

## The President's Message: 15th Anniversary



Photo by Patrick Ryan

Alex, Frank and Francesca Pellegrino

Sometimes you just have to stop and smell the roses. This is one of those times. As CCSE approaches its 15th anniversary it is fitting to reflect on how far we have all come, marvel at the wonderful, generous people who have contributed to CCSE's growth, and celebrate our Catholic partner schools that have transformed into inclusive communities of learning.

We started around my dining table with a small group of parents, with a passion for something that was nothing more than an idea. We quickly discovered that interest in our idea was not limited to just a few families. In fact, there were families far and wide interested in seeing Catholic schools expand beyond serving students with mild learning disabilities. We found support for our idea from clergy, teachers, and administrators.

We started by supporting just two schools. Since then CCSE has awarded 60 grants totaling over \$1,000,000 to Catholic schools in eight Maryland counties and has touched the lives of 7000 students, their families, teachers and schools. We have provided countless hours of consulting and coaching support to Catholic schools free of charge, and provided countless hours of support to parents of children with disabilities also free of charge.

I have watched children with disabilities enter first grade in a Catholic school, walk the stage at high school graduation, continue on to post-secondary education and blossom into productive young men and women. My heart fills with pride

when these young people reach these milestones, just as if they were my own children.

And what could be more fitting in this anniversary year than to be nominated by the Archdiocese of Washington for the prestigious NCEA Elizabeth Ann Seton Award.

CCSE's advocacy work over the last 15 years has led to an important shift in mindset. Conversations have shifted from whether a school would even consider serving students with developmental and/or intellectual disabilities to a desire to explore current best practices. CCSE has been a pioneer in this effort. Before our founding in 2004 there was only one organization, FIRE in Kansas City, to serve as an inspiration. Now there are organizations forming in dioceses across the country to join our movement.

The coming year is filled with promise. The inclusion movement and CCSE have both reached a pivot point. Our strategic plan, which will soon be available, charts a path for the next 3-5 years and includes hiring new staff, reviewing Board governance practices and establishing programmatic and financial goals to address the increasing demand for CCSE's support and services to schools and families, and most critically to ensure CCSE's future sustainability.

There's still so much more work that needs to be done. We continue to regularly hear from families about the rejection they experience when they begin to explore whether their child with a disability can go to a Catholic school with their siblings. We have met parents who have willingly uprooted their family and moved clear across the country to be part of an inclusive Catholic school.

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Photo by Nick Stone

Students jump for "Papa" when making video for Pope Francis

## Technical Assistance and Training

by Kathy Dempsey



Photo by Kathy Dempsey

Educators enjoy networking opportunities at workshop

It happens. One part of the mission becomes more popular or gets more ink than another. But perception is not necessarily reality. At CCSE, the annual seed grants awarded to schools receive all the glory and gala attention. But what makes for enduring change and successful inclusive schools is the quiet support offered by CCSE before, during and after grants are awarded. This support is not limited to schools during the grant-making process. It is open to all Catholic schools in the Archdioceses of Baltimore and Washington. And it is all free of charge.

"What I really like about CCSE is that their support is individualized. They ask us what we need, they work with us to identify needs within our community and then to provide support around them," said Emily Montgomery, Director of the Moreau Options Program at The Academy of the Holy Cross.

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# The President's Message: 15th Anniversary

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Our vision is that Catholic school services for students with disabilities become an accepted and expected part of Catholic schools so that families can avoid the extreme steps of moving.

Our strategic plan describes steps to ensure long-term success and sustainability. We can only achieve this with more staff in a larger office space.

Expanded capacity will enable us to provide more support and encouragement to parents to help keep families strong and together, to provide information on community resources, to provide opportunities for Catholic parents to socialize and worship together.

Developing a diverse and robust revenue stream will allow us to hire the staff we need and to respond positively to every eligible Request for Funding Application (RFA) received from our Catholic schools. Most importantly, it will allow us to not only increase our support and services to schools and families, but also continue to offer them free of charge.

Hiring more staff will allow us to develop model pilot programs with our partner schools and work towards defining standards for inclusive special education within Catholic schools. It will allow us to provide the Technical Assistance (training, coaching, consulting, and workshops) which is in very high demand.

Expanded capacity will enable us to answer every phone call, email and letter with a resounding "yes".



CCSE stands as a beacon of hope for the future generations and I hope that it will serve as an inspiration for many more schools around the nation.

It is your generosity that makes CCSE's work possible so that families find an open door and a place at the table for their children with special needs. Your support is critical.

As you gather around the family table during the holidays, I hope you remember the good you have done and the lives you have touched.

You enrich our community, change lives and truly make a difference for our children and youth with disabilities, their families, teachers and schools.

From the CCSE family to yours, many blessings,

*Francesca*

Photo courtesy of St. Joseph House



A sampling of special moments with special friends over the years

## The CCSE Spirit

The CCSE Spirit is published by the Catholic Coalition for Special Education, Inc. (CCSE).

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## A Skip in Everyone's Step *by Kathy Dempsey*

This year's Fall Family Festival and 14th Grant Awards Ceremony hummed in the bright sun of the last official day of summer. It was a record-setting crowd and there seemed to be a skip in everyone's step. New friends and families from a variety of schools mixed cheerfully with smiling faces of old.

The afternoon provided a nice opportunity for families and educators to mingle and talk about plans, share stories and ask questions over barbeque and drinks. Children played in the moon bounce, on the swings and at the basketball hoop. They made tie-dye works of art, had plenty of cotton candy and snow-cones, and then thankfully played some more.

When the afternoon's activities transitioned to Grant Awards, Francesca Pellegrino shared details, for the benefit of the uninitiated, about CCSE and the programs it offers and reflected on how far CCSE and the mission of inclusion in Catholic schools have come. She paid particular attention to the Technical Assistance to schools that CCSE prioritized this year.

"This year, over and above previous years, we have focused our financial resources on increasing our Technical Assistance so that we may expand the orbit of schools we support and therefore help more families and students, on top of the schools receiving seed grants," said Pellegrino.

The two schools awarded grants by CCSE for this academic year are Our Lady of Mercy Catholic School in Potomac, Maryland, and St. Bartholomew Catholic School in Bethesda, Maryland.

Special educators Amanda Herndon and Barbara Brown together were comment-



*Mrs. Katy Prebble, President of The Academy of the Holy Cross, delights in meeting future students*



*The team from St. Bartholomew School in Bethesda accepting their Grant Award*



*Dr. Donna Hargens, Superintendent of Schools for the Archdiocese of Baltimore, on hand to celebrate and enjoy the day with families and schools*



Photos by Kathy Dempsey

*Emma and her mom creating art and memories*



*The team from Our Lady of Mercy School in Potomac accepting their Grant Award*

ing about how grateful they are that CCSE believes in St. Bartholomew. "Your support allows our community to do what God calls us to do – teach and include everyone. What a gift this is to our community," they said.

Deborah Thomas, Principal of Our Lady of Mercy, said "Mercy will use the generous grant from CCSE to implement an intensive, year-long professional development program for faculty on Universal Design for Learning. The UDL framework will allow us to continue providing caring, engaging, and challenging instruction in the least restrictive environment for all students."

Congratulations to these two wonderful schools and to all schools that will benefit from CCSE's enhanced Technical Assistance.

## Technical Assistance

*continued from p. 1*

Often administrators and educators feel alone when considering opening their doors to students with disabilities, so CCSE is here to offer assistance, answer questions and accompany schools and faculty on their inclusion journey. Professional development is the biggest need that schools have aside from funding. Knowing there is someone to call or email when a question arises makes all the difference.

Services include individual teacher coaching and topical workshops (see *Educator's Corner* on page 4) plus year-long capacity building assistance tailored specifically to a school's needs. CCSE also can provide guidance on things such as ways to modify a school's schedule to fit students' needs or implement the most appropriate accommodation so students interact with the educational content successfully. (Other services are described on page 5, in *We Can Help Your School*, and on

our website at [ccse-maryland.org/schools.html](http://ccse-maryland.org/schools.html).)

A recent CCSE workshop reminded educators that there is no average student who is average across the board in every subject. Each student has classes where he struggles or where she excels. Therefore, in many of CCSE's workshops and trainings, teachers are learning about new tools and methods of incorporating technologies that preserve curriculum content while adapting the ways in which students interact with that content, according to CCSE's *Guiding Principles* publication.

CCSE has at its disposal a network of experts and colleagues and offers an array of free services to assist schools and teachers construct a welcoming environment. CCSE exists to serve Catholic school educators and to help schools be the best they can be in serving and teaching all God's children, side-by-side in the classroom, on the playground and in the community.



Photo by Kathy Dempsey

*Gail Donahue shares a tip with workshop attendees*

## Karlana Finds Doors Are Open *by Michelle Gentry*

Like many 10-year-olds, Karlana is a happy, outgoing, and creative girl who loves God and helping at her parish as an altar server. She has many friends and enjoys dancing, singing, and reading books to young children in her neighborhood. And if you ask the right question, Karlana will tell the story of meeting the Pope and dancing with the President all in one extraordinary day! In 2015 she welcomed Pope Francis to Washington in the presence of President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama. Later that same day, she and the President shared some 'moves.'

Karlana has been on a remarkable journey since birth, with her parents Karen and Deacon Keith Somerville (St. Margaret of Scotland Parish) and older brother, Keith. Karlana, who has Down syndrome, has been surrounded by a large loving family, her parish community, professionals, educators, and friends who value her strengths and unique gifts.

"We consider Karlana to be the angel on earth that God gave us," Karlana's parents said. "We both went to Catholic schools, and we want our children to go to Catholic schools. And, we wanted Karlana mainstreamed."



Family Photo

*Karlana with brother Keith, Jr. and parents, Karen and Deacon Keith Somerville*

The Somerville family heard about CCSE's work to open the doors of our Catholic schools to children with disabilities and reached out early for help. Karlana attended St. Philip the Apostle Catholic School until third grade where she made enormous progress both academically and developmentally. Now, due to the family's recent move, she attends fourth grade at St. Bartholomew Catholic School. Karlana is fully included in the school's academic, recreational, and social activities.

Thanks to CCSE's years of fundraising, consulting, and advocacy to ensure Catholic schools educate children with disabilities, both schools were ready for Karlana. CCSE provided funding for their special education programs and offered customized consultation and training to ensure long-term success. The Somerville family regards CCSE's Francesca Pellegrino a trusted and valuable resource for helping

them navigate the school systems and make educational decisions for Karlana.

Because of CCSE's work, the Somervilles' journey was a little easier. And, because of CCSE's continued work, even more doors will be opened for children with special needs and their families. Your help and generosity to CCSE ensure that Karlana and many other students with disabilities find a place at the table and a Catholic school to call home.



Photo by Catholic Standard's Jaclyn Lippelmann

*Karlana (center) presents flowers to Pope Francis during visit to Washington DC in 2015*

## Educator's Corner: Workshops that Work

*by Alison W. Hughes, Speech-Language Pathologist and CCSE Professional Advisory Board Member*

Since its founding, CCSE has worked tirelessly to provide financial and Technical Assistance (TA) to Catholic schools to ensure that all of God's children are welcome.

Even when Catholic school teachers see the beauty of the gifts bestowed by God upon all children, including those with disabilities, there are obstacles to meeting students where they are and providing an outstanding education in our Catholic classrooms. Teachers want to see their students grow academically, socially, emotionally and spiritually. CCSE is providing them with the tools to do so.

In December 2017, CCSE released a publication *Including Students with Developmental Disabilities in Catholic Schools: Guiding Principles for Administrators and Teachers*. This publication was the first of its kind, providing a step-by-step guide to effectively including students with disabilities in Catholic schools. CCSE has gone on to develop and host professional development workshops with celebrated speakers to breakdown these principles and give educators the opportunity to learn how to

effectively implement these ideas in their classrooms.

These workshops are powerful tools that are facilitating change in our Catholic schools. In my experience both as an attendee and professional with the honor of working with many Catholic school teachers, I have witnessed their incredible value. Teachers walk away enthused by the speakers and their peers. That enthusiasm is a catalyst for change.

The presenters have inspired our educators and given them the knowledge to help all students, including those with disabilities, grow and learn together. Attendees learn specific, evidence-based strategies and take away tools that can be used in their classrooms immediately. For example, in the Promoting Communicative Competence workshop, attendees left with a list of google applications and extensions to help students stay organized and help them better access and understand classroom material through audio and visual means, and express themselves through tools to simplify written expression, such as smart



Family Photo

*Alison Hughes*

word prediction and speech recognition. The workshop demonstrated ways to use each of these tools for the completion of real-life assignments. These workshops are empowering educators.

I truly believe that through these *Guiding Principles* and the related opportunities for deeper learning, CCSE is offering our Catholic schools the necessary framework to guide all students, with and without disabilities, to soar to their potential.

## Seton Award *by Kathy Dempsey*

This fall, the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) awarded CCSE and Francesca Pellegrino with its Elizabeth Ann Seton Award for Exemplary Models of Christian Service at its Seton Gala.

CCSE and Pellegrino were nominated by the Archdiocese of Washington. The Seton Award is presented annually to exemplary individuals whose support and service impacts Catholic education and the well-being of our nation's youth.

NCEA President and CEO Tom Burnford, PhD, noted at the ceremony that "we honor what is important to us." Other 2019 Seton Award recipients were Tony and Michelle Audino, Archbishop Cardinal Blase J. Cupich, Maury Devine, the Dunn Family Foundation and Timothy A. Tewes.

"Witnessing the award to Francesca and CCSE gave Lisa and me the opportunity to reflect, with gratitude, on how CCSE, in league with its recipient and partner schools, truly is engaging the world as it is, and transforming it into the world as God intends through an unfaltering persistence and with great faith, love, joy and compassion," said CCSE Board Member Fern Lavallee.

Earlier in the day, Pellegrino participated in an NCEA Philanthropy Symposium sharing best practices and also discussing philanthropy programs for Catholic schools. In addition to the awards, NCEA offered a scholarship to a Catholic school student selected by each Seton Award recipient.

CCSE's Seton Scholar was Nino Navarra-Petrovic from Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic School in Bethesda, where Nino is an active and fully-included student and member of the community. Roxanne Navarra said, "Words can't express how much CCSE and Francesca mean to our family. The education our son is getting at Our Lady of Lourdes is invaluable and I know without CCSE that would not be possible."

At the awards ceremony, NCEA unveiled CCSE's video, *Opening Hearts ~ Opening Minds ~ Opening Doors*. The video emphasizes that the call to inclusion is fundamental to living out our faith as the one body of Christ and that all students deserve a place at the table.



Photo courtesy of NCEA

*NCEA board chair Bishop Gerald Kicanas and NCEA president Tom Burnford with Francesca Pellegrino and CCSE's Seton Scholar Nino Navarra-Petrovic*

## Ensuring Inclusion

CCSE is pleased to announce a new partnership with Notre Dame of Maryland University. From October 2019 through May 2020, CCSE is funding their Academy of Catholic Educators (ACES) to provide Technical Assistance (TA) through a series of coaching and consulting sessions to a select group of schools based on need.

This expansion of our Technical Assistance allows us to reach schools in a more targeted and intensive way. It will give schools the guidance and tools they need to serve all kinds of learners.

Maggie Hubbard, Ed.D., of Notre Dame of Maryland University said, "I am excited that CCSE and ACES will be collaborating to support CCSE partner schools as they develop a standard of practice that will enable the continued acceptance of and successful education of students with disabilities."



Family Photo

*Breanna Vitak graduated from The Academy of the Holy Cross*



Family Photo

*John Paul Lavallee graduated from Bishop McNamara High School*

## We Can Help Your School FREE OF CHARGE

### "Believe in Me!" Grants

If your Catholic school is located in the Archdioceses 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, socially and spiritually from qualified special education instruction, CCSE invites you to submit a proposal for a seed grant.

Grants may be used to hire special education staff, purchase materials necessary to provide appropriate accommodations and modifications to the curriculum, and for professional development.

- To learn more about these grants or training, see: [www.ccse-maryland.org/schools.html](http://www.ccse-maryland.org/schools.html).

### Training and Technical Assistance (TA)

CCSE's Training and Technical Assistance (TA) ensure that schools are equipped and staffed to meet the needs of students with disabilities and that teachers are well prepared to serve all students in their classrooms through select opportunities. Technical Assistance (TA) may consist of:

- in-service training, topical workshops and professional development;
- individual teacher coaching and collaborative teaching strategies;
- designing scheduling tailored to students' needs;
- defining the admissions process, reviewing IEPs and educational reports;
- establishing a peer mentoring program;
- implementing appropriate modifications and accommodations;
- year-long capacity building assistance tailored to a school's needs.

### Teacher Tuition Grants

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 Grants for Advanced Degrees in Special Education to provide financial assistance to teachers and other professionals.

- For more tuition grant information, contact CCSE at 301-933-8844 or [grants@ccse-maryland.org](mailto:grants@ccse-maryland.org).

# An Evening of Excitement and Surprises

by Maggie Voelzke

On a crisp, clear Saint Patrick's Day eve, an energetic, festive crowd gathered for the Catholic Coalition for Special Education's (CCSE) 14th annual Spring Benefit and were welcomed by a bagpiper.

The benefit, which drew supporters from around the region, marked the beginning of a yearlong celebration of the organization's 15th anniversary, and the excitement among guests was palpable.

After perusing the silent auction and enjoying a selection of cocktails and hors d'oeuvres, guests were treated to a delightful performance by students from the Culkin School of Traditional Irish Dance. Feeling buoyed by the entertainment, guests then proceeded into the ballroom for the main event.

On the evening's docket were honors for 11 schools from the Archdioceses of Baltimore and Washington, as well as a slate of exciting live auction items. Among the most popular were tickets to Billy Joel's first-ever concert at Camden Yards, and luxury hotel stays in both Ireland and Florida.

The honoree schools were recognized as trailblazers that have received CCSE grants and took the leap creating inclusive schools welcoming students with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

CBS Political Reporter Caitlin Huey-Burns, who served as the gala's emcee, shared guests' excitement and enthusiasm.

## Through a charitable bequest, you can:

- Help us ensure children with disabilities are fully included in our local Catholic schools
- Possibly reduce the tax burden on your estate
- Leave a legacy to help future generations

Help us make a Catholic education possible for children with disabilities. Please remember CCSE in your will.

"I was just so incredibly inspired by not only all of the families and students that came, but how much of an investment everybody made in ensuring future successes," she said.

The connection to CCSE is a personal one for Huey-Burns, who graduated from The Academy of the Holy Cross, one of the evening's honorees. The Academy developed its own Moreau Options program, with the help of grants, teacher training and individualized support from CCSE.

A surprise honor went to CCSE's own Francesca Pellegrino, when President of the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA), Dr. Thomas Burnford, announced that Pellegrino and CCSE had been selected to receive the prestigious NCEA Elizabeth Ann Seton Award.

"What we've heard tonight [through these partner schools] needs to be told across the nation," said Burnford of CCSE's accomplishments.

As CCSE continues to strive to create more stories of Catholic education's role in providing a school to call home for all students, we hope that you will mark your calendars for the 15th Annual Spring Benefit on Saturday, March 28, 2020.

Photos by Nick Stone



*The Spring Benefit Committee thanks you for your support*



*Dot Shetterly and Missy Lesmes with Francesca Pellegrino*



*Guests relaxing over dinner*



*Guests enjoy mingling and silent auction before dinner*



*USCCB's Executive Director of the Secretariat of Catholic Education Mary Pat Donoghue*



*Emma and Jim Voelzke with daughter Maggie*



*Katherine Myers and Debbie Copeland*

# Golfers Golf

by Frank Pellegrino

Our third Believe in Me! Golf Classic took place again this year at Worthington Manor Golf Club. Like last year, we were challenged by mother nature and our golfers saw some passing rain. But, golfers golf and they continued to enjoy the course, the beverage cart, and were even seen relaxing in their carts lighting cigars. The field finished the tournament after a short delay and then enjoyed a wonderful awards luncheon.

Awards went to:

- Closest to the pin: George Neshevski
- Longest drive women's: Eileen Brogan
- Longest drive men's: Jason Wright representing Chesapeake Employers' Insurance
- Third Place: Eric Barger, Craig Bricker, Dan Gardner and Matt Roswag
- Second Place: FarmerMac represented by Chris Bohanon, Don Charnley, Bill Miller, George Neshevski
- First place: Kevin Poole, Pat Poole, Peter Sabia and Frank Pellegrino

Special thanks go to the entire Tournament Committee led by Christie Nawrot and to all of you who volunteered to help make the event run smoothly. Thank you also to our sponsors and supporters of this signature event that allows CCSE to offer more grants and training to Catholic schools in the Archdioceses of Baltimore and Washington. Thank you to all of our golfers for

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[info@ccse-maryland.org](mailto:info@ccse-maryland.org)

## Welcome Board Member!



Kathleen and Joe Fitzgerald at 2016 Fall Fest and Grant Awards Ceremony

We welcome Joe Fitzgerald to our Board of Directors! Joe is a long-time supporter of CCSE and attended his first Fall Festival/Grant Awards Ceremony in 2016 with his sister, Kathleen.

showing support for CCSE. We'd also like to acknowledge the staff at Worthington Manor, who continue to maintain a beautiful golf course. Finally, congratulations are due to all of our tournament winners. Some great golf was played and the sun finally did come out.



Photo by Kathy Dempsey

Players enjoying the clubhouse

**A special thank you to our Major Sponsors and Supporters:**



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Joe Fitzgerald works for TD Bank and has an extensive background in commercial banking. "He also has a wealth of experience in nonprofit financing, which we are sure will serve CCSE well," said Francesca Pellegrino. "We are blessed to have Joe's keen enthusiasm as someone who sees the importance of our mission through a different lens – wishing his sister had been able to receive a Catholic education along with her siblings in the family's parochial school and high school when she was growing up. Joe wants to help give that crucial opportunity to this current and future generations."

"An inclusive Catholic education is such a valuable gift for a child with developmental and intellectual disabilities and for his or her family. I am very pleased to join CCSE's effort in expanding these opportunities," said Fitzgerald.

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Save the Date!  
2020 Spring Benefit  
Saturday, March 28, 2020



Photo by Nick Stone

Join Us!