PRESS RELEASE

Igniting Its Third Decade of Inclusion –
Supporting Students & Partnering with Schools

Catholic Coalition for Special Education

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New grant applications due April 24, 2026

(Kensington, Maryland) – The Catholic Coalition for Special Education didn't miss a *quick-step* as it *roared* through its 20th year. And CCSE is igniting its third decade with an exuberant challenge to the status quo for more Catholic schools to open their doors to students with intellectual and developmental disabilities and to educate them side-by-side with their peers.

This school year, CCSE awarded seed grants to three schools in the Washington D.C. and Baltimore region. CCSE continued its partnership Little Flower School in Great Mills (St. Mary's County) and Saint Francis International School in Silver Spring (Montgomery County) while adding a new school to its roster: St. Casimir School in Baltimore (Baltimore City).

Deadline for 2026-2027 Grant Application is April 24, 2026
(Letter of Intent must be submitted at least one month prior to grant deadline)
Details at http://ccse-maryland.org/schools.html

This year, CCSE awarded a total of **$42,000 in seed grants to the three schools**. In CCSE's 20 years, it has **awarded over $1.3 million in grants** to area Catholic schools, building for the future and expanding Catholic schools' capacity to welcome students with disabilities.

St. Casimir becomes the 35th school to receive grants from CCSE. **St. Casimir Catholic School** Assistant Principal Meghan Sitzler explained the need of CCSE's partnership. "Funding for a part-time aide will directly strengthen our ability to support students in both their academic and spiritual growth. By providing individualized attention in the classroom, the aide will help ensure that every child feels seen, supported and encouraged to reach their fullest potential."

Saint Francis International School Principal Sam Chapa also welcomed CCSE's seed grant commenting that "our mission is to be a Franciscan family that nurtures students to be global citizens, scholars and instruments of peace. Partnering with the Catholic Coalition for Special Education will facilitate each of those facets by guiding our work in sustaining inclusive classrooms where students receive the support they need in the environment where they were meant to be."

Little Flower School Principal Caitlin Keeton responded, "We are proud that educating students with disabilities and forming them in the Catholic faith is an essential component of our school culture. CCSE's generous grant has enabled us to expand the already inclusive environment here at Little Flower School to include children with Down syndrome. Our school community is so much richer because of

these children and all they bring to the table and teach us, day in and day out. To be honest, what they give to everyone in our school community far exceeds what I feel we're giving them."

Mae and Henry are siblings who both have Down syndrome. Their parents, John and Rebecca Tritschler, have belief in both Little Flower School and the Catholic Coalition for Special Education. "We are so grateful that CCSE has made it possible for Mae and Henry to receive a Catholic education, and it has been a blessing to see them flourish at Little Flower School," said John Tritschler.

Rebecca Tritschler continued, "Both of them have shown such growth in their social and academic lives, and we are especially thankful that Mae is growing in her faith and received her first reconciliation and first communion this past year."

"Our Catholic faith, that Rebecca Tritschler yearns for her children to receive, is the central element of CCSE's mission and it should be the central element for our Catholic schools," said **Francesca Pellegrino, Executive Director and Founder of CCSE**.

"As Catholics, we believe that each person is created in God's image, yet there are variations in individual abilities. Positive recognition of those differences discourages discrimination and enhances the unity of the Body of Christ. I believe that Catholic schools are uniquely qualified to include students with disabilities precisely because they are Catholic; precisely because we believe in one Body in Christ, and that body is only complete when all its members are included. So including children with disabilities in Catholic schools really is the fulfillment of the mission of Catholic education and Catholic Social Teaching."

In addition to CCSE's seed grants that it offers Maryland and DC Catholic schools, CCSE's **Pro-Bono Technical Assistance and Training** are increasingly in demand. This specialized assistance and training ensure that schools are properly equipped and staffed for success to meet the needs of students and that teachers are well-prepared to serve all their students. Services range from individual teacher coaching and topical workshops to year-long capacity-building assistance tailored to a school's needs.

With an **estimated value of $36,000**, this 25-26 school year's Pro-Bono Technical Assistance grants were awarded to a record nine schools within the Archdiocese of Washington and the Archdiocese of Baltimore representing six Maryland counties:

- Brookewood School, Kensington (Montgomery County)
- Little Flower School, Great Mills (St. Mary's County)
- Mount Saint Joseph High School, Baltimore (Baltimore City)
- St. Casimir School, Baltimore (Baltimore City)
- Saint Francis International School, Silver Spring (Montgomery County)
- St. Jerome Academy, Hyattsville (Prince George's County)
- St. John's Catholic School, Hollywood (St. Mary's County)
- St. John the Evangelist School, Silver Spring (Montgomery County)
- St. Thomas More Academy, Middletown (Frederick County)

"Instructional Coach Dr. Maggie Hubbard delivers Technical Assistance and Training to these schools, all of which have reported that her regular visits have significantly contributed to their success in serving students with disabilities. We are optimistic that CCSE's investment in Technical Assistance will ensure the long-term success, viability and sustainability of schools' inclusion efforts," said **Anna McDermott-Vitak, CCSE President of the Board of Directors**.

CCSE has reached over 9,000 students, teachers and families and awarded 81 seed grants to 35 Catholic schools in the greater Washington Baltimore region, totaling more than $1.3 million since its inception in 2004.

In 2019, CCSE was nominated by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington and was conferred the prestigious NCEA Seton Award as an Exemplary Model of Christian Service.

CCSE supports Catholic schools in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington and Archdiocese of Baltimore. CCSE's *Believe in Me!* grants to Catholic schools may be used by the schools 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.

Finally, CCSE supports families helping them navigate the maze of services, stay informed on community resources and offer spiritual and practical support for parents on the journey of raising a child with a disability.

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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