
NORTH FLORIDA SCHOOL OF SPECIAL EDUCATION ANNUAL REPORT 2017-2018

SOARING TO NEW HEIGHTS



NFSSE...Your Place To Soar



NorthFloridaSchool
Of Special Education

Enhance. Empower. Enlighten.

MISSION STATEMENT

To discover and foster each student's unique abilities revealing their highest potential within an engaged community.

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD AND HEAD OF SCHOOL

As we reflect on how North Florida School of Special Education (NFSSE) is flourishing in fulfilling our mission, **To discover and foster each student's unique abilities revealing their highest potential within an engaged community**, we look forward to new opportunities and advances which will continue to confirm our school as a model of innovation in special needs education.

At NFSSE, resilient and courageous students find success and acceptance, and develop self-confidence. These kind, compassionate children and young adults bring out the best in one another through their encouragement, enthusiasm, and unwavering optimism.

Our faculty and administrative staff selflessly manifest their genuine belief in our students. They know their students on an individual level, ensuring that each one discovers their strengths and passions and reaches their fullest potential. They are an extraordinary assembly committed to fostering an atmosphere of love and support.

Families are engaged partners who share their time and insights to encourage ongoing and emerging programs that strengthen our school and community.

Our Board of Directors lends expertise and ensures the innovation that fortifies NFSSE's place as a leader in the field of special education. Board members are dedicated to sustaining the school's success and to planning for its future.

Also, reflected in this report is the generous philanthropic investment of the North Florida community. We are wrapping up a capital campaign to fund the expansion of our school's footprint on adjacent acreage. The new **Christy and Lee Smith Lower School Campus** will double our classroom space and provide a gymnasium, a commercial culinary complex, onsite therapy rooms, a library, music and art studios and much more. The **Delores Barr Weaver**

Therapeutic Equestrian Center will provide equine therapy to our students and will be open in the afternoons and weekends for others throughout Northeast Florida.

At the heart of NFSSE is the palpable essence of a loving, caring community, dedicated to enriching the lives of our students. Our community partners and stakeholders reflect through their support and generosity, their appreciation of the special resource our school provides to the Northeast Florida community.

This past year, our theme was **Soaring to New Heights**. How fitting for the North Florida School Eagles! We know that when it rains, most birds head for shelter; but in order to avoid the storm, the eagle starts flying above the clouds. We all experience storms in life and our kids are no different...but with the help of so many throughout our community, we are soaring to new heights.

We are grateful for and inspired by the generous spirit of community that is North Florida School of Special Education. The stories on the following pages wouldn't be possible without your investment. Our school is strong, our accomplishments are many, and our future is bright.

With our gratitude



John Macdonald
President of the Board



Sally Hazelip
Head of School

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NFSSE IS SOARING TO NEW HEIGHTS

NORTH FLORIDA SCHOOL OF SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS WERE BORN TO SOAR LIKE EAGLES TO REACH GREATER HEIGHTS. WE BELIEVE IN EACH CHILD'S POTENTIAL AND OUR CAMPUS IS A PLACE WHERE STUDENTS BELONG AND WHERE THEY DEVELOP TOOLS AND SKILLS NECESSARY TO PREPARE FOR THE FUTURE.


AT THE HEART OF OUR SCHOOL IS THE PALPABLE ESSENCE OF A LOVING, CARING COMMUNITY DEDICATED TO ENRICHING THE LIVES OF OUR STUDENTS. WORKING TOGETHER CONTRIBUTES TO THE VALUE AND STRENGTH OF THE EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE PROVIDED TO OUR STUDENTS AND HELPS THEM BECOME THE BEST VERSIONS OF THEMSELVES. THROUGH OUR COLLECTIVE EFFORTS WE CAN CONTINUE TO ASSURE THAT NORTH FLORIDA SCHOOL OF SPECIAL EDUCATION REMAINS THE TREASURE IT HAS BECOME FOR STUDENTS AND FAMILIES THROUGHOUT NORTHEAST FLORIDA.




SOARING WITH NEW FRIENDSHIPS

Every school believes deeply in what it does; at North Florida School of Special Education, we have a passion for **Reverse Inclusion**. This practice brings typical students into the school to participate alongside our students in all extracurricular activities and in our vocational training programs. Students learn from each other to value and respect the unique qualities within themselves and they quickly discover they are more alike than different. We are grateful to all the schools for participating in this valued program.



My favorite part of every month is going to Bolles Buddies. I look forward to this day all month long. I will always cherish the friendships and memories I have made at the North Florida School of Special Education and hope to continue working with special needs kids as I move on to college. 


Haley Bowmaster
The Bolles School

I immediately fell in love with all the kids at the school. They always bring a huge smile to my face. Volunteering at this school makes me want to work with children with special needs when I get older. 

Somerset Acosta-Rua
The Bolles School

VOLUNTEERS...THE WIND BENEATH OUR WINGS

The contribution of over 7,350 volunteer hours is a testament to the strength of this community and the value of the NFSSE experience. It is gratifying to know that so many share a commitment to the educational experience being provided to our students and to helping us fulfill our goal in preparing them for the future. With sincere gratitude to all our volunteers.

“Thank you for such a wonderful volunteer event for us to be able to participate in, such as Berry Good Farms. I think that was my most favorite workday in my 20 years here at JEA. I absolutely loved working with those kids and getting to know them. My heart was so full.” 


Robin Taylor
JEA Volunteer



An Excerpt Published in
Disability Independence Group
August 2018

My Life with Autism
By Ben Kolster, NFSSE Transition Student





My name is Ben Kolster, I'm 18 years old and I live with my parents and my older brother, Ethan. Ethan and I are on the Autistic Spectrum. Ethan was diagnosed with Autism at the age of three. By the time I reached my second birthday, I was formally diagnosed with Autism, and at five years, I was diagnosed with ADHD (Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder). My parents have worked together as a team to provide my brother and me with a solid foundation.

Ten years ago, our parents enrolled Ethan and me in North Florida School of Special Education. I have been well educated in mathematics, language arts, science, social studies, and the fine arts. Our school holds an annual Science Fair and a Cultural Fair, both of which I participated in. I was a member of several of the school's afterschool clubs and in 2015, I was elected Student Council President.

Ethan and I are currently in the Transition Program at NFSSE. The Transition Program provides individuals, ages 18-22 years, vocational experience in addition to life skills, both on and off the school campus. When I entered the Transition program last year, one of my job sites was participating in the Art Enterprise program at NFSSE. My focus is on mixed media, a creative and unique way of using paints, papers, broken glass, as well of various sources from nature as resources to create a collage art piece. It has been an incredible experience and has given me the opportunity to express my creativity in a variety of ways. I look forward to gaining more vocational experience in the upcoming school year.

My brother and I were President and Vice President of NFSSE's Aktion Club, a service club for adults with disabilities, with more than 12,000 members worldwide. This past February, we were among a small group of students who represented our school at a Disability Awareness rally in Tallahassee, FL. We saw disability advocates voice their concerns and state legislators make exciting announcements. Most importantly, represented NFSSE and what we stand for. It was a very memorable experience that I'll always remember.

I have been fortunate to have many friends who have been very accepting of us. Through these friendships, I have accepted who I am and have become appreciative of what I can do as an individual living with Autism. I have learned that I have my own talents, just like any other individual.

In closing, I am excited about my journey into adulthood. I look forward to seeking employment, working on my independent living skills, and preparing for the next chapter of my life. My goal is to obtain my first paid job within the next year. I enjoy research, writing, and giving speeches, and thrive best in a highly-structured environment. I hope to eventually start my own blog—stay tuned!!

I would like to leave you with a quote from my all-time favorite television host:

"Knowing that we can be loved exactly as we are gives us all the best opportunity for growing into the healthiest of people"

—Fred Rogers


The painting shown in this photo was created for President George H.W. Bush on the occasion of Former First Lady Barbara Bush's death. Ben wrote, "I recently heard of the passing of your wife, Former First Lady Barbara Bush. To honor her enriching legacy and devotion to literacy, I created this painting of a stack of books in her memory. My condolences to you and your family."

SOARING THROUGH LEARNING DIFFERENCES

At North Florida School of Special Education, our students follow a different developmental path, and we are dedicated to forging ahead with them. By combining quality academic and classroom instruction with vocational training, job coaching, enrichment studies, therapies and social skills instruction, NFSSE sets itself apart as the premier learning environment for students with intellectual and developmental differences in Northeast Florida. With a fully-accredited student-centered and nurturing learning environment, our students learn to value and respect the unique qualities inherent within themselves and their classmates.

When Caleb was born with Down syndrome, our journey into new territories began. We soon discovered that his educational road would be a little different from his sister's and began to look for a situation that would best serve his needs. Lucky for us, it didn't take long. The North Florida School of Special Education just happened to be in our "backyard" here in Arlington. We visited the school and fell in love. Seven years ago, Caleb's journey at NFSSE began.

Since that time, he's grown into a young man, nurtured and supported along the way with an outstanding cast of teachers, therapists, and administrative personnel. His schedule includes a variety of academic and resource classes, helping him to explore his interests and talents. At NFSSE, he is challenged. He has expectations. He's encouraged to do his best, as are all our students, in classrooms designed to support each individual's unique learning style.

As we enter another year here at the school, we absolutely feel that Caleb, along with all our students, are "Soaring to New Heights" each day, with the encouragement and direction of the caring staff and invested board. We are a family here at school. Thank you NFSSE, for your guidance and commitment for excellence! 

Karen and David Prewitt, parents



SOARING WITH TENDERNESS AND COMPASSION


The Scott Bledsoe Memorial Scholarship Fund

Scott Bledsoe was a staff member on the Berry Good Farms team. He passed away in 2015 and the Scholarship Fund was established to celebrate the love that Scott poured into the lives of our students. This year, three students who embody the same tenderness and compassion that Scott infused into every role he played at NFSSE benefitted from gifts directed to this fund. Scott's spirit is still present on our campus and in our hearts, and is an ever-present reminder that beauty and grace are growing everywhere we look.



Our son Scott worked at NFSSE for several years. Nothing energized and stirred his heart more than being with the children and young adults who attend the school. These young people taught him and continue to teach others a simple, but profound lesson, that joy comes from within. Scott often remarked that he had never been around such a happy group of people. Scott felt that his greatest contribution here on earth was serving the students at NFSSE.

Scott's time on this earth was cut short, but his legacy of caring and sharing remains dear to our hearts. We now better understand the joy that he experienced, as we have become more involved in the school's mission to serve these wonderful students with intellectual and developmental differences.

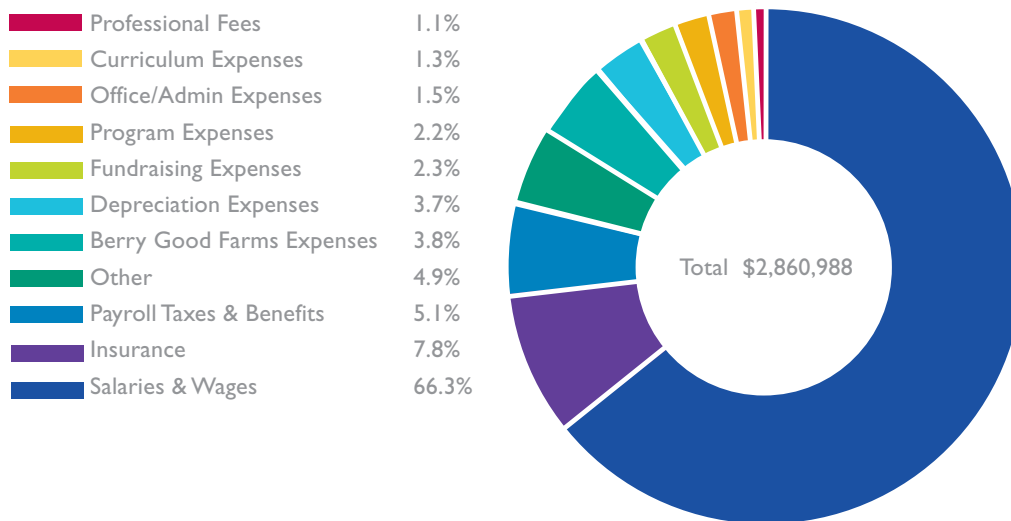
Lynn and I are both grateful that Scott's memory and impact lives on through the establishment of the Scott Bledsoe Memorial Scholarship Fund. It is truly a blessing to be able to assist families and reward students for their remarkable efforts. 

Lee Bledsoe

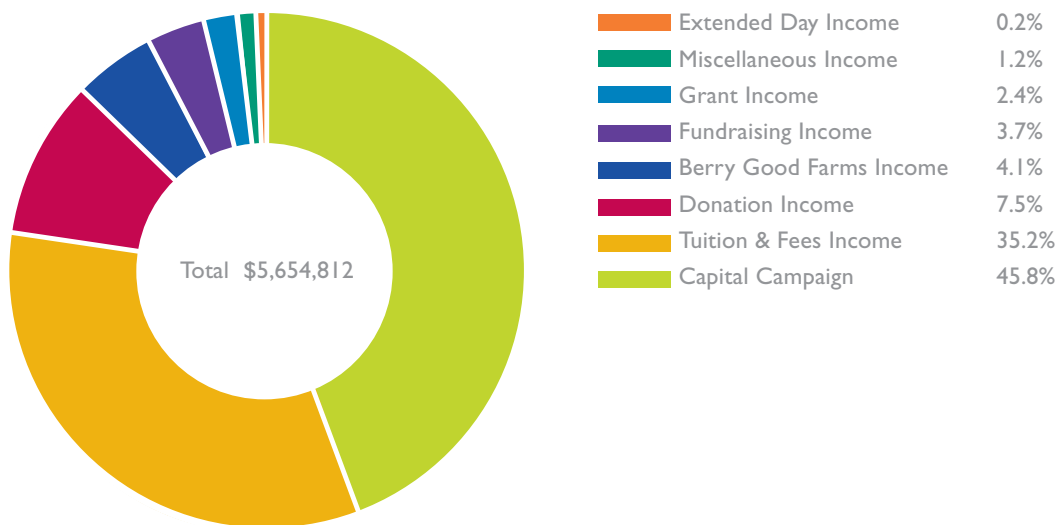
FINANCIAL SUMMARY

FY 2017–2018

Expense Summary July 2017 Through June 2018



Income Summary July 2017 Through June 2018



NFSSE AT A GLANCE

FY 2017–2018



101 Students,
ages 6 to 18

35 Transition Students,
ages 18 to 22

62 Post Graduates,
22 years of age and older

THANK YOU!

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Bishop Kenny High School
Christ's Church Academy
Episcopal School of Jacksonville
Impact Christian School
Jacksonville University
Providence School
St. Mark's Episcopal Day School
The Bolles School
University Christian School
University of North Florida

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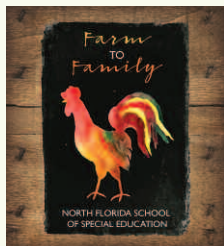
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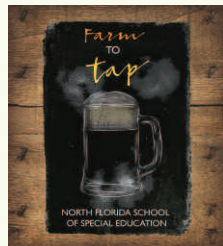


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The Berry Good Farms Festival dishes up a culinary weekend filled with live music and entertainment, delicious fare prepared by Jacksonville's trend-setting chefs, craft beer from local breweries, and an al fresco dinner paired with wine. The inaugural three-day fundraising event is the school's innovative collective effort to support the programs of the North Florida School of Special Education by celebrating the spirit of community with the power of food.



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Friday, April 5, 2019



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