

The President's Message



Francesca and Alex Pellegrino

compassion (n.)

“feeling of sorrow or deep tenderness for one who is suffering or experiencing misfortune,” mid-14c., *compassioun*, literally “a suffering with another”

In a year unlike any we have ever known, compassion is the word that keeps coming to mind. Despite the suffering wrought by the coronavirus, or perhaps because of it, the loss of loved ones and the toll on family and finances, I am moved and inspired by all those who selflessly step up to help those most in need. I marvel at people’s spirit, resilience and ability to adapt. With essentially no notice, principals and teachers pivoted to create centers of distance learning and simultaneously manage in-person classrooms and remote classes. And despite the challenges, we are still able to celebrate some moments of grace such as when, in the midst of this pandemic, Davide, who has Down syndrome, was welcomed into a Catholic school.

I am extremely grateful to all our CCSE friends. Despite our being compelled to cancel an entire year of in-person events, every single supporter who had purchased a ticket or sponsorship to our spring benefit graciously and generously converted their gift to a 100% charitable donation. While we missed out on some of the usual fundraising opportunities, CCSE was still able to present grant awards to two deserving schools (see page 3). Thank you from the bottom of my heart. We could not have done it without you. An overused phrase perhaps but it is truer today than ever.

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Moments of Grace

by Francesca Pellegrino

As a mother of a child with a disability I understand some of the struggles of raising a child with a disability, which can then lead to a greater appreciation of the special moments of grace when your child reaches a new developmental milestone. Education, like everything else, changed drastically this year. Teachers across the nation quickly adapted to new ways of teaching students, often with limited resources and training.

This pandemic has been challenging for all families, but it has been especially hard for families of children with disabilities. While CCSE’s work has always been important in ensuring that children with special needs can access a quality and inclusive Catholic education, this pandemic showed us just how vital our work is for our most vulnerable students.

CCSE has been building the capacity of Catholic schools for 16 years. Our grants to schools and specialized technical assistance for school staff have resulted in stronger Catholic schools with established special education programs and dedicated staff for children with disabilities.

With this foundation in place, students with disabilities and their learning needs did not take a back seat as our Catholic schools figured out how to educate students during a global pandemic.



Nino at Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic School

CCSE’s support, this school, among 31 other schools, has been able to enroll a number of children with

Thanks to you, our generous donors, we will redouble our efforts to support students, teachers and families. One among them is Nino, a fifth grader with Down syndrome, at Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic School in Bethesda. With CCSE’s support, this school, among 31 other schools, has been able to enroll a number of children with

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Welcoming Anne Hummer and CCSE’s Next Chapter

by Kathy Dempsey



Anne Hummer

There is a certain satisfaction in actually seeing the results of your hard work, whether on the field, in the classroom or in the office. CCSE often has such satisfaction – just look at our 2020 *Believe in Me!* Grant Award schools (page 3).

The hard work of our donors, supporters and our Board of Directors has brought us a new face with whom we hope you will become acquainted. Anne Hummer is CCSE’s first Associate Director. She began work in September. The appointment of Hummer cements a key part of a broader strategic plan charting CCSE’s path for the next five years.

“Our new Associate Director position will give CCSE the capacity to expand the support and encouragement we provide to parents and schools, and develop diverse and robust revenue streams,” said Francesca Pellegrino, CCSE President and Founder. “Our vision is that Catholic school services for students with disabilities become an accepted and expected part of Catholic education means including and educating all students together so that they all reach their full potential

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CCSE's steadfast commitment and support to Catholic schools continues to help ensure that they are fully equipped to meet the needs of every child with a disability who walks through their door. We will continue to provide support to families raising children with disabilities. It is well documented that a high-quality education is critical to better lifelong outcomes and this applies more so to students with disabilities to help them access employment opportunities, healthcare and housing.

To help us pursue that mission, I am pleased to extend a warm welcome to Anne Hummer, CCSE's first Associate Director. Anne brings to her new position many years of development experience along with her demonstrated nonprofit management history. This position will give CCSE expanded capacity to provide more support and encouragement to parents and schools, and to develop diverse and robust revenue streams. (See *article on page 1 for details on this exciting news.*)

I also am delighted to report that two Catholic universities in Pennsylvania have launched post-secondary education programs for students with intellectual/developmental disabilities. However, we still need more Catholic high schools to open their doors to the burgeoning group of middle school students with disabilities.

The Catholic school inclusion movement

continues to gain momentum and we're delighted to have you join us on this remarkable journey. Keep an eye out for our **Called to Include** video series which complements our first publication **Including Students with Developmental Disabilities in Catholic Schools – Guiding Principles for Administrators and Teachers**. This series of eight videos will provide incentives for including students with disabilities, as well as information, tips and resources for inclusion.

We miss you and yearn for a time when we will be able to gather together again in person.

Your compassion and generosity make 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



5th Inclusion Summit held virtually this spring with advocates from as far west as Hawaii to as far east as Rhode Island.

The CCSE Spirit

CCSE's mission is to advocate for and facilitate an appropriate, inclusive, high quality education for students with developmental and/or intellectual disabilities in the Washington D.C. and Baltimore region Catholic schools to enrich their lives, schools, and the broader community.

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

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NCEA

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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.

Believe In Me! Grant Awards - A Treasure Inside

by Kathy Dempsey

Congratulations **St. Philip the Apostle Catholic School** and **Our Lady Star of the Sea Catholic School** as this year's *Believe in Me!* Grant Award recipients.

Both schools have opened their doors to students with differing abilities for some time, and like any forward-thinking



Fr. Patrick Lewis and Principal Deanna Johnson of St. Philip the Apostle Catholic School receive *Believe in Me!* Grant Award from Francesca Pellegrino (C)

Catholic school, are doing an exemplary job with the limited resources they have available. CCSE's grants enable the schools to hire professional staff and implement best practices in inclusive education.

But CCSE's support does not begin and end with the grant. CCSE also is providing guidance, professional development and technical assistance to these two schools plus three additional schools through CCSE's relationship with the ACES program of Notre Dame of Maryland University. The schools will never be charged for these valuable resources. CCSE covers the cost of these services. (See *ACES story*.)

While the Covid-19 pandemic prevented the staging of our much-loved Fall Family Festival & *Believe in Me!* Grant Awards Ceremony, CCSE got creative and took the show on the road to celebrate with each school through Mass and gift baskets.

St. Philip the Apostle's Parish Administrator Fr. Patrick Lewis explained in his homily

that we are all like clay vessels with a treasure inside. It is a vessel bearing not only the faith of Jesus, but also the unique gifts with which God has bestowed each and every one of us.

Ms. Deanna Johnson, Principal at the school in Camp Springs, Maryland, spoke to those gathered in person in the church and to all her students watching virtually. "No one else is like you, because you are unique. You're special. We all are.

The Lord made all of us different, but not better," said Ms. Johnson.

In thanking CCSE, Ms. Johnson noted that "this award allows us to become closer to a fully inclusive school ... committed to ensuring every student reaches his or her potential."

Two days later, CCSE travelled to Solomons, Maryland for the weekly Mass for Our Lady Star of the Sea School (OLSS). The school is CCSE's first grant recipient in Calvert County and just the second in Southern Maryland. Pastor Kenneth Gill talked to the students about using their gifts to the best of their abilities.

He also noted, "We are grateful to God for Francesca Pellegrino and her team for their commitment to Catholic schools ... and for all of the children in our community."

OLSS Principal Jennifer Thompson also talked about human dignity and diversity. "Every child has the right to be welcomed by peers and teachers ... learning side by side. Inclusive Catholic schools value diversity."



CCSE's Francesca Pellegrino delivers remarks at Our Lady Star of the Sea



Fr. Kenneth Gill and Principal Jennifer Thompson of Our Lady Star of the Sea School receive *Believe in Me!* Grant Award from Francesca Pellegrino (C)



Principal Thompson accepts poster and basket of goodies from Francesca Pellegrino (L)

ACES for Inclusion

by Francesca Pellegrino

CCSE's partnership with Notre Dame of Maryland University's Academy for Catholic Educators (ACES), now in its second year, is continuing to provide pro-bono Technical Assistance (TA) to a select group of schools based on need. The year-long Technical Assistance includes monthly instructional coaching, professional development and consulting sessions, with teams of teachers or individual teachers and/or administrators. The goal is to assist in the development of school-wide inclusion plans and appropriate educational plans, identify resources that can support access to the curriculum for all learners including assistive technologies, instructional strategies, manipulatives and human resources.

Maggie Hubbard, Ed.D. of Notre Dame of Maryland University is the selected expert who works with CCSE partner schools: "I am excited that CCSE and ACES are 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."

Technical Assistance helps build a school's capacity to teach a wide variety of learners, in an inclusive setting, where students with and without disabilities learn side by side and each grow academically, socially and spiritually.

The cost of these services is covered completely by CCSE thanks to the contributions of its generous benefactors. A school never receives a bill from CCSE for these services.



Parish Administrator Fr. Lewis said we all have a treasure inside and a purpose

Volunteer Spotlight on Debbie Copeland

by Mary Brogan



Photo by Nick Stone

Debbie Copeland

We LOVE all of our volunteers! You truly are the backbone of our organization. The generous gift of your time not only makes every event we have possible; it means more of CCSE's funds go directly

to supporting inclusion in our Catholic schools. We simply could not do what we do without you.

One of our most treasured volunteers, Debbie Copeland and her family, recently moved home to New Jersey. After 13 wonderful years in Maryland, we had to say farewell.

Debbie's daughter, Samantha, a beneficiary of CCSE's work, attended a Catholic grammar school and high school in the Archdiocese of Washington, both CCSE grantees.



Family Photo

"Until I learned of CCSE, I didn't think it was possible for my daughter to attend a Catholic school... Our family has lived many places and I've never seen anything like this elsewhere. CCSE is doing something unique." Debbie Copeland

Spring Benefit co-chair Anna McDermott-Vitak remarked that "Debbie is the best sort of friend CCSE could have. She is a volunteer who leads the way and engages others with her energy and enthusiasm. She is always there when you ask her to be, and I think her work with and for CCSE just comes naturally to Debbie."

According to CCSE's President and Founder Francesca Pellegrino, "It is an understatement to say that Debbie will be missed. We are grateful for Debbie's unwavering dedication. She is an exemplary volunteer. Debbie is a true friend and stalwart supporter."

Debbie is a doer and a giver – always eager to say "yes." The beautiful raffle baskets at our annual Spring Benefit, are testaments to Debbie's creative work. Every February and March her home overflowed with baskets, ribbons, TVs, pizza ovens, fire pits, and bourbon and vodka baskets. Debbie and her team assembled and arranged them so beautifully, tempting our Benefit guests to bid generously as they vied for each basket. A long-standing member of our Spring Benefit Committee, Debbie brainstormed the program details, researched ideas and always volunteered to do that 'one more thing.'

Thank you Debbie, and blessings for you and your family.

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



We celebrated Debbie and bid her farewell in Covid-fashion

Want to Volunteer? Join Us!

"Pure and simple, I got started as a volunteer at CCSE because I believe in the mission and I have seen first-hand how they have changed families and changed the lives of children with special needs - flourishing and happy in a Catholic School!" said Debbie Copeland.

"I have loved being a CCSE volunteer. I have helped in various ways but mainly being on the CCSE Spring Benefit Committee. I also acted as a school liaison."

"We are lucky to have such a great core committee -- and every year we get a few new people joining us and adding to our thoughts, ideas, and planning. Our core group is close and we have remained close friends apart from CCSE," said Copeland.

CCSE holds several large fundraising and social events each year that allow us to help develop and sustain inclusive education programs in area Catholic schools, and importantly, offer training and technical support free of charge to educators and schools.

Without our volunteers, many schools would not have been able to open their doors to our children with disabilities.

Visit our Volunteer Page to learn about more opportunities at [ccse-maryland.org/helpVolunteer](https://www.ccse-maryland.org/helpVolunteer) or email info@ccse-maryland.org to get involved.

"CCSE continues to make a positive difference wherever they go - with their wealth of knowledge, understanding of how school systems work, by being and providing resources to struggling families and schools that want to do right by their families to be inclusive of children with special needs - but require extra support and guidance," said Copeland.

Follow Debbie Copeland's lead and volunteer today. Thank you.

Milestone Moments: 16 Years of CCSE

- 2003**
Francesca Pellegrino and parents of children with special needs meet w/ Msgr. John Enzler who encourages them to make vision a reality
 - Sept 2004**
Catholic Coalition for Special Education is incorporated in State of Maryland
 - March 2006**
First Spring Benefit is held and raises over \$50,000
 - Sept 2006**
CCSE awards first grants to two schools
 - March 2008**
“If You Believe in Me” first promotional video produced
 - Dec 2008**
CCSE initiates Teachers Tuition Assistance Program
 - March 2009**
Spring Benefit breaks \$100,000
 - Sept 2009**
CCSE hosts first ever-popular annual Fall Family Festival
 - February 2011**
Kate Droege is CCSE's first permanent staff hire
 - Sept 2011**
CCSE offers first professional development workshop for Catholic school educators
 - Fall 2013**
CCSE holds first workshop for parents and others in support of people with disabilities
 - March 2015**
Spring Benefit breaks \$200,000
 - Aug 2015**
CCSE students star in “We All Have a Treasure Inside!” video for Pope Francis and find stardom
 - Sept 2015**
Francesca Pellegrino and CCSE students meet Pope Francis
 - Spring 2016**
CCSE part of Archdiocese of Washington Task Force to make Catholic schools more inclusive
 - Aug 2017**
CCSE receives its first national grant, from Our Sunday Visitor Institute
 - Oct 2017**
CCSE launches its first Charity Golf Tournament
 - Dec 2017**
CCSE issues its first publication, *Including Developmental Disabilities in Catholic Schools: Guiding Principles for Administrators and Teachers*
 - May 2018**
Board approves and begins implementation of Strategic Plan for 2025
 - Aug 2018**
CCSE introduces its *Believe in Me!* Professional Development Series to complement its *Guiding Principles* publication
 - Sept 2018**
CCSE reaches milestone distributing over \$1 million in grants to schools since its inception
 - Sept 2019**
Francesca Pellegrino and CCSE recipients of Elizabeth Ann Seton Award from National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA)
 - Oct 2019**
CCSE launches partnership with Notre Dame of Maryland University's Academy of Catholic Educators (ACES)
 - Sept 2020**
Anne Hummer is hired as CCSE's first Associate Director
- CCSE has reached over **9,000** students, teachers and families
 - CCSE has awarded **75** grants totaling over **\$1,114,000**
 - **31** Catholic schools in **nine** Maryland counties have received CCSE grants
 - **Three** Catholic school teachers have received Tuition Assistance for Advanced Study in Special Education grants from CCSE

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.

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.

Moments of Grace

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special needs including Nino, and provide them with a high-quality inclusive Catholic education. In all, CCSE's work has reached 9,000+ students, teachers, and families.

Nino, as a result, has become a valued member of the Our Lady of Lourdes community. He is included in all the educational, social, and extracurricular activities of the school and is well-known by his peers as a great soccer teammate, jovial lunch buddy and compassionate friend who will always comfort you when you need it. He uses sign language to communicate. At the all-school morning assemblies, Nino signs his announcements sharing openly with the community. Nino's example has taught his friends and teachers how to see the face of God in everyone they encounter. As Nino and his classmates prepared to process together for First Holy Communion, their school community viewed their own moment of grace - Nino holding tightly to his classmates' hands.

Students with disabilities in our Catholic schools were not lost during this crisis. They continued to be educated and are returning to school alongside their peers without disabilities. Throughout this crisis, we have witnessed many other moments of grace.

Catholic schools' dedicated teachers have excelled throughout this challenging time. For Nino the return to school in person this fall was a time of joy. He smiles and claps his hands every school day when his family pulls into the school parking lot.

As Catholics, we remain hopeful people of faith. As a mother and advocate for all children, I applaud our Catholic schools as they courageously adjust to new ways of operating and safeguarding students and staff. CCSE will continue to be here for families and for our Catholic schools. We are stronger together, and we will continue our work to open hearts, open minds and open doors to help ensure that children with disabilities find open doors in Catholic schools and make sure they stay open even during the most challenging of times.

There are children like Nino in every single community, but programs in far too few. Because of CCSE's work, Nino's 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 Nino and many other students with disabilities find a place at the table and a Catholic school to call home.



Welcoming Anne Hummer

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academically, socially and spiritually."

Pellegrino continued, "Ms. Hummer brings to her new position many years of development experience along with her demonstrated nonprofit management history. I am grateful to CCSE's Search Committee of Anna Vitak, Christie Nawrot, Patrick Murphy and Joe Fitzgerald for a well conducted search leading to Anne's appointment. This new position is an important milestone in CCSE's development and expands our capacity to fulfill our mission. In the name of all those who value inclusive Catholic education, I welcome Anne."

Hummer responded, "I am eager to join the CCSE team and look forward to combining all our talents to achieve impressive results for the Catholic Coalition for Special Education. I am honored to have the opportunity to help advance inclusive special education in Catholic schools and fund training for teachers who work with students with disabilities."

Hummer expects to spend her days strengthening CCSE's operations and helping reach out to CCSE donors while welcoming new individual, corporate and foundation donors. She also will assist with increasing CCSE's capacity to serve families with children with disabilities and promoting awareness of the importance of inclusive communities of learning.

Hummer has spent her career raising funding and awareness for national nonprofit organizations. "I believe in the critical difference that nonprofit organizations make in solving world problems. Not only do I enjoy meeting challenges and problem-solving, but I also thrive when working with others who share a common goal," said Hummer.

In its 16th year, CCSE's advocacy work has paved the way for an important shift in mindset in classrooms and playgrounds and across the country. Conversations have advanced from whether a Catholic school would even consider serving students with developmental and/or intellectual disabilities to a desire to explore current best practices.

Anne Hummer's expertise will help CCSE grow and allow us to welcome more children with disabilities who will be able to call a Catholic school their own.

Purple & Gold: The Meaning of CCSE's Colors

When we designed CCSE's logo, we chose purple and gold for their 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, training 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!

Honorary Board Expansion

Missy Lesmes joins Honorary Board



Missy Lesmes and son Scotty at the CCSE Fall Family Festival

CCSE is delighted to announce the expansion of our Honorary Board and privileged to welcome Missy Lesmes as an Honorary Board Member.

Over the last sixteen years CCSE has been blessed with many dedicated and hardworking directors. Each one of them brings their own gifts which they so generously share to the great benefit of all students in our inclusive Catholic schools. The impact of their work continues to be felt not only after their term on the board, but sometimes well into the future of our organization. With this in mind, in 2017, we instituted the role of the Honorary Board member to recognize the seminal contributions of extraordinary, retired Board members. Missy Lesmes, a CCSE founding benefactor, now joins our first Honorary Board member, Carin Collins. Missy, whose son, Scotty, has directly benefitted from CCSE's work at both the elementary and high school level, joined our Board of Directors during a period of important growth, worked tirelessly to fulfill CCSE's mission, and left the Board in a much stronger position. Missy was an exemplary Board member who was always

Thank You!
CCSE received 100% conversion of gifts and donations from our cancelled spring benefit.

willing to help in any way she could. She gathered friends and family to not only attend our events, but to volunteer and become involved in every possible way. Her husband, Scott Lesmes, served as our Pro-Bono Legal Counsel for a number of years. With Missy's assistance, Scott's mother, Dot Shetterly, shared her artistic flare with beautiful flower arrangements for many of our spring galas. Missy not only procured and donated many exciting auction items, but opened her home to host Event Committee meetings, Board reunions, and even a news crew covering our video welcoming Pope Francis to Washington.

While we already miss her dynamism at meetings of our Board of Directors, Missy has left a lasting legacy and we are beyond thrilled that she will remain involved and continue to further the mission of CCSE.



Photo by Nick Stone

Missy Lesmes with Dot Shetterly, mother-in-law (L) and Francesca Pellegrino, CCSE President (R) pause for a photo at the 2019 Spring Benefit

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Save the Date!
2021 Spring Benefit
Saturday, March 13, 2021



Photo by Nick Stone

Join Us!