



## Celebrating our Trailblazing Catholic Schools 2019 Spring Benefit Catholic Coalition for Special Education

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
March 16, 2019

(Kensington, Maryland) – The Catholic Coalition for Special Education (CCSE) held its 14<sup>th</sup> annual Spring Benefit, marking the beginning of a year-long celebration of its 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary. This year, the focus of attention and celebration was on the trailblazing partner schools that took the leap and created inclusive schools welcoming students with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

“Not only are these schools centers of learning and academic rigor, they are inclusive communities where children with disabilities have found a home,” remarked Francesca Pellegrino, President and Founder of CCSE.

“Home is a place where we are loved and safe. Home is a place where we are welcomed no matter what. Home is a place where we grow spiritually and socially. Home is where we are assured a place at the table. Home is a place where we recognize the face of Jesus in all our children. Home is where we gather with our friends. Home is a Catholic school.”

The 11 schools honored at the Spring Benefit from the Archdioceses of Baltimore and Washington were:

The Academy of the Holy Cross (Kensington)  
Bishop McNamara High School (Forestville)  
Holy Redeemer Catholic School (Kensington)  
Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic School (Bethesda)  
Our Lady of Mercy Catholic School (Potomac)  
St. Bartholomew Catholic School (Bethesda)  
St. John the Evangelist School (Silver Spring)  
St. Louis School (Clarksville)  
St. Mary of the Mills School (Laurel)  
St. Mary’s School (Landover Hills)  
St. Philip the Apostle Catholic School (Camp Springs)

“Catholic schools are uniquely qualified to help develop the potential of students with special needs, specifically because they are ‘Catholic’ schools. 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.

“It takes courage for schools to step up in this way, be agents of change, be inclusive and take risks. I commend those administrators and teachers who are ensuring that our brothers and sisters with disabilities have a place at the table and a Catholic school to call home. They are helping to ensure the Unity of the Body of Christ,” said Pellegrino.

After recognizing each school and presenting them with awards, the gala was interrupted with a breaking news announcement. The President of the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA), Dr. Thomas Burnford, surprised the guests by revealing that Pellegrino and CCSE have been selected to

receive the NCEA Elizabeth Ann Seton Award at its gala in October. The award is being presented “in recognition of the vision that Francesca Pellegrino had and of the quality outcomes that CCSE has accomplished... What we have heard tonight [through these partner schools] needs to be told across the nation,” declared Burnford.

CCSE knows that change is not easy which is why we are here to support schools every step of the way on their inclusion journey. The most visible support is through the seed grants given to schools to create or expand inclusion programs. CCSE has awarded over \$1,000,000 to 29 schools in eight Maryland counties.

But CCSE also responds to the needs of schools through capacity-building, teacher coaching, professional development and workshops. We offer a scholarship to educators at Catholic schools who are pursuing an advanced degree in special education. And we provide practical and spiritual support to families raising children with disabilities.

And all our services are free of charge to schools and families.

*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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