



**CCSE & Francesca Pellegrino Receive  
Seton Award from NCEA as  
Exemplary Models of Christian Service  
& Unveil Video on WHY We are  
Opening Doors**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: October 18, 2019

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As Exemplary Models of Christian Service**

*Unveil video on WHY we are opening doors - <https://youtu.be/K4-1kZCNZsk>*

(Kensington, Maryland) – “A true fulfillment of Catholic education means including and educating all students together so that they all reach their full potential,” remarked Francesca Pellegrino, Founder and President of the Catholic Coalition for Special Education, when accepting the prestigious award conferred on her on October 7, 2019 from the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) at its annual Seton Gala.

An audience of about 350 supporters of Catholic education from around the nation gathered at the Gaylord Hotel, National Harbor, Maryland, where NCEA awarded Pellegrino and the Catholic Coalition for Special Education (CCSE) with its Elizabeth Ann Seton Award for Exemplary Models of Christian Service.

At the awards ceremony, NCEA unveiled CCSE’s video, Opening Hearts ~ Opening Minds ~ Opening Doors. These moments, these openings have a ripple effect and demonstrate that the call to inclusion is fundamental to living out our faith through the one body of Christ.

View and share the video at: <https://youtu.be/K4-1kZCNZsk>

In the video, LaSandra Hayes, Principal at St. Mary’s School (Landover Hills, Maryland) said, “Inclusive Catholic education is a must. Students are able to learn alongside other students. So, when we can learn together, work together, love together, our individual communities benefit.”

Also in the video, Pellegrino explained that “the ultimate vision for CCSE is that special education services really become an *expected* and *accepted* part of Catholic education.”

Earlier in the day on October 7, Pellegrino participated in an NCEA Philanthropy Symposium sharing best practices and also discussing philanthropy programs for Catholic schools. She said, “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 which is really gaining momentum.

“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.”

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

Pellegrino and CCSE were nominated by the Archdiocese of Washington which also helped produce the video. 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.

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.

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 offers technical assistance and training – all free of charge – to help schools be the best they can be in serving and teaching all God’s children inclusively.

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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