



DIOCESE OF MADISON  
BISHOP O'CONNOR CATHOLIC PASTORAL CENTER

---

702 S. High Point Road  
P.O. Box 44983  
Madison, Wisconsin 53744-4983

Office of Catholic Schools  
608/821-3180  
FAX 608/821-3181  
schools@straphael.org

TO: Representative Gary Hebl, Chair  
Members, Assembly Committee on Ways and Means

FROM: Michael Lancaster, Superintendent of Schools, Diocese of Madison

DATE: March 2, 2010

RE: Assembly Bill 726, Tax Credits for Charitable Contributions to Schools

Dear Representative Hebl and Members of the Assembly Ways and Means Committee:

I come before you today to urge your support for Assembly Bill 726 which allows individuals and corporations to claim a nonrefundable tax credit for charitable contributions made to public school curricular and physical education programs and private school scholarship funds.

By creating a tax credit that encourages private investment in education you will not only strengthen and affirm Wisconsin's legacy as a state with the highest quality education, but you also affirm the principle that parents are the primary educators of their children and as such, they should have choices regarding how best to educate their children. While this principle is already evident in programs like open enrollment, charter schools and the Wisconsin virtual school system, there is no program, outside of Milwaukee, addressing parents who choose a private or religious school education for their children.

Beyond this principle however, is the principle of service, especially to economically disadvantaged families. A tax credit for contributions to scholarships will directly assist those parents who choose a private school education, but can't afford it. As Catholics, we are called to serve the poor. We strive to make Catholic school education available to all who desire it regardless of economic means. Although the average, per pupil cost of education at a Catholic elementary school in the Diocese was \$4,260 last year (2008-2009), the average per pupil tuition was only \$1,576 – just 37% of the actual cost of education.

The greatest portion of the cost of education comes from the affiliated parishes, which on average, subsidize 50% of the cost of school operation. Still however, even at a low annual cost of only slightly more than many families spend on cable or satellite television or cell phones, those in most need cannot afford Catholic schools.

This is an issue that we confront daily. Last year our two schools in Beloit had nearly a 19% drop in enrollment. After investigating this decline, we found that the majority of families who

left the schools did so for economic reasons. They simply couldn't afford the tuition and fees. This story repeated itself, to greater and lesser degrees, across all areas of the Diocese. Families left simply because they could not afford it.

While our schools and parishes are committed to working with all families who wish to send their children to our schools so that they may do so, we found that in most cases, families were too ashamed to ask for help. Establishing scholarships through tax credits for donors would directly address this issue, not only by making more funds available, but by removing the often negative stigma associated with "financial aid" replacing it with the prestige of a "scholarship." This program would directly assist those who are most in need, and they would be willing participants.

I urge your support for AB 726.