, supported, and successful.”

Social Security Workshop Helps Those Preparing for School-to-Work Transition

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Wallish carefully explained how to maximize cash and healthcare benefits while working toward self-sufficiency, and outlined tools to track benefit changes while working and reporting wages to the SSA. She stressed the importance of immediately reporting to the SSA major life changes, such as address, loss of job, employment status, etc.

The presentation included valuable tips on accuracy in record keeping, as well as the importance of re-evaluating benefit recipients’ long-range and short-term goals. Wallish made it clear that a combination of good information and planning is most important in making good decisions for the future of those with disabilities.

Attendees went away with presentation handouts, copies of the SSA’s “red book,” and a summary guide to employment supports. Most important, they left with the understanding of benefits and knowledge that their choice of employment, combined with the appropriate supports, can promote a successful transition and lead to greater economic security – clearly, the goal of anyone with the best interest of a person with a disability at heart.

CCSE’s Family Support and Advocacy helps families of children with disabilities navigate the complex maze of services by providing information on programs and community resources. It also provides spiritual and practical support for parents raising a child with a disability.



Photo by Francesca Pellegrino

Cindi May, national expert on inclusive education



Photo by Francesca Pellegrino

Educators from Archdiocese of Washington and Baltimore schools attended the workshop



Cardinal Wuerl Speaks about CCSE Blessings

Dear Friends,

As you gather for the Catholic Coalition for Special Education's Ninth Annual Spring Benefit, I want to express my gratitude for all that you do in solidarity with families who seek the opportunity of a Catholic education for their children with special needs, as well as your support of special education teachers working in our Catholic schools.

Too often, children with intellectual and developmental disabilities have found themselves marginalized in our society – on the outside looking in. But from the outset, CCSE has fostered a culture of inclusion and sought to create new educational opportunities for our children with special learning needs to receive a Catholic school education and thus encounter the powerful love of Jesus Christ on a daily basis in the classroom. In addition, as a part of the great mosaic that is our family of faith, children who learn differently help to manifest the kingdom of God, enriching the life of all students in our Catholic school communities.

Students and parents know that in the nurturing home that is a Catholic school, every child matters. That lesson is instilled every day so that our young people grow up with a deep sense of their own self-worth, personal respect and dignity, gaining the confidence they need to take on the challenges of life and bearing witness to the hope and joy of Christ for their classmates and all those they encounter.

Their presence is made possible due to the dedicated efforts of CCSE and their benefactors and volunteers. Last year, \$75,000 in "Believe in Me" grants was awarded to five Catholic schools in addition to CCSE hosting a professional development workshop for teachers and administrators. This generous support is a glimmer of hope for families to realize their aspirations for their children's potential and it is a response to the call of our Holy Father Pope Francis, "Let everyone admire how you care for one another and how you encourage and accompany one another" (Evangelii gaudium, 99).

Asking God's blessings on you and all those served by the Catholic Coalition for

Special Education, and with every good wish, I am Faithfully in Christ,

Signed,

Donald Cardinal Wuerl

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Board Members Bring Passion, Skills to CCSE

CCSE welcomes two additions to the CCSE Board of Directors, contributing varied skills and strengths to the team. Each brings a unique voice to the organization.

Roger Brown was raised in the Baltimore area, and earned a bachelor's degree from Virginia Tech. Roger is a former NFL football player with the New York Giants and New England Patriots. He was with the Giants when they won the Super Bowl championship in 1991.

Roger is the owner and personal trainer at Train Like A Pro in Washington, DC. He also serves on the Board of Silver Spring Lacrosse. Roger and his wife, Courtney Sullivan Brown, have three children and reside in Silver Spring, Maryland. He joined the board in July 2013.

Anna McDermott-Vitak, is an executive director for Global Government Affairs at Amgen, Inc., in Washington DC. She focuses on international diplomacy with primary responsibility for Amgen's European affiliate relationships. Anna serves on several American-European business councils. She earned a bachelor's in science and an MBA in marketing from LaSalle University and is currently enrolled at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. Anna and her husband, Joseph, have four children and are parishioners at Our Lady of Mercy in Potomac, MD. She joined the board in August 2013.



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**CCSE thanks its 2014
Spring Benefit Sponsors**



EVERYTHING MATTERS



Save the Date!
2015 Spring Benefit
Friday, March 13, 2015



Students with and without disabilities gather at this year's CCSE Fall Fest and Grant Awards Ceremony

***Celebrating 10 years of making
inclusive education possible for all children.***