lighting the way

WITH

VISION

INCLUSION

& INTENTION

NorthFloridaSchool
Of Special Education

Enhance. Empower. Enlighten.



LETTER FROM BERT AND SALLY

As we reflect on the 2025–2026 school year at North Florida School of Special Education, one truth shines brighter than ever before: when students are surrounded by vision, inclusion, and intention, extraordinary things happen.

This year's theme, Lighting the Way with Vision, Inclusion and Intention, became more than words on a page. It became a call to action woven into every classroom lesson, vocational opportunity, theatrical performance, partnership, and celebration across campus.

At NFSSE, we believe every student deserves a future filled with belonging, opportunity, and purpose. This year, we saw the future illuminated in remarkable ways. Students stepped confidently into workplaces across our city, found their voices on stage, deepened friendships through inclusive experiences, and discovered new levels of independence and self-confidence.

We also witnessed the extraordinary power of community. Families, donors, volunteers, business partners, and advocates continued to walk alongside us with generosity and belief in our mission. Together, we build more than programs—we build pathways for students with intellectual and developmental differences to live full and happy lives.

This year brought moments of celebration and growth across every corner of our campus. From the continued expansion of vocational programming and community partnerships to our beautiful classrooms, our students continued to show us what is possible when potential is nurtured with care and purpose.

We remain deeply grateful for the trust and support of this extraordinary community. Because of you, our students continue to thrive in a place where they are seen, valued, challenged, celebrated, and empowered.

As we look ahead, we remain committed to lighting the way forward—for our students, our families, and our broader community. With heartfelt gratitude,

Bert Brown, *President*
Board of Directors

Sally Hazelip
Head of School

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MISSION STATEMENT

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

LIGHTING THE WAY

We are excited to celebrate the Joylights that illuminated our community this past year. Both the people and the events that inspired connection, generosity, and hope. From dedicated volunteers, donors, and community partners to gatherings, celebrations, and shared experiences, these Joylights brought us together and strengthened our collective impact.

Our theme, "Lighting the Way: With Vision, Inclusion, and Intention," reflects the values that guide our work. Vision helps us see new possibilities, inclusion ensures everyone has a place to belong, and intention transforms purpose into action. Throughout the year, Joylights of every kind reminded us that meaningful change happens when people come together around a shared commitment to community.

We invite you to reflect on the individuals and moments that helped light the way forward. Together, they have created a brighter, more connected future for all.


DIPRIVAN

LIGHTING THE WAY WITH VISION

Vision begins by seeing possibility where others may see limitation.

At North Florida School of Special Education, we believe our students deserve futures filled with independence, connection, and opportunity. This year, that vision came to life in extraordinary ways across our campus and throughout our community.

With Vision, Inclusion & Intention

Lighting the Way with Vision—Highlight

When Alex joined North Florida School of Special Education at age nine, he faced challenges with focus, motivation, and social connection that often made it difficult to fully engage at school and with his peers. Yet, with determination, support, and opportunities tailored to his strengths, Alex steadily grew in confidence and independence. Through NFSSE's Eagle Academy transition program and participation in Project SEARCH at Mayo Clinic, he discovered new possibilities for his future, developing valuable workplace skills, exploring career interests, and building the self-confidence needed to succeed in a professional environment.

Today, Alex is a proud Mayo Clinic employee, working 30 hours a week in the Comparative Medicine Department with competitive pay and benefits. He independently navigates Mayo Clinic's campus and coordinates his own transportation through JTA services, demonstrating a level of confidence and self-sufficiency that once seemed out of reach.

Alex's success is a shining example of what happens when students are given opportunities to thrive. His journey reflects the power of meaningful support, hands-on learning, and high expectations. As Project SEARCH continues at Mayo Clinic, more students will have the opportunity to follow in Alex's footsteps, building skills, confidence, and pathways to meaningful employment.

Alex is truly a Joylight, illuminating what is possible when vision, inclusion, and intention come together to create brighter futures.

Last August, six NFSSE Eagle Academy students embarked on their journey in the inaugural year of the Project SEARCH Transition to Work program at Mayo Clinic in Jacksonville. By providing meaningful workplace experiences that empower students to discover their strengths and build confidence in their abilities, Mayo Clinic helped bring our mission to life by Lighting the Way through Vision, Inclusion, and Intention.

Throughout the year, students gained valuable, transferable employment skills while working alongside Mayo Clinic staff who served as mentors and role models. They learned workplace communication, problem-solving, and professional responsibility while experiencing the pride that comes from contributing to a world-renowned organization and being valued in an inclusive workplace.


NEMOURS
CHILDREN'S HEALTH.
Rotary
District 6970

LIGHTING THE WAY WITH INCLUSION

Inclusion means creating a world where every individual is welcomed, valued, celebrated, and fully seen.

At NFSSE, inclusion is not an initiative—it is the heartbeat of our community.

This year, we witnessed countless moments where students, families, educators, volunteers, and community partners came together to build meaningful connections rooted in understanding and belonging.

With Vision, Inclusion & Intention

Lighting the Way with Inclusion—Highlight

The partnership between North Florida School of Special Education (NFSSE) and Nemours Children's Health created a unique opportunity for postgraduate student Cierra, an active participant in Project S.A.D.D.L.E. (Self-Sufficient Adults Developing Diverse Learning Experiences). Through this vocational training program, NFSSE postgraduate students gain valuable hands-on experience caring for the barn, maintaining the grounds, grooming horses, and developing essential workplace and life skills.

When the partnership with Nemours was established, it quickly became clear that Cierra would be an excellent fit to support the equine-assisted therapy program. Cierra thrives in the calm, structured environment and especially values the support and encouragement of her coworkers. The opportunity has allowed her to work independently, build confidence, and showcase her abilities.

Cierra's success extended far beyond her initial role. After demonstrating her dedication and strong work ethic, Cierra now receives compensation for her role in the program at Nemours Children's Health. Her journey is a powerful example of how meaningful partnerships can create pathways to employment and independence, truly reflecting what it means to light the way beyond our campus walls.

At the Delores Barr Weaver Therapeutic Equestrian Center, our equine-assisted programs continued expanding in extraordinary ways. After introducing our beloved mini horses Pip and Squeak last year, this year brought a beautiful new Mini Horse Barn made possible through the generosity of Delores Barr Weaver.

This new space represents more than growth. It reflects the continued expansion of therapeutic equestrian programming. This year marked the expansion of our equine therapy outreach beyond our campus. For the first time, North Florida School of Special Education partnered with Nemours Children's Health to provide equine-assisted therapy experiences for children receiving care there. The same horses who bring calm, comfort, and connection to our students began extending that same healing presence to children and families in a hospital setting.



Hope Cowherd



Rebecca Emery

LIGHTING THE WAY WITH INTENTION

At North Florida School of Special Education, every step forward begins with intention. As we continue *Lighting the Way* for students and families, we recognize that meaningful impact is created through purposeful actions, thoughtful partnerships, and a steadfast commitment to each individual's potential.

With Vision, Inclusion & Intention

Lighting the Way with Intention—Highlight

Our Lower School Teacher Joylight has celebrated the remarkable growth of the students in the E3 classroom. Through Hope Cowherd's dedication, intentional instruction, and caring approach, her students have made meaningful progress both academically and socially.

Mrs. Cowherd has fostered greater independence, strengthened classroom readiness skills, and supported important social development within her classroom. She is known for her patience, consistency, and commitment to meeting each student where they are, helping them build the skills and confidence needed for success.

Thanks to Mrs. Cowherd's guidance and encouragement, her students are entering Elementary 4 with greater independence, increased confidence, and a stronger readiness to learn. The growth they have demonstrated this year is a testament to the positive and lasting impact she has made in their lives.

Our Upper School Teacher Joylight is Rebecca Emery. Ms. Emery's dedication to her students is evident in the individualized support, encouragement, and creative instruction she provides each day. She takes the time to understand each student's unique communication style and sensory needs, allowing her to create learning experiences that are meaningful, engaging, and accessible.

Ms. Emery celebrates every success, both big and small, helping students recognize their strengths and build confidence in their abilities. Her willingness to think creatively, adapt instruction, and provide personalized support ensures that each student has the opportunity to experience success at their own level. Through her commitment to truly knowing and understanding her students, Ms. Emery creates an environment where they can thrive. Her impact extends beyond academics, fostering greater confidence, independence, and self-belief that will benefit her students for years to come.

Our Joylights, the moments and people who illuminate possibility and inspire progress, remind us that when we lead with intention, we create opportunities for growth, independence, and belonging. Furthermore, when deliberate efforts and compassionate guidance are provided to students, they discover their strengths and shine their brightest light.

NEW JOYLIGHTS

A strong community is built through the people who choose to share their time, talents, and hearts in service of others. This year, we welcomed new Joylights whose generosity, leadership, and belief in our mission have helped further Light the Way for our students and families. Through meaningful connections, volunteerism, and partnership, these individuals have brought fresh energy and new opportunities to our school community.

Each new Joylight represents a bright source of hope and possibility, helping create pathways for growth, inclusion, and independence. Their commitment reminds us that when people come together with purpose and compassion, they can illuminate a brighter future for every student. We are honored to celebrate these new members of our community and the lasting impact they are making both on our campus and beyond.

The Warren and Agusta Hume Foundation

The Warren and Agusta Hume Foundation became a true Joylight in the North Florida School of Special Education community, illuminating opportunities that make a lasting impact on our students and families.

Thanks to the Foundation's generosity and a meaningful connection with Rusty Creighton, the Foundation's CEO, key campus improvements have come to life, including the completion of our microenterprise buildings' campus fencing. Their support will help fund upcoming enhancements, including improvements to our track and greenhouse facilities that will enrich daily experiences for students. The Foundation also provided a generous donation to our Endowment Fund and perhaps most significantly, the Hume Foundation's commitment ensures that families receive critical financial aid assistance, making North Florida School of Special Education more accessible for those who need it most.

Because of their unwavering support, students can learn, grow, work, and thrive in an environment designed to help them reach their fullest potential. The Warren and Agusta Hume Foundation's generosity shines brightly across our campus, bringing hope, opportunity, and joy to the lives of so many. We are profoundly grateful for their partnership and the light they continue to share with our community.





Tyler Dean

After a severe car accident that led to multiple surgeries and a lengthy rehabilitation process, Tyler Dean moved from Oregon to Jacksonville to be closer to family and focus on recovery. Looking for a meaningful way to give back during that time, he began searching for volunteer opportunities and discovered North Florida School of Special Education.

Although he had no previous experience with individuals with intellectual and developmental differences, Tyler was drawn to the school's microenterprise businesses, particularly Art With Soul because of his love for the arts. After touring the campus, he signed up to volunteer the very next day.

Since joining Art With Soul, Tyler has found joy in helping with art projects and building relationships with students. What began as a volunteer opportunity has become a source of purpose and connection."Volunteering fills my soul," Tyler says. "I love being able to give back."

Through Tyler's generosity, compassion, and commitment to our students, he has become a true Joylight, bringing warmth, encouragement, and connection to those around him. We are grateful for the light he shares with our school community each week.

Eagle Academy

Another major milestone this year was the relocation of Eagle Academy, our transition program for students ages 18 to 22, into a new campus space just beyond the heart of our main campus.

This move represented far more than a new building. It reflected the continued evolution of how we prepare students for adulthood through vocational experiences, life skills instruction, community integration, and increasing independence.







New Microenterprise Building

This year also marked exciting growth across our campus.

Art With Soul and Berry Good Blooms moved into beautiful new building adjacent to Barkin' Biscuits at the far end of Mill Creek Road. These vibrant new spaces have already become hubs of creativity, vocational training, and connection.

Students are building job skills, confidence, and independence while creating products that connect them meaningfully to the broader community. Since opening, the buildings have welcomed up to 100 volunteers each week—creating not only support systems, but new advocates and lasting mentorships.



High-Quality School Experience

Throughout every classroom, students continued building toward bright futures.

Elementary students grew in reading, math, friendship, movement, and social confidence while participating in reverse inclusion experiences and cultural learning opportunities.

Middle school students designed their own pizza shop while applying budgeting, measuring, and fraction skills in meaningful ways.

High school students explored architecture and measurements through zoo habitat design projects and built personalized miniature golf holes using math, engineering, and creativity.

Across every age and stage, students were not only learning academic skills—they were learning to envision futures filled with possibility.







Stubborn Grace

Intentionality was also present in one of the most personal projects of the year.

Through a partnership with NFSSE parent Lena Winslow, families across our community came together to create Stubborn Grace, a collection of stories reflecting the realities, challenges, joys, heartbreaks, resilience, and beauty of raising children with intellectual and developmental differences.

The project became a powerful reminder that no family walks this journey alone.

Together, these stories created something deeply meaningful—a tapestry of honesty, connection, hope, and belonging that will continue lighting the way for families for years to come.

JOYLIGHT PARTNERS

FRIENDS WHO ARE LIGHTING THE WAY FOR US!

ANNUAL CLASSROOM/ PROGRAM PARTNER

Thank you to all our partners! The work of North Florida School of Special Education is made possible by extraordinary Joylight- donors, foundations, businesses, volunteers, and advocates. Their generosity helps create opportunities that transform lives.

Classroom and Program Partners

Support a classroom or specific program close to their hearts.

Anonymous, "In honor of our children"
John Baker III
Martha and Eli Bekkum
Jess & Brewster J. Durkee Foundation
Charlene Johnson
Kirbo Charitable Foundation
Clinton Family Foundation
Ann and Ed McCarthy
One Achord
Dorothy and Lee Thomas

Scholarships Partner

Provide financial aid to student and families in need of assistance to cover the cost of tuition.

Scott Bledsoe Memorial Scholarship
W.W. Gay Scholarship
Kim Smoak Scholarship
Spriggs and Jones Scholarship
Marianne Hillegass
Jennifer and Michael Mayo
The Fig Tree Fund

Vocational Partners

Provide a paid internship for an NFSSE student gaining vocational skills in one of our microenterprises.

Marianne Hillegass
Jennifer and Michael Mayo



Thank you to each of our amazing partners. Your gift is essential to our school. Interested in becoming a Classroom, Program, Scholarship or Vocational Partner? Contact Laura Davis, Director of Advancement, at LDavis@NorthFloridaSchool.org or 904-724-8323 to learn more.

THE GIVING TREE LEGACY CIRCLE

The Giving Tree Legacy Circle was created to recognize those who support the school's planned giving program either through an outright gift to the North Florida School of Special Education Endowment Fund at The Community Foundation for Northeast Florida, or by including NFSSE in their will or state plans.

These gifts ensure that the doors remain open to individuals with IDD. Planned gifts are a predictable source of funding, allowing us to sustain our mission for future generations. Join us in reaching our $10M planned giving goal to ensure a bright future for years to come.

There are multiple ways to make a planned gift. You can make an outright gift to NFSSE's Endowment, include NFSSE in your will, retirement plan, life insurance or establish a charitable gift annuity. If you have already included NFSSE in your will, please let us know so we can welcome you into the Giving Tree Legacy Circle. To learn more, contact Laura Davis, Director of Advancement, at 904-724-8323 or LDavis@NorthFloridaSchool.org.



THANK YOU TO OUR GIVING TREE LEGACY CIRCLE MEMBERS

Anne Brown-Baker
Jan Bebeau
Kathleen and Joseph Brandt
Patty and Doug Campbell
Marianne Hillegass
Leslie Jones
Mary Virginia Jones
Ann and John Macdonald
Kathy and Rusty Newton
Elise and Greg Nowikowski
Jenifer and Chip Skinner
Erin and Chris Skinner
Tracy and Randy Skinner
Justin and Briana Spooner
Brightman Thomas
Kit and Corky Thomas
Lanny Thomas
Dorothy and Lee Thomas
Linda Thomas
Page Thomas
Linda and Ray Van Landingham
J. Wayne and Delores Barr Weaver
Karen and Chris Western

BUSINESS PARTNERS 2025-2026

Our business partners make so much possible for our students. They provide a place for students to learn and grow into employees. Thank you to all of our community partners who embraced our stduents, took them under their wing, and gaive them an opportunity to learn and flourish.

Al's Pizza
Alto Duval Station
BEAM Thrift Store
Bearded Pig
Bitty and Beau's
Blue Bamboo
Brooks YMCA
Burlington—River City Marketplace
Chanco King
Chic-fil-A –Marsh Landing
Church of Eleven22
Connecting the Dots
Cultivate
Culver's
Destination Church
Eat Your Yard Jax
Foliahom
Gate River Run
Greenwood School
Habijax Restore
Happy Brew
Hillary's Chicago Pizza
Hope's Closet Thrift Stores—Arlington
Hope's Closet Thrift Stores—San Pablo
Jacksonville Humane Society
Jacksonville Jaguars
Longhorn Steakhouse—Marsh Landing
Lutheran Social Services
Mayo Clinic
MOCA
Morrison Food Services
Natural Life
One Ocean
Panera
Pet Paradise
Publix Super Markets—Monument Road
Publix Super Markets—Neptune Beach
Publix Super Markets—Sawgrass Village
Publix Super Markets—Southside
Safari of Smiles
Seaside Shops
Southside Methodist Church
Surge
Ucom UrbanServ Inc.
VyStar Credit Union
Winn Dixie

Learn how your business can become a job site by contacting Ann Atkins, Director of Transition and Postgraduate Programs at AAtkins@NorthFloridaSchool.org or 904-724-8323.

ENGAGED COMMUNITY

At NFSSE, community is at the heart of everything we do. We know that growth happens when individuals feel valued, connected, and empowered to contribute. Here, everyone belongs, and every student brings a unique light that strengthens and enriches our community.

Each day, remarkable things happen across our campus. Students are developing life-changing skills, building meaningful friendships, gaining confidence, and taking important steps toward bright and fulfilling futures. Their achievements are made possible through the dedication of our staff, the support of families, and the generosity of friends like you.

Thank you to everyone who attended an event, volunteered, advocated, or invested in our mission this year. Your partnership helps create opportunities for our students to learn, grow, and thrive. We are grateful to share this journey with you, and our doors are always open as we continue building a stronger, more engaged community together.

Holiday on the Farm

Holiday on the Farm returned this past December! Everyone discovered one-of-a-kind gifts crafted through NFSSE's student microenterprises and supported opportunities that foster independence, creativity, and community. We look forward to welcoming you to campus for this special holiday tradition. Join us December 4 & 5, 2026 and celebrate the joy of the season at the Delores Barr Weaver Therapeutic Equestrian Center.









HEART OF THE RUNWAY

After Dark

FASHION SHOW















HEART of the RUNWAY



The Delores Barr Weaver Therapeutic Equestrian Center took on the role as a fashion runway, hosting two memorable showcases featuring the exquisite designs of Linda Cunningham. Excitement was felt at Heart of the Runway After Dark, where NFSSE students proudly modeled their Night to Shine attire on the eve of Valentine's Day, celebrating confidence, individuality, and self-expression. At our annual Valentine's Day luncheon, students once again took center stage alongside community models, showcasing fashions from Dillard's. These special events highlighted the poise, personality, and spirit of our students while bringing together supporters for joyful celebrations of inclusion and community.











CONCERT ON THE FARM



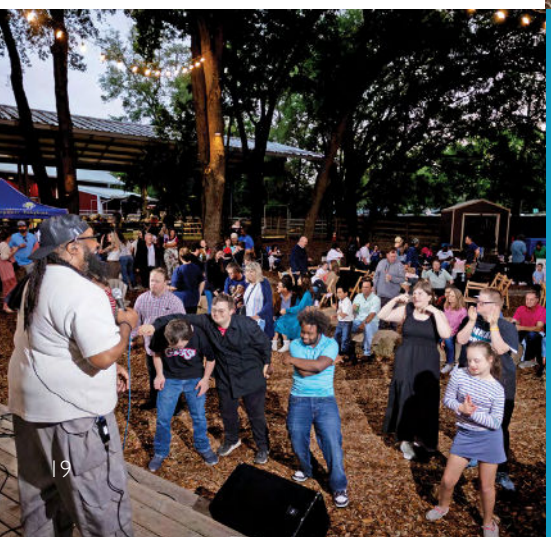






Berry Good Farms Weekend Festival

This year's Berry Good Farms Weekend Festival brought our community together for a memorable celebration filled with delicious food, live music, and beautiful spring weather. Friends, families, and supporters gathered at the Delores Barr Weaver Therapeutic Equestrian Center to enjoy Concert on the Farm filled with fun, fellowship, and connection. The festival showcased the spirit of NFSSE at Dinner on the Farm, demonstrating the power of community and the impact of coming together in support of our students and mission.





DINNER ON THE FARM







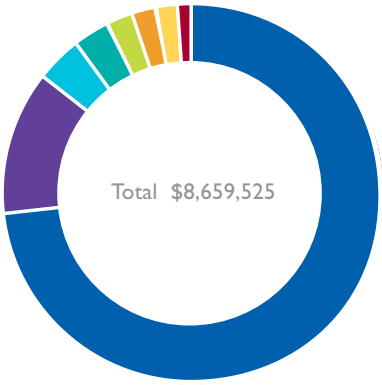






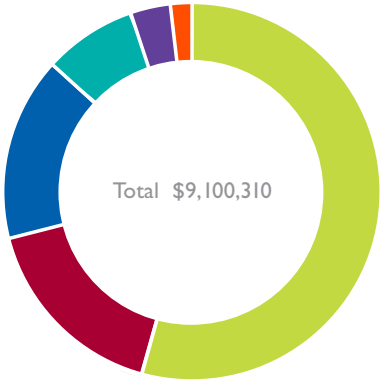
FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS FY 2025–2026

Expense Summary



Salaries & Benefits	73.0%
Office/Administration	9.4%
Depreciation	5.0%
Microenterprises	4.0%
Financial Assistance	3.0%
Insurance	2.0%
Curriculum & Program	2.0%
Fundraising	1.6%

Income Summary



Tuition & Fees	53.0%
Fundraising	14.0%
Grants	14.0%
Microenterprises	11.5%
Programs & Services	6.0%
Other Income	1.5%

NFSSE AT A GLANCE FY 2025–2026

195
STUDENTS AGES 6 TO 18

57
TRANSITION STUDENTS AGES 18 TO 22

100
POSTGRADUATES 22 YEARS OF AGE AND OLDER

120 STAFF MEMBERS AND A

1:6 TEACHER TO STUDENT RATIO

Due to printing deadlines, the financials listed above are based on unaudited financial statements. Please refer to NFSSE's 990's for audited financial reports.

BERRY GOOD FARMS EVENT VENUE

NFSSE's beautiful campus continues to grow as a sought-after destination for memorable events and community gatherings. Throughout the year, we welcomed thousands of guests for corporate receptions, company picnics, holiday celebrations, children's birthday parties, weddings, bridal showers, community concerts, and NFSSE's signature events.

Nestled beneath a canopy of majestic oak trees accented with vintage market lighting, our campus offers a distinctive blend of natural beauty and timeless charm. With a spacious wraparound deck, covered pavilion, and reception seating for up to 350 guests, NFSSE provides a unique setting where celebrations, connections, and community come together.







SAVE THE DATES 2026-2027 UPCOMING FUNDRAISING EVENTS

HOLIDAY ON THE FARM
December 4 & 5, 2026



Each December, the Delores Barr Weaver Therapeutic Equestrian Center is transformed into a festive, family-friendly holiday destination. Guests enjoy a charming farm celebration while shopping for unique gifts and seasonal treasures at pop-up boutiques featuring products from NFSSE's student-led microenterprises: Barkin' Biscuits, Art With Soul, Berry Good Blooms, Berry Good Farms and Berry Good Farms Culinary.



HEART OF THE RUNWAY AFTER DARK
February 11, 2027

Attend an unforgettable evening of fashion, fun, and celebration! Enjoy a runway show featuring the spring collections of Linda Cunningham and Dillard's, alongside a special showcase of NFSSE students modeling their Night to Shine prom attire. Filled with energy, inspiration, and community spirit, this Valentine's season event is the perfect opportunity to celebrate with your Valentine or Galentines.



HEART OF THE RUNWAY LUNCHEON AND FASHION SHOW
February 12, 2027

Join us for an elegant afternoon of fashion, friendship, and philanthropy. The Delores Barr Weaver Therapeutic Equestrian Center will be transformed into a stunning runway experience, complete with elevated staging and beautiful décor. Enjoy an al fresco lunch with friends while viewing the exquisite designs of Linda Cunningham alongside the latest spring fashions from Dillard's. This signature event celebrates style, community, and the mission of NFSSE in a truly unforgettable setting.

BERRY GOOD FARMS WEEKEND FESTIVAL

Enjoy our signature weekend festival celebrating the spirit of the NFSSE community. We will offer delicious food, family-friendly entertainment, and time with friends old and new as we come together for a weekend of fun, connection, and celebration. We look forward to welcoming you to this beloved annual tradition.

CIRQUE DE LA FARM
Friday, April 9, 2027

Have fun at an inclusive circus experience featuring the Omnium Circus from NYC! This event will be filled with awe-inspiring performances and joyful moments. You will witness the power of inclusion in action while supporting the life-changing work of NFSSE.

DINNER ON THE FARM
Sunday, April 11, 2027

Our traditional Dinner of the Farm will feature a program involving NFSSE students and performers from the Omnium Circus. An event where wonder takes center stage blending the magic of the circus with the beauty of the farm and the mission at the heart of NFSSE.

Visit NorthFloridaSchool.org to learn more. For ticket sales and sponsorship opportunities, email Laura Davis, Director of Advancement at LDavis@NorthFloridaSchool.org or call 904-724-8323.

NorthFloridaSchool
Of Special Education

Enhance. Empower. Enlighten.

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