



Helping Catholic Schools and Teachers Say YES to Educating Students with Special Needs

New “Believe In Me” Professional Development Program Set to Launch with Workshop on August 27 at 8:30 am

MEDIA ADVISORY: August 24, 2018

***Workshop on Maintaining High Expectations
and Promoting Communicative Competence for ALL Students***
Monday, August 27, 8:30 am – 1:00 pm
St. John the Evangelist School
10201 Woodland Drive, Silver Spring, MD 20902

(Kensington, Maryland) – The Catholic Coalition for Special Education (CCSE) has touched over 6,000 students, teachers and families and awarded nearly 60 grants to 29 Catholic schools in eight Maryland counties totaling nearly \$1,000,000 since its inception in 2004. It has also awarded tuition assistance grants to several teachers pursuing graduate degrees in special education.

During this time, it has become increasingly clear that schools are seeking robust support, understanding and buy-in from all their educators and everyone in their communities to make inclusive education truly successful. This is foundational to an effective and long-term program.

“To address the demand for teacher and principal training and coaching, we are pleased to announce that 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 Francesca Pellegrino, Founder and President of CCSE.

The first in a series of workshops for Catholic school personnel will be held on Monday, August 27 beginning at 8:30 am at St. John the Evangelist School, a school with a history of welcoming children with special needs. This first workshop will focus on two principles: Maintain High Expectations and Promote Communicative Competence.

The pedagogical practice of challenging others to reach high expectations is applicable to all students, but is particularly critical for students with disabilities. We should recognize the gifts of all students in the classroom. We should ‘presume competence’ and not lower our expectations. In other words, teachers should design instruction and materials so that all students, including students with developmental disabilities, can fully interact with the curriculum content. This foundation must be built solidly for a school's inclusion program to be successful.

When students with disabilities have communication challenges (receptive language, expressive language, reading, writing), communication supports should enable them to reliably receive information from others and to communicate to others what they know and to express their needs, desires, questions and comments about their lives and their world. And teachers and administrators need methods, tools and devices to facilitate communication in their classroom.

“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,” said Pellegrino.

The program is made possible through a generous grant from Our Sunday Visitor Institute and complements CCSE’s newly published *Including Students with Developmental Disabilities in Catholic Schools – Guiding Principles for Administrators and Teachers*. This publication provides a practical

framework of best practices to develop successful educational opportunities for students with special needs.

The “*Believe in Me*” *Professional Development Program* contains four elements:

1. The new publication
2. Workshops
3. Videos
4. Outreach

This program will provide teachers and administrators with the inspiration and framework to say YES to students with developmental disabilities. The workshops will provide participants with theory and practices addressing the six Guiding Principles from CCSE’s newly-released publication. They will integrate opportunities for personalized learning, based on teacher and administrator needs, through small group problem-solving and discussion. The underlying theme will be on the moral, ethical, and spiritual rationale for including students with disabilities in Catholic schools, with practical best-practice considerations taken from current literature in the field of special education.

The Guiding Principles identified in CCSE’s first-ever publication are:

1. Maintain High Expectations
2. Promote Communicative Competence
3. Use the Principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL)
4. Know How to Select and Use Appropriate Accommodations for Individual Students
5. Make Use of Evidence-based Practices
6. Target Instruction and Use Formative Indicators of Students Performance.

CCSE supports Catholic schools located in Washington, D.C. or Maryland 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 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 and training to help Catholic schools in Washington, D.C. and Maryland achieve this goal.

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