



# THE CCSE SPIRIT

THE CATHOLIC COALITION FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION NEWSLETTER

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## Video Features CCSE Stars for Papal Visit



Photo by Nick Stone

At the end of a hot day, the children still showed enthusiasm for the video

[www://bit.ly/ccsevideo](http://bit.ly/ccsevideo)  
Changing the world's attitude toward children with differences starts small, and will take time, but Pope Francis can accelerate the process. Knowing that an Apostolic Visit attracts

the attention of all, including Catholics, non-Catholics, educators, policymakers and the media, Catholic Coalition for Special Education (CCSE) dove into the opportunity early and with full focus, in the hopes that

the Holy Father himself would eventually provide his leadership to open hearts, open minds and open doors in Catholic school communities locally and around the globe.

*continued on p. 4*

## Truly a Pope of Encounters

What an incredible week it was! The presence of Pope Francis in Washington, DC, New York and Philadelphia in September was electrifying. People of all faiths spoke of not being able to tear themselves away from the television coverage, all touched in their

own way by witnessing the beauty of the loving encounters of the Holy Father. He so clearly sees in each person the manifestation of God's love that those who actually meet Francis cannot help but feel it.

Take our own Gina Baldini, for instance, whom many saw

run impulsively out of the crowd to hug the Holy Father in front of the Apostolic Nunciature.

First grader Eddie Sloan was also there with his little sister and his mom, Melissa. Eddie attends one of CCSE's former grantee schools. "I know the

*continued on p. 5*



Photo by Mary Frances LaHood /St. Joseph's House

The iconic photo seen around the world of Pope Francis' face of pure joy welcoming the embrace of Theresa Brogan



After a spontaneous run to Pope Francis and hug, Pope Francis and Gina Baldini share a moment neither will forget



Photo by Melissa Sloan

Pope Francis makes quite the impression on Eddie Sloan

## "Believe in Me!" Benefit Celebrates 10th Anniversary

by Bridget Shute



Photo by Nick Stone

Gala Chairs David and Anne Kane; Roger Brown; Francesca, Frank and Alex Pellegrino

Nearly 10 years ago, CCSE began with a small group of passionate educators, clergy and parents, sitting around a dining room table. The injustice of excluding students with special needs from Catholic schools had to be remedied. Since its inception, CCSE has provided technical assistance, professional development, and other resources to schools and families free of charge.

CCSE's success comes, in *continued on p. 6*



Photo by Nick Stone

Zachary Karr; Pat Collins and Benefit sponsor Chris Donatelli enjoying the night

## Inside This Issue

- President's Message.....p2
- We Can Help Your School.....p2
- Grant Fall Festival.....p3
- Volunteer Spotlight.....p4
- Sr. Kathleen Lannak.....p5
- Prof Advisory Bd Update.....p7

# The President's Message

## - A Year of Milestones

Dear Friends,

This year has been marked by important milestones in education both for CCSE and our country. This year, we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the *Americans with Disabilities Act*, the 40th anniversary of the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*, and the 50th anniversary of *Head Start*.

And CCSE celebrates its 10th anniversary. In that time, our **"Believe in Me!" Program** has awarded approximately \$800,000 in seed grants to 26 Catholic schools in seven Maryland counties. Our work is gaining national attention.

Needless to say the highlight of the year and I dare say of the decade was a personal encounter with Pope Francis. It was such a blessing for my son and me to greet him at the Apostolic Nunciature during his trip to Washington. What a thrill it was for CCSE students to receive hugs from the Holy Father!

With the media spotlight on CCSE, the most frequently asked question was, "If you were to meet the Pope, what would you want to tell him?"



*Alex, Frank and Francesca Pellegrino*

I want him to know that having a child with a disability deepens one's faith and brings parents closer to God. That despite the challenges and struggles of raising a child with a disability it also brings countless blessings. We need his leadership to help transform our Catholic schools into model centers of inclusive learning where ALL students - both with and without disabilities - benefit academically, socially and spiritually.

When parents struggle with a variety of issues including how having a child with a disability impacts their faith, we provide a friendly ear. And we become a family, so that it feels like their beautiful children are my own. It is a thrill to watch them attend Catholic schools and grow up. I have spent the last decade doing something that I am passionate about and absolutely love even though 30 years ago I could not have envisioned that this was my future; apparently it was the Lord's plan.

My vision for the next decade is that CCSE will transform into a self-sustaining organization with full-time staff. I hope that our work will lead to more Catholic high schools opening their doors to students with disabilities. The demand exists as more students are enrolling in Catholic elementary schools than ever before.

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

## We Can Help Your School

### "Believe in Me!" Grants

If your Catholic school is located in the Archdiocese of Baltimore or Washington 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!" Seed Grant. Funds from CCSE can be applied to hiring special education staff and to purchasing materials necessary to provide appropriate accommodations and modifications 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, DC 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 IEPs 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](http://www.ccse-maryland.org/schools.html).
- For online information about Tuition Grants see: [www.ccse-maryland.org/tuition.html](http://www.ccse-maryland.org/tuition.html).
- For more information, contact CCSE at 301-933-8844 or [grants@ccse-maryland.org](mailto:grants@ccse-maryland.org).

## The CCSE Spirit

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## Grants Help to Expand Reach to New Schools and More Students

This fall CCSE awarded a total of \$66,000 to seven schools with one receiving the first Technical Assistance grant ever awarded by CCSE. Many of these schools serve lower-income students in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods.

The 2015 recipients are:

- **The Academy of the Holy Cross, Kensington:** The grant will continue to help fund the salary of a special education teacher for the Moreau Options Program. Created just last year, this program provides inclusion in regular classes along with small-group instruction for students with intellectual disabilities.

- **Bishop McNamara High School, Forestville:** Bishop McNamara's grant will fund teacher attendance at a Learning and Brain Conference as well as a school-wide professional day for teachers to be led by CCSE Professional Advisory Board member Dr. Cynthia May.

- **Holy Redeemer School, College Park:** Funding continues to support the salary of an instructional assistant and additional professional development to support students with intellectual disabilities.

- **St. Joan of Arc School, Aberdeen:** With the help of CCSE's grant, this new recipient will be able to fund the salary of its resource teacher who serves students with disabilities.

- **St. Mary's School, Landover Hills:** This Title I school uses its grant to help fund the salary of a para-educator for students with intellectual disabilities.

- **The Academy of St. Matthias the Apostle, Lanham:** Another new CCSE grantee school, St. Matthias is using its grant to help fund the salary of a teacher for its new resource center program which will support students with intellectual and other disabilities.

Also this year, CCSE's first ever Technical Assistance Grant was awarded to **Saint Francis International School, Silver Spring**, to provide student-centered planning for a child with Down syndrome.

## Annual Fall Fest with a Papal Twist to Honor Grant Recipient Schools



Photo by Debbie Copeland

Pope Francis welcomed families to the Brogan home for the Fall Fest and Grant Award Ceremony, including the Lannan family

With the visit of Pope Francis just days away, CCSE threw a papal party for its families and grant recipient schools – and also marked its 10th anniversary.

This free event included papal fun, a moon bounce, crafts and balloons along with great barbecue and conversation. New families and schools came out along with long-time friends. The Fall Fest is a great event for parents and children to make new friends. Equally important, it is an opportunity for school representatives to network and learn how other Catholic schools are serving students with special needs. A special shout-out goes to St. Joan of Arc School in Aberdeen for traveling nearly 60 miles to the idyllic home of Stephen and Mary Brogan, who once again graciously hosted the annual event.

Even the media showed up to interview



Photo by Debbie Copeland

Academy of the Holy Cross was well-represented at the Fall Fest with President Katy Prebble, Moreau Program Director Emily Montgomery, Development Director Charly Ryan, students and friends

students about their *Welcome Pope Francis to Washington* video and his impending visit.

During the 10th Grant Awards Ceremony, Wendy Bauer, Resource Teacher at St. Joan of Arc, said that the CCSE "grant has allowed the school to live its mission of infusing Catholic education with 21st century technology to serve our students. I have been able to use assistive technologies to aid students with vision difficulties to read and students with comprehension difficulties to understand."

Bishop McNamara High School President Marco Clark, noted that "Bishop McNamara High School is a place where success is a part of the language. Everyone is possessed with gifts, and as a Catholic educational institution, we set the bar high for our students and then we say that we're here to walk this journey



Photo by Debbie Copeland

Relaxing together are board member Andrew Fois, teacher Tracie Lamirande of St. Mary's School and guests

with you. With the financial support from CCSE, we have been able to establish and expand our St. Joseph's Program to help our students with learning differences achieve success, academically, socially and in various areas of their lives."

Fernand Lavallee, Board Member and Chair of the Grants Committee, said "The Grants Committee is delighted with, and humbled by, both the diversity and excellence of the schools receiving grants. The recipients include two high schools well known for excellence in academics and athletics, and several elementary schools serving students in the Washington and Baltimore archdioceses, including its economically depressed communities. Each one of the recipient schools has a remarkable commitment to helping its students develop fully all of their talents

continued on p. 5

# Volunteer Spotlight on Kari Hicks

by Lyn McGann

One of the many blessings the birth of her daughter, Bella, brought to Kari Hicks was a fuller understanding of the joys and challenges that spring from the addition of a child with special needs to a family. "Bella really opened our eyes, and gave us more opportunities to see what's out there for her," Kari says.

Four-year-old Bella has Down syndrome. Early on, when Bella was just a month old, the principal at St. Peter's Elementary School in Olney assured Kari that the school would be ready to serve Bella when her turn came. This touching pledge has informed Kari's volunteer efforts with several special needs organizations.

CCSE was one such organization, and when Francesca Pellegrino approached Kari to help with the 2012 Spring Benefit, Kari plunged right in. "CCSE's mis-

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



Photo by Debbie Copeland

*Volunteer Spotlight Kari Hicks with her daughters Bella and Erin enjoying the Fall Fest*

sion statement spoke to me," Kari says. She started attending planning meetings and soliciting donations, and in the fall of 2014, Kari was asked to take on the larger commitment of Volunteer Coordinator.

Kari soon found that friends and family members were eager to step up and help, and her efforts led to a seamless coverage of duties large and small that made

the event a joyful experience for all. "They were thrilled to jump in and help. They all said how much they loved working at the event," Kari notes.

With an older daughter, Erin, at the Academy of the Holy Cross, the Hicks family has been able to see CCSE's mission in action at that school. Son, Andrew, is a senior at Gonzaga and daughter, Elena, is a St. Peter's fifth grader. They all look forward to Bella being able to enjoy a Catholic education too.

"I do plan to take on Volunteer Coordinator again this year, and help on committees as well," Kari says. Good news indeed for CCSE!

**Retirement plans can be subject to double or even triple taxation (federal estate, federal income, state death and income taxes).**

**Name the Catholic Coalition for Special Education as a beneficiary and taxes will be avoided.**

## Video Features CCSE Stars

*continued from p. 1*

This summer CCSE produced a brief video inspired by the Pope's Google Hangout with children with disabilities around the world, during which he said, "Each one of us has a treasure inside ... What I want to ask of you is that you do not hide the treasure that each of you has." In CCSE's video the treasured children of CCSE show Pope Francis the treasures of the nation's capital.

Featuring 10 children with disabilities along with their siblings and school 'buddies' welcoming Pope Francis to Washington DC, the video offered the Pope a tour of the city. Since the Pope had never visited the United States, several monuments

and key tourist destinations were included.

The children, wearing their Catholic school uniforms and with parents in tow, trekked around DC on a hot Saturday morning with the expert support of CCSE volunteer Christine Nawrot, who offered her home as the starting point. The adults were the entourage; the children were clearly the stars. Even the Secret Service lent a hand.

The video has been a worldwide hit, viewed and praised by bishops and lay people, the media and strangers alike. It would not have been possible without the dedication, keen eye and impressive talent of Nick Stone (Nick Stone Photography), who donated his time to film and edit the video.



Photo courtesy of Nick Stone  
Nick Stone donated his time not just for the 2015 Benefit, but also for the filming and editing of CCSE's papal video; please visit <http://nickstone.com>



*Kids being kids, regardless of abilities*

The video and the children have appeared on WRC (Ch. 4), WJLA (Ch. 7), and EWTN News Nightly, along with newspapers, news agencies and blogs around the world. What a fitting way to jump-start the changing of attitudes in our world of diversity!

Thank you to our video stars: Gina Baldini; Theresa Brogan; Annamaria & Carlo Brown; Emma & Isabelle Cannito; Adriana Colburn; Samantha Copeland; Emily Dukes; Betsy Haywood; Erin Hicks; Ellie Johnson; John Paul Lavallee; Faith, Hathaway & Joelle Packard; Nicholas Page; Henry & John Christopher Rutz; Eddie & Gianna Sloan; Madelyn Tankesley; Breanna Vitak; and Caroline Zarzecki.



*Several media outlets covered the video launch party*

## A Pope of Encounters

*continued from p. 1*



*Cardinal Wuerl also received his fair share of hugs from Catholic school students including Eddie Sloan*

Pope has quite a heart for children and especially children with disabilities. ... To see someone so special and so holy, and to see Eddie want to be close to him, it's kind of indescribable," Melissa said.

CCSE was blessed and honored to be a part of several of the Pope's stops during his time in Washington. Board member Frank Pellegrino was invited to the White House welcoming ceremony. Our special *Welcome Pope Francis to Washington* video was shown to the assembled crowd waiting for the Papal Mass at the Shrine. But those touching personal encounters outside the Apostolic Nunciature were heart-stopping.

In addition to Gina and Eddie, Founder Francesca Pellegrino, her son and inspiration Alex, and CCSE students Ben Stevick and Theresa Brogan were also lucky enough to be present. Excitement and joy filled the crowd as Pope Francis arrived. The hugs, the smiles, the tears, the blessings were overwhelming.

The Holy Father's deep love and respect for every child of God could not be missed. As Neil Sloan, Eddie's father, reflects, "We are grateful not only for Pope Francis' joy-filled embrace of our children with special needs, but also for the awareness that so many people share our belief in the dignity and value of all people and celebrate with us in Eddie's wonderful opportunity to have an inclusive education with his friends and siblings in our parish school."

Everyone at CCSE is still glowing after this truly memorable encounter!

## In Remembrance - A Fond Farewell to Sr. Kathleen Lannak

*by Mary Brogan*

This past summer CCSE lost a good friend. On July 30 Sister Kathleen Lannak, IHM, passed into eternal life. Sister had a long career of service and leadership to Catholic schools, the last 35 years of which she served as the principal of St. John the Evangelist School in Silver Spring. There, and across the Archdiocese of Washington, Sister Kathleen became our strong ally.

Sixteen years ago, before the Coalition even existed, she added the following note to the card she sent to welcome our newborn daughter with Down syndrome. "We can't wait to have her here at St. John's. We'll be ready." Sister just knew it was the right thing to do. She just knew that Theresa should follow her siblings into St. John's. She understood, of course, that just like every other student in her school, Theresa, too, was made in the image of God and would have beautiful gifts to share.

I am sure that Sister Kathleen also knew that there would be challenges. I am sure that she understood there might be doubters and she might be called upon to defend her decision, and of course, find ways to pay for it.

I am also sure that Sister's courage to commit to include Theresa at St. John's, as well as those students who would follow her, came directly from her faith. In CCSE's first video, Sister Kathleen encourages



*Photo by Patrick Ryan*

*A touching moment at the Benefit with Sr. Kathleen Lannak, IHM, (second from left) and Sister Doreen from St. John the Evangelist along with Teacher Kelly Burgess and graduates*

other schools and principals by saying, "It's a matter of realizing that once you say, 'I'm going to do it,' God's graces take over and people start jumping on board and helping you do it."

Sister not only welcomed our students into St. John's School, but she 'jumped on board' to help others do the same. She hosted several of CCSE's early award ceremonies and annual meetings. She attended as many of our Spring Benefits and Family Fun Fests as she could. Most importantly, she was an outspoken advocate for inclusion in our Catholic schools. She encouraged others to visit St. John's, to meet with her teachers and discuss possibilities and concerns, and she implored them to move forward with trust in the Lord. Sister Kathleen told those who would listen, "It has brought to our school a real understanding of all human nature and of all God's gifts to us."

May Perpetual Light shine upon her.

## Annual Fall Fest with a Papal Twist

*continued from p. 3*



*Photo by Debbie Copeland*

*Saint Francis International School Principal Tobias Harkleroad speaks about the grant award and how it will help his school serve students with disabilities*

and gifts as young Christian men and women. And each admirably refuses to exclude (and miss out on) the treasures provided by students with intellectual disabilities. We are grateful to be able to support these diverse schools and the unique, diverse and rich Catholic charisms each school so generously and authentically delivers."

# “Believe in Me!” Benefit 2015

continued from p. 1



Photo by Nick Stone

Lucy Collins and Maddie Guay



Photo by Patrick Ryan

Benefit Executive Committee: Anna Vitak; Mary Brogan; Carin Collins and Missy Lesmes

large part, from generous donations and its volunteers who form CCSE's backbone. On March 13, 2015, CCSE hosted the 10th anniversary Spring Benefit, its largest fundraising event.

Gala chairs Anne and David Kane, along with event committee chairs Mary Brogan and Anna Vitak, created an evening of warmth and joy, beginning with impressive raffle baskets and silent auction items that filled two large rooms. The 300 guests bid on items and visited with friends old and new, including numerous representatives from Catholic parishes and high schools as well as the Archdioceses of Baltimore and Washington.

As guests dined, Auxiliary Bishop Martin D. Holley gave the keynote address, conveyed Donald Cardinal Wuerl's greetings and praised those schools that welcome students of varying abilities. He stated, "They witness to the local community, our nation and to the whole world the principles of social justice and equality."

A surprise tribute was made by Kelly Branaman, interim superintendent for the Archdiocese of Washington, who honored Francesca Pellegrino with an award commemorating 10 years of extraordinary service.

All of the hard work and generosity of

so many supporters and sponsors made the Spring Benefit a huge success. Among the abundant offerings were packages spanning the globe from The Ritz-Carlton and Marriott Hotels which included trips, Taylor Swift concert tickets, and something for every sports fan from the Bruins to the Cowboys. Not to mention the 99 bottles of beer in a wheelbarrow!

The evening would not have been complete without an anniversary cake and a beautiful tribute from the Events Committee recognizing Francesca Pellegrino's extraordinary contribution to the community and to the lives of children with disabilities and their families.

Your generous support helped us reach our goal of raising \$200,000. We are so grateful to all of our benefactors whose contributions will help us meet the increasing demand of a Catholic education for students with disabilities.



Photo by Nick Stone

Master of Ceremonies Fr. Bill Byrne and keynote speaker Bishop Martin D. Holley with Msgr. Thomas A. Kane who delivered the invocation and Francesca Pellegrino



Photo by Patrick Ryan

Board Members: Anna Vitak; Missy Lesmes; Mary Brogan; Carin Collins; Frank Pellegrino; Andrew Fois; Francesca Pellegrino; Patrick Murphy and Fernand Lavallee. Not pictured: Roger Brown

## Quotable at the Benefit

*"Catholic schools are uniquely qualified to help develop the potential of students with special needs, specifically because they are Catholic. ... And when students with and without disabilities are educated together, they all learn, witness love, unity, respect and beauty in diversity; and that there are many ways to define success."*

*Bishop Martin D. Holley  
Auxiliary Bishop of Washington*

*"I thought this little phrase of a song seemed to fit ... 'All God's children got a place in the choir. Some sing low and some sing higher.' ... Isn't that the theme of what we are about – a place in the choir for all the little ones."*

*Msgr. Thomas A. Kane*

*"I look at the words 'intellectual disability' and it is a challenge to me to accept those words. ... Everybody learns differently. You learn differently. ... It's not a disability. I think it's a gift. You develop other things. So it's a rainbow. Everybody brings different things to the table."*

*David Kane*

*2015 CCSE Gala Co-Chair*

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and fun developments.  
Send us your email address  
to be added to our e-letter.  
info@ccse-maryland.org**

# The Ultimate Task for the Professional Advisory Board

by Bridget Shute

Last fall, CCSE revamped its Professional Advisory Board (PAB) to serve as a strategic partner for the Board, advising on special education (K-12, transition and post-secondary) and disabilities issues, programs for professionals and reviewing teacher grant applications.

Through CCSE's Technical Assistance Program, it recommends appropriate support services when requested by schools. PAB also prepares professional development workshops and disability-related work-

shops to support parents. And it serves as the public advocate for CCSE.

As introductions were made at the inaugural meeting, one could see that this was a very diverse group of experts, from those working in the schools to those working to promote inclusion on the national level.

This group was formed specifically to find solutions so that inclusion can occur and thrive in our Catholic schools.

To help address this identified need, members of the Professional Advisory Board are developing a guiding principles document that will provide teachers and administrators a broad description of the policies, processes, and instructional approaches for including students with disabilities in Catholic schools.

How can CCSE and the Catholic Church increase inclusive education in our Catholic schools? Now that's the ultimate task.



Photo by Patrick Ryan

*Professional Advisory Board Members: back row: Mary Brogan; Sharon Malley; Alison Hughes; Joan Hosmer; Bridget Shute; front row: Maggie Hubbard; Jeanne Dwyer; Shawn Lattanzio. Not pictured: Martine Boudreaux; Amanda Herndon; Cynthia May and Madeleine Will*

## Purple & Gold: The Meaning of CCSE's Colors

When Catholic Coalition for Special Education designed its logo, we 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 - 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!

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*We Stand with Pope Francis to  
Open Doors for Students with Disabilities*

## Save the Date! 2016 Spring Benefit Friday, March 18, 2016 Embassy of Italy

CCSE thanks its  
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Photo by Nick Stone

*Our CCSE stars making their Welcome Pope Francis to Washington video*

**Can't wait to see you next year!**