

ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO

Dear Friends in Christ,

The Illinois legislature abandoned nearly 10,000 children attending Catholic and other non-public schools this week by failing to renew the *Invest in Kids* scholarship program. Since 2017, *Invest in Kids* has empowered low-income families to choose the school that best meets their child's needs, providing them the same options more affluent families have.

For more than 175 years, Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago have provided students a high-quality, faith-based education that prepares them to lead, not just within our Church but in the broader, global community. Catholic schools have educated millions of Chicago area children of all faiths and none during that time.

During the past few years, thanks in large part to the *Invest in Kids* scholarship program and thousands of generous donors who contributed to the program, we were able to educate even more students who flourished academically. During the pandemic, because our schools made the bold choice to reopen safely, our students continued to grow academically. Many other schools were closed to in-person instruction and students in them, through no fault of their own, lost ground academically. How have Illinois' elected officials now responded to our students' academic success and to our schools' leadership and service during the pandemic? By pulling the rug from underneath thousands of needy families.

Unfortunately, Illinois' lawmakers ignored both the wishes of their constituents and their responsibilities to the struggling families of this state. Their failure now puts thousands of children at risk of losing the ability to stay in the school that best meets their needs.

This is a cruel and devastating outcome that will have far-reaching repercussions. Students will lose the scholarships that allowed them to attend our schools, those nearing graduation may not be able to graduate with classmates who have befriended them in these years, and families may no longer be able to choose the school that is best for their child.

I share my shock and disappointment at this situation with thousands of students, parents, educators, and other caring citizens throughout Illinois. However, our Catholic Schools, our other partner schools and the broader Catholic community will not be deterred by our elected officials' inaction and will continue to advocate on behalf of families in need. Over our 175 year history we have supported, to the best of our abilities, families in need who want to enroll their children in the school that best fits their needs. We will continue to walk with these families, regardless of their faith tradition, trusting in the support of our families and our generous donors. We take pride in the excellent Catholic schools in our archdiocese, and in our solid record of giving students, particularly those living in poverty, a chance to succeed in the future.

One of the most important decision parents make for their children is where they are going to send their children to school. Making that decision should not be denied to families in need. I ask all people of good will, particularly those who have been educated in our schools, to join me in the fight to provide the life-long advantage of a Catholic education to every family in need. Together we can make a difference.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Archbishop of Chicago