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## Bridging the Gap

### CCSE Spring Benefit Raises Record Sums, Awareness to Support Catholic Education for Students with Intellectual, Developmental Disabilities

*"Whoever receives  
one child such as  
this in my name  
receives me"*

(Matthew 18:5)

The Catholic Coalition for Special Education (CCSE) has held its most successful Spring Benefit ever, raising a record-breaking sum that will further its work expanding Catholic school education programs for students with intellectual disabilities.

CCSE raised at least \$160,000 at the gala and auction, held at a country club in Chevy Chase. Some 325 people attended, including educators and officials from the Archdioceses of Washington and Baltimore, experts in the disabilities field, and families and friends of students with special needs.

The funds will be used to support a host of CCSE programs, ranging from grant-making to schools and educators seeking to expand their inclusive programming to children with disabilities, and providing technical and other support to schools and families.

"We're thrilled with the success of this year's benefit. With each succeeding year CCSE is gaining recognition and support from those in our community who recognize this is a social justice issue," said CCSE Board Member and Benefit Chair Carin Collins. "We want to ensure that students with intellectual disabilities have the same opportunity for a great Catholic education as their typically developing brothers, sisters and neighbors. It's critical that we ensure the programs are available."

Since it was established in 2005, CCSE has awarded more than \$400,000 to 14 local Catholic grade and high schools in three Maryland counties that have established or expanded inclusive programming. CCSE grant recipients say those funds have enabled them to live out the Gospel message of welcoming all children.

The message was reiterated by the evening's Master of Ceremonies, Rev. William Byrne, Secretary for Pastoral Ministry and Social Concerns, Archdiocese of Washington and Pastor at St. Peter's Church, Capitol Hill.

"Every child of God is planned," Fr. Byrne said, "and we as Catholics need to welcome *every* child, not just *some* children, into our churches and schools to learn in the Catholic faith."

**CATHOLIC  
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One of the Benefit guests, Madeleine Will, Director of the Policy Center for the National Down Syndrome Society, praised CCSE’s “pioneering” work welcoming students with intellectual disabilities into Catholic schools. “It’s clear that the efforts of CCSE are going to lead to better outcomes for these students as they graduate and go on into their adult lives,” she said. “They can live more meaningful, productive lives because they are part of a welcoming community.”

Spring Benefit guests mingled, feasted on dinner and bid on auction items, which included travel packages to the Big Apple, San Francisco and wine country, Disney World and a special trip to attend the Emmy Awards Ceremonies.

Benefit sponsors included DLA Piper, McCormick Spices, Ruppert Companies, and the Stephen and Mary Brogan and William J. Page families. The Ritz-Carlton donated seven accommodations packages at hotels around the country.

Throughout the evening-- which also included dancing by adults and school children alike--school educators, parents and students from Washington and Baltimore archdiocesan schools that have received CCSE grants asserted that they have benefitted from the inclusive programming as much as their students with special needs.

Both research and empirical evidence show that “students with disabilities do better when they are educated alongside typically developing students,” Will said, “and we also have evidence that typically developing students perform better academically and have better social skills when they are educated alongside students with disabilities.”

CCSE is believed to be the only organization on the East Coast and one of just a handful in the U.S. that supports children with disabilities and their families through a variety of means: grants and technical assistance to Catholic schools and educators; and school and community resources and support to families.

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*The mission of the Catholic Coalition for Special Education is to ensure that children with special needs are able to attend, and receive an appropriate education in their local Catholic elementary schools and high schools. In the words of Pope Benedict XVI “no child should be denied his or her right to an education in faith, which in turn nurtures the soul of a nation.” CCSE provides grants and technical assistance to help Catholic schools in Washington, D.C. and Maryland achieve this goal.*