



CCSE & Francesca Pellegrino to Receive Seton Award from NCEA as Exemplary Models of Christian Service

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(Kensington, Maryland) – Francesca Pellegrino and the Catholic Coalition for Special Education, the organization which she founded have been named recipients of the National Catholic Educational Association’s (NCEA) Elizabeth Ann Seton Award for Exemplary Models of Christian Service.

NCEA President and CEO Tom Burnford, PhD, made the breaking news announcement at CCSE’s Spring Benefit noting that there is “no better way to showcase the vision that Francesca had or the quality outcomes that the Catholic Coalition for Special Education has accomplished” than by showcasing the amazing work CCSE has done with its partner Catholic schools and then sharing CCSE’s “story of this work across the nation.”

Pellegrino and CCSE 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, according to the NCEA website.

The award will be presented at NCEA’s Seton Gala on October 7, 2019 at the Gaylord National Resort and Convention Center at National Harbor, Maryland. Earlier in the day, Pellegrino will participate in an NCEA symposium sharing best practices and also discussing philanthropy programs for Catholic schools.

It is difficult for families of children with disabilities to find a school that not only provides a quality education, but also truly believes that all children, no matter the differences, have unique gifts that they bring as valued members of a school community.

CCSE has worked for 15 years to help families and students with disabilities access a Catholic education and has awarded 60 grants to 30 Catholic schools in eight Maryland counties totaling over \$1,000,000. Through these classrooms, CCSE has directly impacted over 6,000 students, teachers and families.

“Our goal is to include all students in Catholic schools who want a Catholic education, thereby helping to maintain the unity of the body of Christ. We are thrilled to support an increasing number of Catholic schools, as well as support an increasing number of families raising children with disabilities. At the same time, we are honored to be a voice in the national inclusion movement in Catholic schools.

“And we are not done yet. Most of the students served so far by CCSE have been in primary or middle school. They are ready to head to high school. CCSE hopes that our current partnership with two Catholic high schools will pave the way for other Catholic high schools to open their doors to students with disabilities thereby helping to shorten the long line of students and families who are seeking a Catholic high school to call home,” said Pellegrino, President and Founder of CCSE.

Often teachers and administrators feel isolated and without a game plan. CCSE offers seed grants and professional development training. These ensure that schools are properly equipped and staffed to meet the needs of students, and that teachers are well-prepared to serve all their students. CCSE services range from individual teacher coaching and topical workshops to year-long capacity-building assistance tailored to a school's needs.

While finances often are a top concern, schools that are considered less well off actually make up a good percentage of the schools being served by CCSE. It is the preparation, commitment and follow-through that are crucial to the success of any program, along with professional development support for the faculty. Then, these programs become models for other schools.

“To address the demand for teacher and principal training and coaching, we have designed a comprehensive professional development program to offer Catholic school administrators and educators the knowledge and skills they seek to ensure students with disabilities are served well in Catholic schools,” said Pellegrino.

“Our new *Believe in Me* Professional Development Program is an expansion of the support services we have long been providing schools and is a natural starting point for many schools as they plan out how best to serve students with disabilities. In many cases, the technical assistance CCSE provides is a precursor to a CCSE grant,” she said.

This new program, made possible through a generous grant from Our Sunday Visitor Institute, complements CCSE's publication, *Including Students with Developmental Disabilities in Catholic Schools – Guiding Principles for Administrators and Teachers*.

CCSE supports Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Washington and Archdiocese of Baltimore by providing seed grants to expand or create sustainable programs enrolling two or more students with disabilities. Funding may be used to hire and train special educators, purchase equipment and materials, or provide appropriate accommodations and modifications to the curriculum.

CCSE also provides scholarships to Catholic school teachers pursuing advanced degrees in special education and offers workshops and other training /coaching support to Catholic schools to help them meet the needs of students with disabilities at the classroom and administrative levels.

The mission of the [Catholic Coalition for Special Education](#) 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.

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